

**EFL Teachers' Development through
Professional Learning Communities
(A Case Study)**

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Abstract:

This study was an attempt to investigate EFL teachers' professional development in an Egyptian school upon being engaged within a Professional Learning Community. The purpose of the study was to examine the impact of Professional Learning Communities on the targeted EFL teachers to find out its effect on developing their abilities of self-regulated teaching as well as on their professional identities. The study employed the case study design, focusing on EFL teachers who were teaching in an Egyptian national school. After being introduced and coached to the usage of Lesson Study as one of the strategies of Professional Learning Communities, these teachers were provided with daily reflection forms in order to internalize and reflect on their professional learning and development. Other instruments included observation grids, interviews, questionnaires, reflective memos, the researcher's log and documents review. Hence, mixed research methods were employed for triangulation purposes. Filling in the gaps in the available literature, and formulating a new framework for self-regulated teaching was the main contribution that this study strived to achieve.

Keywords: professional learning communities, lesson study, self-regulation, professional identity, professional development

مستخلص البحث باللغة العربية:

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى فحص تأثير مجتمعات التعلم المهني على مدرسي اللغة الإنجليزية لتحديد أثرها على تطوير مهارات التنظيم الذاتي لدى هؤلاء المعلمين و على هويتهم المهنية. استخدمت تلك الدراسة نهج دراسة الحالة لبحث المشكلة لدى بعض معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية الذين يقومون بتدريس المنهج الجديد. في البداية تعرف المعلمون على إحدى استراتيجيات مجتمع التعلم المهني و هي "دراسة الدرس" ثم يقومون بتطبيقها. كذلك تم تزويدهم بطرق البحث من خلال طرح إطار للتنظيم الذاتي للمعلمين قامت بطرحه الباحثة كإضافة للبحث التربوي. هذا و قد تم استخدام عدة أدوات في هذه الدراسة منها على سبيل المثال لا الحصر نماذج ورقية لكي يقوم المعلمون بتدوين التفكير الخاص بهم حول ما يحدث في مجتمعهم المهني الصغير و التي تم توزيعها على المعلمين المستهدفين، بالإضافة إلى بطاقات الملاحظة الخاصة بالمعلمين و أخرى خاصة بالباحثة. هذا بالإضافة إلى الاستعانة ببعض الاستبيانات والمقابلات الفردية و الجماعية الخاصة بالدراسة.

1. Introduction:

Teachers' professional development constituted the cornerstone of improving educational means and outputs. Moreover, the rapid changes that were occurring in education worldwide required concurrent paradigm shifts in teacher development. Hence, influential educational reform called for

effective teacher development programs that were in line with the recent best practices. This notion ought to be seriously taken into consideration in many parts of the world, and specifically in Egypt; for the sake of realizing the 2030 strategic plan and effectuating the profound educational reform vision as aspired.

Similarly, the field of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) witnessed varied aspects of advancement. This was also true concerning EFL teachers' preparation and in-service training programs. This was why the one-shot and the one-size-fits-all teacher training programs were no more viable. As mentioned in recent research studies, the current approaches called for ongoing EFL teacher development programs that may vary in implementation from one country to another, and should basically emanate from EFL teachers' real needs and challenges. This would explain why the most up-to-date trends in EFL teacher professional development programs stressed on the importance of personalizing these programs and tailoring them to the specific school context and culture. Worthy to note, such trends considered teachers as a determining factor in the sustainability of their own professional development throughout their teaching career.

