

Professional Learning Communities in Private Schools in Bahrain and Oman: Reflection on Two Cases

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Highlights

- This study explores features of professional learning community (PLC) models in the educational contexts in Bahrain and Oman.
- Findings based on the case studies of PLCs in two private schools in Bahrain and Oman, and theoretical input from international PLC literature has implications for policy and practice.
- Study recommends promoting PLC approaches in the Bahraini and Omani educational systems in pre- and in-service teacher training programs, adapting best international PLC practices to the specific educational contexts of Bahrain and Oman, preparing school principals to lead PLC in their schools, providing human and financial support to these communities, and making school cultures more collaborative.
- This study highlights the importance of the PLC approach, expands the existing conceptual/analytical framework, demonstrates how this approach is being used in two schools, and encourages other practitioners and researchers to embrace PLC.

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Keywords

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Introduction

In recent years, research on and development of teachers' professional development frameworks and practices have undergone a paradigm shift—one driven by the complexities of teaching and learning requirements, the increasing necessity for educational system reform, and a growing need for accountability and quality outcomes (Vescio et al., 2007). These approaches have shifted the concept of professional development beyond the focus on teachers attaining knowledge and skills, to emphasize a framework that requires teachers to reflect on their own practices, innovate new classroom pedagogy, and develop an authentic understanding and expectations of student outcomes (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995).

Approaches to teacher professional development include a variety of practitioner-based activities, such as peer observation and assessment, engaging in class lesson study groups, and conducting action research. Another practitioner-based activity involves participating in individually guided activities, such as online distant learning or academic higher educational programs. Such activities are intended to promote teachers' sense of belonging as knowledge workers in their professional learning communities (PLCs). These activities are also expected to support teachers in achieving their learning and teaching goals, thus shaping their students' knowledge, skills, and values (Al-Mahdi, 2019a; Al-Mahdi, 2019b; Al-Mahdi & Al-Wadi, 2015).

As part of our other work on PLC research, this study explores PLC as an innovative approach to teachers' professional development and discusses possible ways to implement PLC in teacher professional development programs. Accordingly, the following section defines PLC and discusses the existing research on PLC, including international research and work focusing on the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, including Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar. A brief review of the methodological considerations is followed by two practical cases of PLC in the Bahraini and Omani educational contexts, with subsequent discussion focusing on the implications for policy and practice.

Literature review

There is a broader discussion in the educational literature about the importance of PLC as an effective way of increasing school improvement. Despite Bolam et al. (2005) suggesting that there is no universal definition of a PLC, there appears to be a high-level international understanding of a PLC as a

group of people sharing and critically interrogating their practices in an ongoing reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-oriented, growth-promoting way and operating as a collective enterprise. In short, learning activities are performed by teachers in their daily lives. According to Kyndt et al. (2016), PLC is created when all members of the organization share an interest in and work together to improve students' learning outcomes and mastery, understand and adhere to a shared vision and mission, actively participate in decision making, engage in active learning, share professional responsibilities, and reflect on and identify practical solutions to the challenges they encounter.

Traditional "one-shot workshops" or "one-size-fits-all" types of professional development that consider teachers as individuals have been deemed insufficient. With the increasing demands for educational reforms and the growing need for accountability and quality outcomes in schools (Harris & Jones, 2017), PLC has been put forward as a strong alternative. By focusing on collaborative teacher learning to stimulate learning outcomes among students, PLC promotes a collaborative culture to build strong and resilient learning communities, thus placing emphasis on the need to improve both teachers' teaching and instruction practices and students' academic outcomes.

Placing professional collaboration at the center of educational reform is one of the key changes in educational system reform. Indeed, PLC has become common practice in several educational systems around the world. This section discusses several studies conducted in various countries around the world. Although not exhaustive, this section elucidates how PLC are being implemented and promoted on an international level.

School-based PLC research in the United States shows that improved collegial professional practice is associated with a wider distributed leadership style (Carpenter, 2015; Mindich & Lieberman, 2012). This improved practice also requires a supportive leadership structure for teachers (Carpenter, 2015) and a balance between leadership authority and teacher autonomy (Mindich & Lieberman, 2012). For instance, conducting interviews and observations in two schools in the United States, Mindich and Lieberman (2012) concluded that vision, community, resources (including time to meet and teachers' own expertise), and processes are associated with the development of collegial professional practice in schools. They also noted that there were several challenges to PLC, including scheduling and data use for quality teaching. Olivier and Huffman (2016) proposed a conceptual model for PLC comprising five dimensions: shared and supportive leadership, shared values and vision, collaborative learning and application, shared personal practice, and supportive conditions. According to Olivier and Huffman (2016), among leadership and administration staff, transformative and proactive district involvement, transparency, trust, accountability, and autonomy in school culture were important. They also found that developing leadership capacity, embedding professional development, and focusing the learning culture on student success were paramount.