2. Background:

Teachers' Professional Development (TPD) or as it has recently been referred to as Teachers' Professional Learning (TPL) ought to be considered of utmost importance for educational reform and for creating a self-regulated teaching task force who would hence become autonomous lifelong learners. According to C. Marcelo (2009), TPL could be either an individual or a collective process. It has recently been regarded as a long term journey which involved varied experiences and opportunities that were carefully designed to enhance teachers' development and 'evolution'. Also, Bolam and McMahon (2004) referred to the fact that the term 'development' denoted 'evolution and continuity'. This again stressed the fact that the old-fashioned training sessions mechanism was neither adequate to the teachers' needs, nor is compatible with the recent best practices. Such programs should not be employing the outdated 'top-bottom' approach or the lecturing style. Instead they should be conducted in the form of 'hands-on' workshops that ought to be carefully structured and periodically scheduled. The most important part would be the constant follow-up and mentorship for the sake of continuity and sustainability.

Among the pioneering definitions of TPL was Bredson's (2002) when he described the process as subsequent experiences that promoted teachers' innovative and reflective skills as a means to help them develop their practices. In addition, Villegas-Reimers (2003) viewed TPL as a long-term process for teacher professional growth that occurred as a result of reflecting on their practices from a constructivist perspective. This meant that TPL was supposed to incorporate authentic classroom context and practices that were directly related to the daily teachers' endeavors and the yearly school reform procedures. Hence, here the teachers were viewed as professionals who continuously acquire knowledge based on reflecting on their practices and who were then capable of constructing new knowledge and innovative pedagogical practices. This would all lead to the formation of what recent research studies referred to as Teacher Professional Identity (TPI) as the ultimate consequence of such progressive TPL.

Research has defined the concept of TPI as the way teachers viewed themselves and their profession. In other words, TPI formation is described as a process that constructed the 'Professional I'. According to Lasky (2005), TPI was considered a myriad of previous knowledge, skills, beliefs and practices that

involve a personal commitment to learn and teach. Furthermore, C. Marcelo (2009) viewed TPI as an evolutionary ongoing process formed on both individual and collective levels, whereby the teachers kept on revisiting and answering the question of *Who they were and Who they wanted to be* on the professional level. Moreover, he contended that TPI depended mainly on both the teacher and the teaching context.

Thus TPI would differ from one teacher to another, and could be determined by their different individual attributes, knowledge and expertise. Adding to this, Antonio Bolívar (2015) proposed that since TPI affected teachers' motivation, satisfaction and self-efficacy; all TPL forms should bear in mind the mechanism of promoting 'professional teachers'. In fact, developing such essential skills should be incorporated in the current training sessions provided to EFL teachers.

Even though research has identified various forms of TPD, what made a model more effective than the other was its suitability and applicability to the school context and the teachers' needs. Among the recent trends of TPL was the formation of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Mónica Bonces (2014) considers PLCs as one of the TPL mechanisms. She contended that this could be enhanced through participating in

national, regional and international academic networks. In addition, Stanley (2011) referred to the PLC as a means for collaborative learning and developing teaching practice. Moreover, research has identified some basic principles for PLCs which seemed to gain consensus worldwide. These principles also constituted the main conditions which would be crucial for the success and sustainability of the PLC. These principles were summarized as follows: collective values and vision; shared responsibility; shared individual practices; supportive and shared leadership; supportive conditions; as well as collective planning and innovation.

For a PLC to reach its desired objectives, it would need to set clearly defined SMART goals that are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Time-bound. Harris and Jones (2010) believed that such goals would have positive impact on teaching practices and educational policies. Moreover, Caine and Caine (2000) considered a PLC a great TPL opportunity that would empower teachers and build their capacities by reflecting on their practices and inquiries; the fact which would eventually lead to knowledge construction.

Many research studies have highlighted the importance of PLCs. According to Lieberman and Miller (2008), a PLC could be

a great opportunity that would promote new ideas and strategies, enhance teacher competence and encourage collaboration. Also Collinson (2012) believed that PLCs could make teachers appreciate each other's efforts in the process of becoming innovative thinkers and lifelong learners. Moreover, Byrd-Blake and Hundley (2012) considered a PLC a special form of TPL that could give teachers the leading role in their own learning and development. Furthermore, Little and Curry (2008) referred to the fact that the positive aspect of the PLC lied mainly in making TPL more engaging and teacher-driven. Adding to this, Wenger et al. (2009) point to the distinctive effect of PLCs on its members, who end up having a sense of belonging, commitment and a shared understanding of their PI through collaborative learning endeavors.

One of the most successful strategies of PLCs that could realize all these positive effects was the strategy of Lesson Study (LS) which originated in Japan. De Vries (2016) considered LS as a valuable tool for teacher learning that was vastly spreading in Netherlands despite its relatively recent application. According to Fernandez and Chokshi (2002), LS was applied by teachers in the United States of America, whereby they designed a lesson plan collaboratively, observed one another during execution,

reflected on their practices in post-lesson discussions, referred to related research studies and thus refined their strategies accordingly. Moreover, Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) considered LS as an effective TPL approach that was gaining prominence in empirical studies as a powerful vehicle for improving teaching and learning practices. Furthermore, Chichibu and Kihara (2013) explained how effective the use of LS was in building PLCs in Japan.

It was obvious that many research studies had highlighted the importance of LS in relation to teacher development and student achievement. For instance, S.B. Gutierrez (2016) described LS as an effective TPL model, whereby teachers were deeply engaged in self-monitoring and evaluating their performance and improvement. This was eventually reflected on students' engagement. Moreover, Hadar and Brody (2010) considered LS as a mechanism for PLCs that employed collaborative learning and thinking, improved instructional practices, and promoted students' attainment. In addition, Ansawi and Pang (2017) showed how teachers highly valued PLCs and LS in Malaysia and how these strategies affected their personal learning and skills development.

It was evident from the recent reviewed research that among the most positive effects of PLCs and LS would be the preparation of teachers as lifelong self-regulated learners. If teachers were to develop their self-regulation skills, they ought to pass through different stages in order to reach this ultimate goal. As a matter of fact, Self-Regulation (SR) would not only implicate motivation, self-efficacy and goal-setting, but it would also encompass planning, meta-cognition, engagement, time management and ongoing self-evaluation (Rose & Harbon, 2013). Moreover, monitoring the outcomes and setting alternative strategies for further learning experiences would aid the teachers to become fully self-regulated (Seker, 2016). This was why many recent research studies had been concerned with exploring the role of SR in relation to lifelong learning. Similarly, PLCs and LS were considered “ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research to achieve continuous job-embedded learning for educators” (Du Four et al., 2006, p.3). Hence, PLCs and LS could be considered as stimulating SR skills on the part of the teachers.

3. Statement of the Problem and Research Questions:

This research study was basically concerned with TPD through their engagement in PLCs by applying the strategy of LS.

The main emphasis here is on EFL teachers' professional development. To be more specific, the study mainly focuses on EFL teachers in the Egyptian national schools.

There was a dire need for the EFL teachers in Egypt to develop themselves professionally, stay well-informed of the recent best practices, and keep the students engaged. This study aimed to use PLCs and LS to realize this purpose. The current study was an attempt to answer the following main question: *What was the impact of using Professional Learning Communities and Lesson Study on EFL teachers' growth and development in relation to their Self-Regulation and Professional Identity?*

4. Aims of the Study:

This study was an attempt to investigate EFL teachers' professional development in an Egyptian national school. The purpose of the current study was to examine the impact of PLCs through the Lesson Study Approach (LSA) on the targeted teachers to find out its effect on developing their abilities of Self-Regulated Teaching (SRT) as well as on their Professional Identities. Worthy to note that all the literature available is on Self-Regulated learning. Hence, this study tried to offer a new perspective towards self-regulated teaching. The researcher suggested a guiding framework that would assist another group

of EFL teachers to develop their SRT skills. The study employed the case study design, focusing on EFL teachers. Among the expected outcomes of the study was the development of these teachers' performance and practices.