PLC research conducted in China and the wider Asia region similarly confirm that professional development, student learning, and leadership are closely connected. For instance, Jensen et al.

(2016) suggest that some high-performing PLC schools in the Chinese mainland, Singapore, Canada, and Hong Kong SAR are characterized by primarily focusing on student learning, considering effective professional learning as the key element for improving student learning outcomes, school improvement, and school evaluation. In Chinese Taiwan, Chen et al. (2016) found that a collegial trust relationship was strongly and directly related to shared practices and served as an important mediating factor between supportive and shared leadership, shared visions, and shared practices. Accordingly, through collegiality and trust relationships, shared vision along with supportive and shared leadership could support school staff in learning in a collective way, as well as to collaborate, innovate, inquire, reflect, and give feedback to one another in the form of shared professional learning practices. Practical modalities of PLC among teachers show that participating in teaching and research, lesson preparation, and grade groups result in collective enquiry and collaborative learning (Wang, 2016). Meanwhile, Sun-Keung Pang et al. (2016) examined the characteristics of PLC practices in Hong Kong SAR in six different areas: leadership for teacher learning, collaborative learning capacity, student-focused orientation, a culture of sharing, mutual understanding and support, and continuous professional development. Their findings showed that within the schools identified as strong PLC, both school leaders and teachers placed significant emphasis on the six subscales of PLC practices.

Qualities and characteristics among PLC leadership suggest that improved instructional leadership skills, developing and communicating a shared vision, acknowledging teacher expertise leadership, shaping a culture of trust, and supporting and monitoring collegial learning are important (Wang, 2016). The connection between leadership and trust identified in Yin and Zheng's (2018) study indicated that leadership practices had an enhancing effect on faculty trust, with trust in principals found to have either a negative or positive effect on PLC, while trust in colleagues had a positive effect on PLC. In their study, Yin and Zheng (2018, p. 142) referred to the five components of practice initially defined by Louis et al. (1996) and later used by Lomos et al. (2011): namely (a) shared norms and values / shared sense of purpose, (b) a collective focus on student learning, (c) collaboration or collaborative activity, (d) de-privatized practice, and (e) reflective dialogue. Scholars typically examined the effects on these five different components of a PLC. For instance, some teachers in Korea showed the highest extent of involvement in three components of school-based PLC, namely shared vision, de-privatized practice (i.e., observation of other teachers' classes and feedback exchange), and collaborative teaching (i.e., joint teaching) (Lee & Kim, 2016). Other scholars, such as Wang (2016), found that emotional connections and shared responsibility in teams strengthen professionalism (Wang, 2016). In short, supporting a model of shared leadership, embedding professional development into collaborative time, and focusing on creating a culture of collaboration all have positive effects on PLC growth (Zhang & Sun-Keung Pang, 2016). Salleh (2016) also confirmed the vital role of conversations in PLC and how facilitating these conversations can bring about collegial, collaborative, and learning relationships that can shape

teachers' teaching and students' learning. PLC characteristics and requirements can vary across contexts with differences in educational, economic, social, and cultural developments (Zhang & Sun-Keung Pang, 2016). Nonetheless, a framework consisting of processes, principles, and practices can be used in PLC conversations among facilitators (Salleh, 2016).

While research related to PLC in Gulf Cooperation Council countries varies in context, methods, and findings, it exposes several similarities to the studies conducted in Asia. For instance, Al-Taneiji (2009) investigated PLC characteristics in 15 elementary and secondary schools in the UAE. Analysis of questionnaire data revealed that of six identified PLC characteristics, only two characteristics—namely, supportive and shared leadership and supportive structure—were exhibited by the schools. These two characteristics were similarly present in multiple studies conducted across the Asian region. The other four characteristics—shared values and vision, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, and supportive relationships—were less evident in schools in the Gulf region.

Al-Mahdy and Sywelem (2016) explored perceptions of public school teachers in three Arab countries, namely Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Oman, based on the dimensions of PLC. Their results indicated that both Saudi and Omani teachers had positive perceptions regarding the degree to which their schools function as PLC, whereas the perceptions of Egyptian teachers were negative. They also observed significant differences between male and female teachers regarding their perceptions of their schools' function as PLC in favor of female teachers. Focusing on Bahrain, Roy (2016) discussed how a western approach to a PLC can be implemented in an eastern setting without removing the uniqueness of Bahraini culture. In this respect, Roy (2016) explored the steps needed to implement a structured PLC in which the existing community can produce empowered teachers who will be life-long learners. In this regard, the beginning stages of creating PLC involved enabling ordinary teachers to facilitate professional development meetings at a local private school in Bahrain. Also examining the Bahraini context, Underwood (2015) conducted a small-scale exploratory case study, drawing upon interviews with Bahraini teachers who had worked with teachers from the United Kingdom through programs run by various bodies, including the British Council. Underwood (2015) concluded by suggesting that teachers working with colleagues from other nations build their professional identities together in innovative and exploratory ways. The study further suggested that actively constructing PLC with these colleagues would be both rewarding and significant.