5. Context of the Problem:

Based on the limited number of recent research studies in relation to the Egyptian context, there are opposing views regarding PLCs in Egypt. On one hand some studies found that there was need, will and room for creating PLCs in Egypt. For instance, Al-Harhi et al. (2016) highlighted the availability of the essential dimensions of PLCs in Egyptian public schools, the willingness of the teachers to participate in such initiatives and the probability of supportive leadership and sustainability. However, their study had focused on all subject teachers and not just EFL teachers. On the other hand, other studies had proved the inadequacy of TPL programs in Egypt. Recent studies like that of El-Bilawi and Nasser (2017) showed EFL teachers' negative perspectives on the provided TPD programs, in addition to the lack of supportive leadership and follow-up. Furthermore, Abdelrahman and Irby (2016) had posed this paradox of the

presence of both the desire to improve teaching practices and the challenges that hindered the implementation of ‘peer-coaching’ in Egypt despite the willingness of the teachers to engage in such professional learning and development activities. Hence, the current study strived to untangle such paradox and fill in the gaps in the literature; especially in relation to the Egyptian context and to EFL teachers in particular. Accordingly, a pilot study was required for conducting a needs analysis as a major step for setting the basis for this study.

6. Rationale of the Study:

A preliminary exploratory pilot study was conducted as a preparatory step for initiating the current study. This was considered as the initial needs assessment for the elementary national school to be selected. The school principal was contacted and interviewed as a key informant, together with the Head of the English Department. There seemed to be a dire need to develop the EFL teachers’ instructional strategies and incorporate communicative approach activities in their lesson plans rather than teaching grammatical structures for the test. Moreover, the teaching task force seemed to be willing to develop their practices and learn new techniques that would have a

positive impact on student performance as well as on their teaching practices.

Worthy to note, despite the one-shot training workshops that previously occurred in the school using a one-size-fits-all training, there needed to be more efforts done. They should initially prepare the teachers and familiarize them with the desired learning objectives, the rationale of the curriculum, the expected teaching strategies, the needed teaching skills, and the means to incorporate the best practices for communicative teaching and learning. As a matter of fact, TPD ought to be considered as a process not as an event. Hence, a new paradigm shift regarding these EFL teachers' Professional Development (PD) programs was direly needed for the sake of achieving an ongoing support system for the teachers.

7. Procedures and Instruments:

The study employed the case study design, focusing on EFL teachers in an elementary Egyptian school. The procedures undertaken were as follows. First of all, there was an extensive review of the literature on TPD. This is in addition to substantial research on PLCs and on LS as independent variables as well as on SR and PI as dependent variables. Then there was also a more narrowed search for the EFL context concerning the related

best practices in addition to the studies on the Egyptian context in order to fill in the gaps in the literature and make a contribution to the field.

Regarding the tools and instruments that were used in the study, they were as follows. First of all, there was a demographic needs analysis regarding the targeted EFL teachers, in addition to pre-study questionnaires and interviews on teachers' views regarding PLCs, TPD, SR and PI. Then, a well-designed program based on teachers' needs was employed for incorporating LS as a strategy for the formation of PLCs through coaching and mentoring according to the SMART goals identified earlier while using feed forward techniques. This mentoring scaffolding program progressed from a guided practice to freer practice so that by the end of the study, teachers were capable of independently keeping on applying these new strategies and could even help other teachers implement them.

The main target of the researcher was to achieve the sustainability of TPL and ongoing development. Hence, the researcher provided the teachers with research articles, suggested useful websites and resources for their lifelong PL. Moreover, a suggested framework for SRT was adopted through mentoring with a focus on TPI. Formulating a new framework for

SRT was the contribution that this study strived to achieve. These EFL teachers were provided with reflection forms to internalize and reflect on their professional learning and development and then were later substituted by teachers' logs as more contextually convenient.

Adding to this, while applying the LS strategy, the researcher as a 'participant observer' and the team of teachers were using identical observation forms for inter-rater reliability. Furthermore, there was a resort to documentation of meeting minutes, lesson plans and researcher's log for tracking progress. Other instruments which were used as post-study instruments included post study questionnaires, surveys, reflective memos, individual and focus group interviews, and documents review. Hence, mixed research methods were employed for triangulation purposes and reliability considerations.