Methodological considerations

We selected two private schools in two Gulf Cooperation countries as case studies on the basis of the researchers having a shared interest in improving national educational systems and PLC. While a case study normally involves an inquiry into an example and a detailed examination of a process or phenomenon (Creswell, 2009), we opted to use practical cases as examples to maximize the scope of information (Flyvbjerg, 2006), thereby providing and extending information about

PLC. Certainly, the case study approach has proven useful in previous research on professional learning (de Munnik, 2020). As school-based researchers, the authors sought to share their experiences in PLC with the wider educational community. As both schools and school-based researchers were distinct in terms of location, context, and perspective, a flexible, exploratory, and qualitative research approach was adopted in this study.

The school case studies were selected based on the views and analyses offered by the third and fourth authors, who occupy leadership positions in the selected schools. In this regard, the authors reflect on their experiences as organizers of and active members of the PLC in their schools. Their reflections were guided by an initial discussion on a PLC framework suggested by ACER (2016), which focuses on the following five domains: (1) professional culture; (2) leadership; (3) student engagement, learning, and well-being; (4) improving professional knowledge and practice; and (5) focusing on performance and development. Although their views cannot be generalized, they offer valuable insights regarding their school cultures and how PLCs are organized.

Finally, this study adopted the following guiding questions:

- Which different models of professional development were used in different international educational systems?
- What are the main features of the two cases from Bahrain and Oman and key features relevant to a PLC approach?
- What are the implications of studying these two cases for policy and practice?

Analysis was conducted according to the guiding questions. The case analysis was steered by different ideas presented in the literature review, particularly the ACER framework, which also guided the initial discussions with the two schools. However, the authors decided to select PLC as a conceptually exploratory approach rather than a fixed analytical approach, whereby the characteristics and components of a PLC are emergent and non-static.

The analysis of the two case studies highlights different themes related to the leadership and professional features of teachers. The preliminary findings of this qualitative study cannot be generalized. Nonetheless, the findings of this study enhance our general understanding of the nature of PLC in private schools in Bahrain and Oman, with markedly few studies on this topic in the Gulf area. The findings can also be used to further strengthen the argument for creating PLC in other educational systems.

Education in Bahrain and Oman

Compulsory education in Bahrain is divided into primary (grades 1–6), intermediate (grades 7–9), and secondary education (grades 10–12). Children begin compulsory schooling at the age of six. There are 248 schools in Bahrain: with 149,000 students enrolled in 211 public schools, and

78,000 enrolled in 73 private schools. In total, public schools employ some 14,042 teachers, while 8,283 are employed in private schools. The majority of private school students come from average or above-average socioeconomic backgrounds.

Oman's educational system comprises four levels: preschool, basic education (level 1, years 1–4), basic education (level 2, years 5–10), secondary education (years 11–12), and tertiary education. Children begin basic schooling at the age of six. In Oman, some 579,024 students are enrolled in 1,124 public schools, while 53,000 students are enrolled in 245 private schools. In terms of teacher employment, a total of 56,385 teachers work in public schools, while 9,222 teach at private schools. Most private school students come from average or above-average socioeconomic backgrounds.

PLC in a Bahraini school

This section presents the case of a Bahraini school PLC from the perspective of a school leader. As such, the discussion applies to some but not all private schools in Bahrain.

As the world becomes increasingly interconnected and complex, schools need to continue creating opportunities for educators to grow and adapt their practices to meet the needs of a fast-changing world. Our private international school in Bahrain has embraced this change by making a commitment to lead the future of learning and personalize the learning journey of students.

One of the pillars necessary to establish a foundation for this objective to fundamentally change the way we approach education is teacher professional learning and collaboration. Developing PLCs that allows participants to grow, share, and learn from one another will set the stage for a transformation within schools. At our school, we have reformed our approach to PLC in order to build PLC that promotes more continuous and sustained collaboration at an individual and systematic level through collaborative planning times (CPT), learning pathways, development of heterogeneous teams, the de-privatization of practice, and the creation of authentic learning networks in schools across the country. Accordingly, this case review elaborates on how these five practices have helped create a community of learners within the school and how it may ultimately aid us in leading the future of learning and creating personal learning journeys for our students.