8. Theoretical Framework:

Several theories had implicitly set the basis for this study. Among the recent theories that were employed in the study was Huffman and Hipp's dimensions of PLC developed in 2003. This was in addition to Dufour and Eaker's 1998 model of PLCs and Senge's learning organization theory developed in 1990. Moreover, the study resorted to Luehmann's 2007 processes of

developing TPI as well as Beijaard et al.'s 2004 essential features of TPI. Furthermore, the study referred to Dörnyei's 2005 taxonomy of SR which was intended to re-theorize language learning strategies.

9. Definition of Terms:

9.1. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs):

PLCs provide the chance for the participating teachers to collectively reflect upon the most contextual pertinent issues and challenges faced within the boundaries of their own school environment (Selçuk Doğan & Nihal Yurtseven, 2018).

9.2. Lesson Study (LS):

A. Coşkun (2017) defined LS as “a professional development method involving a group of teachers working collaboratively towards a jointly prepared research lesson” (p.151). In addition, Tsui and Law (2007) had referred to LS as the “systematic investigation of classroom pedagogy conducted collectively by a group of teachers/students, with the aim of improving the quality of teaching and learning” (p.1294).

9.3. Teacher Professional Development (TPD):

TPD represented a variety of structured and facilitated learning opportunities designed to assist in improving teacher professional knowledge, competence, skill and effectiveness

(Speck and Knipe, 2005; Whitcomb et al., 2010; Patton et al. 2015).

9.4. Self-Regulation (SR):

“Self-regulation supports individuals in learning and coping with demands and competing priorities. It might help teachers to increase their self-knowledge If teachers want to become effective in teaching, they need to become effective learners first. (Anjomshoa et al., 2017, p.134). In fact, SR was considered an “important factor in effectiveness of teachers” (Heydarnejad et al., 2017, p.83).

9.5. Professional Identity (PI):

“Professional identity is defined as ones’ professional self-concept based on various factors such as experience, belief, values, motivations, and attributes. It can be improved and strengthened through the process of professional education and experience (Motallebzadeh and Kazemi, 2018, p.1-2). “Teacher identity refers to teachers’ dynamic self-conception and imagination of themselves as teachers, which shifts as they participate in varying communities” (Yazan, 2018, p.21).

10. Target population and Sampling:

A number of schools were approached by the researcher for checking the suitability of application and fieldwork. However, this school was selected as the case study sample. The most important driving force behind nominating this school was the insistence of the School Principal for building the capacities of the EFL teachers in the school.

Since this was mainly a case study, it meant that the number of participating EFL teachers should be between two and five teachers. During the initial interviews conducted with the School Principal, and then with the Head of the Elementary Stage, they both provided the researcher with a detailed background and an evaluation regarding all of the EFL teachers in the Elementary stage. Moreover, based on the special nature of the LSA, and the necessary conditions and requirements that needed to be available for the sake of creating a PLC as outlined in previous studies, three EFL teachers were then purposively selected. Pseudonyms were used to refer to the participating EFL teachers in the Case Study for anonymity. These EFL teachers were referred to in the study findings as: *Teacher V*, *Teacher L* and *Teacher R*.

This purposive sampling was determined due to many factors. First, the designated EFL teachers taught the same

grade, and thus the collective lesson planning as a necessary requirement for LS could be easily achieved. Second, their schedules allowed for peer observation to occur, which constituted another important aspect in the study. Third, based on the initial needs assessment, the school had to improve the competencies of most of these teachers and the language proficiency of their learners too. Worthy to note, the name of the school and the participating EFL teachers would remain anonymous for protecting the rights of the participants, and for the sake of confidentiality as well.

11. Results of the Study:

Among the results seen in the teachers' behaviors and attitudes were their sense of empowerment and accomplishment. This was observed and documented in their reflective journal templates, in their lesson observation sheets, and in the researcher's log. Noteworthy, the researcher was quite alert during the planning sessions to give more room for the teachers' own creative ideas. Thus the researcher was keen on playing the role of both the facilitator and the mentor, or the 'knowledgeable other'; without enforcing any ideas or strategies. This was realized through eliciting from the teachers themselves their own ideas of how they thought the lesson should go about, and

choosing the type of activities that suited their own students. However, the researcher would interfere whenever necessary so as to give them some expertise regarding how they should select the sequence of activities to be able to convey the concept they wanted to deliver, and provide opportunities for students to practice the target language and enhance the communicative approach to develop their language performance.

This sense of empowerment was evident in the way teachers developed their ideas throughout the planning sessions; trying to follow similar incremental patterns of activities, while considering the major lesson objective and language outcomes. Moreover, the researcher also provided them with a vast array of online resources for them to choose from according to the lesson objective. So at the beginning they always checked with the researcher whether a certain activity would be suitable, and then at later stages they started to collectively select the activities confidently and then show them to the researcher; knowing when and how they would serve practicing and mastering the target language. Noteworthy, they would complement one another when there was a need for adding or modifying any activities. This also gave the teachers a feeling of ownership, and self-awareness

that they can accomplish a lot when they collaborate together within a PLC.

One of the greatest findings resulting from this PLC endeavor through the application of LS was the high levels of self-efficacy demonstrated by the teachers. This was witnessed through the teachers' increasing awareness and confidence of the basic rules of lesson planning for the sake of promoting the students' communicative language performance. They clearly developed as EFL teachers regarding their teaching mechanisms that have started to shift away from resorting to direct explanations of grammatical rules towards adopting elicitation of language usage based on employing suitable introduction and carefully selected meaningful incremental activities. They became more confident as teachers who would constantly reflect on their teaching and the outcomes achieved.

Another obvious result seen at that stage was the development of the teachers' self-initiation and research skills. The teachers started to surprise the researcher by preparing online resources for classroom usage from websites other than the researcher had suggested. They embarked on a new phase, whereby they seemed to possess the ability to evaluate and pick the activities that best served the objectives of the lessons and

the practice of the target language. When they first started to self-research these resources, they would use some activities that involved some new terminologies which the students had not encountered earlier. But when the researcher drew their attention to that issue using the feed forward technique, they began to make sure they built on what the students had already known or else would introduce such new vocabulary earlier when students were ready for it.

12. Case by Case Findings

12.1. *Teacher R's Case:*

In relation to assessing the impact of the PLC on *Teacher R's* professional development in terms of her SRT and her PI, this was demonstrated in the development of her reflective and lifelong learning skills. Even though she had earlier problems with classroom management as a novice teacher, she developed to a great extent in that aspect. She started to become more reflective and more aware of when and how problems arise and how to set goals for remediation. This constituted a tangible development in her SRT. According to her, she intended to 'become better' at teaching. This was another crucial finding in terms of her PI. She started to visit her teacher's log more often; writing down any future personal or professional plans, things to modify or change

in her instructional practices, or items to read about for her own professional learning or for resolving students' difficulties.

12.2. *Teacher L's Case:*

As for *Teacher L*, she could have done a lot better if it had not been for her easily distracted and stressed personality. Her performance level started at a very high level as she almost followed the original collective plan to the letter. Then, the pitch went through some fluctuations based on her intensified and overtly exaggerated stress. So the researcher tried to reassure her that she was there to support her and provide her with any help she might need. This comforting friendly chat was quite effective as it was clear that her performance level started to ascend after a plateau period. Moreover, she started to feel more at ease while being observed. Being part of this small PLC provided her with the chance to learn new ways for 'indirect grammar teaching' through incorporating and practicing 'interesting activities'; the fact which made her students more engaged while practicing the target language. However, she thought that 'each teacher had her own style'; and so each teacher should pick the activities that suited her own way of teaching. Nevertheless, one of the results of being engaged in this PLC was that she became more reflective, and started to jot

down few notes in her log as a reminder of what she might ‘need to do’. In addition, she expressed her hopes for more professional development opportunities that would also provide her with more ideas for effective EFL teaching.

12.3. *Teacher V*’s Case:

It was quite evident how confident *Teacher V* became. She even expressed to the researcher that she stopped feeling tensed while being observed. This was also demonstrated in her active contributions within the PLC despite the busy schedule and extra load of conducting both virtual and face-to-face lessons. This had greatly affected her enthusiasm for developing herself as a teacher. She stated that what she liked most about being part of the PLC were the ‘creative ideas’, the ‘new ways of teaching’, and the ‘active learning’ for communicative purposes. According to *Teacher V*, she started to become better at ‘time management’ and more ‘creative’ in language teaching. She also witnessed how language learning practice could be fun, and how the students enjoyed the recently incorporated interesting activities and hence became more engaged and interactive. In fact, this inspired her to become eager to learn more and develop her instructional practices. Moreover, reflection became a basic routine for *Teacher V*. She became convinced that reflection was

quite important for any teacher in particular and for any person in general. She believed that reflection was very beneficial, as it helped her know what she needed to work on, what her strengths were, and what she developed in. However, she tended to prefer using journal writing logs and not reflection forms for saving time and effort. In her reflection log, *Teacher V* would include the type of activities she intended to use later for better student performance and interaction. She would also use the teacher's log to remind herself of key things to include in lesson presentation for better learning outcomes. In addition, she would also write in her log the items she needed to research for her own professional learning, and for improving her teaching practices. She even specified the new areas she needed to explore more like human development theories, creative thinking, and EFL recent techniques for effective communication. However, she preferred that similar professional development opportunities, mentorship programs and practice based hands-on training sessions would be at less stressed times like in the summer vacation in order to be fully dedicated.

13. Discussion of the Results:

Throughout the presentation of the results and their analyses of, some major themes were derived as closely related

to the dependent variables of the study. Among these deduced issues are teacher empowerment, teacher self–efficacy, teachers as knowledge seekers, and teachers as lifelong learners; as basic outcomes for participating in a PLC. Furthermore, there were many factors that affected the varying levels of influence on the three EFL teachers. These were divided into individual and contextual aspects. In relation to the individual assets that triggered higher levels of transformation was encapsulated in intrinsic motivation, creativity, self–initiation and reflection. As for the contextual factors, they comprised mentorship, scaffolding and feed forward as major factors affecting the positive impact level of being engaged in a PLC through LS as the main independent variables. Among the most crucial aspects that had the main role in facilitating the whole endeavor were the supportive school leadership, and the encouraging school environment.

According to the findings of the study, the participating EFL teachers were positively affected by being engaged in a PLC. The feeling of being empowered EFL teachers basically emanated from their development in terms of instructional knowledge and pedagogical practices. These EFL teachers started to perform their tasks on a more professional

basis. Furthermore, there was an overall attitude that demonstrated that they became 'better teachers' after joining the PLC. The whole experience escalated these EFL teachers' beliefs in their own potentials for growth and advancement. According to Wei Li (2013), such an endeavor "emphasizes the process of learning for improvement and change in schools"; whereby the teachers taking part in a PLC "become more intellectually mature and responsible for their learning" (p.1).

Another aspect that positively affected those EFL teachers' self-efficacy was the knowledge they gained from the PLC. As a matter of fact, this knowledge was not just limited to instructional and content knowledge, but it also comprised their learning experience and orientation towards new independent forms of seeking knowledge. This made them more confident in their teaching and learning capabilities. This self-efficacy also emanated from their feeling that they were capable of initiating self-learning strategies which would enhance their own professional development.

A number of research studies highlighted the positive influence of mentorship and scaffolding procedures on teachers' development. This was quite similar to the strategies followed by the researcher in this study; all which have proved to be quite

impactful. Feed-forward was considered one of the means to show the mentees “how they can move on to the next higher level of knowledge helping them to do better in the next phase” (Junifer Abatayo (2020, p.80). This was why Y. A. Delaney (2012) considered mentorship an essential aspect in TPD.

There were some additional factors that highly affected the teachers’ improvement. These could be encapsulated in the role of the school. In fact, the institutional support was of vital importance in that respect. This was mainly reflected in the school leadership, the school culture and the school administrative style.

As a matter of fact, personal attributes made a difference in terms of teacher performance and practice. Among the individual differences that affected teacher development was their intrinsic motivation. Moreover, “there is a strong relationship between intrinsic motivation and skilled language teaching” (Praver and Oga-Baldwin, 2008, p.2). Another important personal element that greatly influenced teacher development was creativity. Some studies referred to the fact that teacher creativity was greatly affected by varied forms of teacher collaboration. For instance, Daniel Paul Draper (2014) stated that a PLC was a venue that allowed for gathering a pool of creative ideas shared by all the participating members of the PLC.

According to Mullen and Schunk (2010), PLCs offered a stimulating milieu for initiation and change for the sake of reaching the targeted outcomes. This proved that when teachers were given the opportunity to initiate change they showed higher degrees of commitment, initiation and creativity. Furthermore, reflection was demonstrated to have immense effect on the development of teachers. "In that way, they could become more aware of their own learning and of the gaps they need to fill" (Novozhenina & López Pinzón, 2018, p.125). Accordingly, teachers ought to be trained on using reflective inquiry on an ongoing basis.

In fact, the teachers' development was highly affected by the reflective practices and techniques employed in the study. Reflection was among the most influential factors that ensured the teachers' commitment towards developing themselves, strengthened their potentials for SR and promoted their PI self-conception on the professional basis. Despite the varied forms of reflection employed in the study according to the teachers' needs and the emerging circumstances, they all yielded positive outcomes. Moreover, they proved that the sequence adopted in the study could be a model that would inspire further studies and theoretical frameworks. These reflection forms comprised guiding

reflective templates at the beginning, and then ended up with free reflective journal writing exemplified in the teacher's log. This suggested framework for SR for EFL teachers could be considered one of the main contributions of this study. Worthy to note, all previous studies which tackled SR had focused on students not teachers.

14. Recommendations:

This section would basically shed light on some recommendations based on the conclusions reached and the analysis provided in the current study. There would be some generic recommendations in relation to the main issues discussed in this study in addition to few recommendations for further research.

14.1. Overall Recommendations:

- There could be more than one PLC for EFL teachers within the same school. They could be divided according to their grade levels. Moreover, there could also be a bigger PLC for the whole EFL department that discusses generic concerns, opportunities and challenges.
- There ought to be adopted varying and ongoing PLC mechanisms depending on each school's contextual needs

and changes for keeping the momentum and for sustaining the established PLC.

- The teaching force should be considered by the school administration as its 'human capital' and worthwhile investment.
- Schools should dedicate specific time slots in teachers' schedules that would allow them to collaborate in PLCs.
- PLCs should be embedded within the school's culture.
- There ought to be a built-in system for mentorship and teacher induction in each school.
- PLCs should be institutionalized within schools and educational districts and directorates.
- Schools could build a repertoire of resources through their PLCs and hence form a library of their own for future reference.

14.2. Recommendations for Further Studies:

- Other studies ought to explore the impact of PLCs on the overall school reform.
- There should be studies that would examine and analyze the process of the institutionalization of PLCs.
- More studies could examine various strategies other than LS that would succeed at creating PLCs.

- There could be studies on Team Teaching or Participatory Action Research (PAR) for reaching specific objectives similar to that of PLCs based on schools' contextual needs in terms of TPD or students' learning outcomes.

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