Collaborative planning teams

The school planned to provide scheduled time to meet, discuss common assessments, establish grading norms, and dive into topics that are pertinent to teachers' grade levels or subject areas. The school chose to have members of the leadership team participate in each group to provide guidance, spur conversation, and help the leaders remain deeply involved with teaching and learning within the school. Coaches were also provided opportunities to join the meetings to contribute ideas, provide expertise, and identify ways to become more involved in the classroom.

Teachers recognize that these are times in which to collaborate and prepare learning experiences with the expertise of their colleagues, coaches, and leaders. Having such a broad range of voices in the planning process helps ensure diversity in perspective, a wide scope of expertise, and a final product developed as a result of teamwork. This has helped define what type of learning will occur in these meetings, with teams focusing on collaborative planning rather than broad school initiatives.

Learning pathways to collaborative activity

With the shift from isolated PLC to a multipronged approach to continuous collaboration and learning, the school needed to ensure the availability of opportunities for deep learning. Accordingly, learning pathways facilitated by leaders, coaches, and teachers were developed to encourage deep dives into topics prioritized by the school. These deep dives were collaborative approaches to learning about specific topics for an entire year through five sessions on in-service days. The first four sessions lasted for four hours each, while the final session comprised a learning showcase of learning where teams shared their knowledge in short, facilitated lessons with participants from the different pathways.

This overhaul of internal professional learning had three main impacts. First, new PLCs were created with groups that had never worked together. Second, participants felt more empowered in their learning as a result of being offered a choice and occupying an active role in planning and learning within their chosen pathway. Finally, teacher facilitators that led the sessions were given an opportunity to share their passion, voice, and knowledge with a group of colleagues, effectively helping them build confidence in sharing their expertise and developing themselves as educators.

Heterogeneous teams

The third aspect of the school's continuous collaborative efforts was the formation of heterogeneous teams focusing on advancing the school's initiatives as outlined in its five-year strategic plan. These teams comprise volunteer teachers and leaders within the school, with many also including student and parent members to ensure the input of all stakeholders within the school community. To date, teams have tackled a wide range of challenges and initiatives, such as child protection, strategic technology integration, the school mission statement, and student wellness.

The real impact of this endeavor can be seen in the increase in student and parent involvement in collaborative teams. In the past, parents and students were typically only involved in things like the Parent Teacher Organization, surveys, and creation of the strategic goals. However, considering the end user of education elicited insights that often challenged our thinking. It also provided opportunities for parents and students to understand how and why the school operates as it does.

De-privatization of practice

A significant part of collaborative and innovative practice for teachers revolves around their willingness to open up, share what is happening in their classrooms, and ultimately allow themselves to be vulnerable. Accordingly, the school began to encourage teachers to open up and share their practices with their colleagues and even beyond school walls through social media; we refer to this as the de-privatization of practice. All too often, teachers become isolated in their classrooms, only ever meeting with their “PLC” during scheduled times. For true growth to occur, such learning needs to be continuous and become normalized within schools.

In this respect, the school utilized a protocol for opening up classrooms in an informal manner, encouraging teachers to share what they were doing in a nonthreatening way while allowing other teachers to join them for a lesson. The school also incorporated learning walks as a way to encourage classroom walkthroughs, granting teachers opportunities to showcase what was happening in their classrooms. De-privatizing practice within the school encouraged teachers to be more collaborative in their planning and increased their willingness to share with one another. Many teachers began sharing through social media, helping them build wider networks with excellent educators from across the world.

Expanded learning communities

Finally, to ensure continued collaboration within our schools, we are purposefully creating opportunities for extended PLC. This approach is being spearheaded by the professional learning center developed at the school. This center hosts a wide range of learning experiences for educators from across Bahrain and the wider MENA region, providing opportunities to join, learn, share, and develop professional relationships with like-minded educators. These professional learning experiences engage educators in creative, contemporary pedagogies and introduce them to new ideas in order to help them reimagine what education could be. The innovation hub also focuses on linking industry and education to ensure that authentic learning occurs at all levels. Bringing educators and leaders together with industry experts can have a profound effect on what learning looks like and allows for the expansion of learning communities. Such collaboration can help educators and school systems move away from isolated schooling systems that ignore what is happening in the real world. The professional learning hub also hosts “TeachMeets,” in which educators from different schools give short five- to seven-minute presentations to an audience of educators. These “TeachMeets” are also an opportunity to network with educators from other schools in Bahrain and ultimately broaden PLC beyond the walls of the school.

The creation of such opportunities for diverse PLCs has already resulted in the spread of ideas across Bahrain and the provision of opportunities for collaborative projects between schools. Significantly, such endeavors have served to the breakdown of established invisible barriers in relationship building between educators from different schools.

The five initiatives listed above have helped our school revamp our traditional PLC, transforming it into a system that promotes continuous and sustained collaboration within and beyond school walls. Although the outcomes are difficult to quantify after just a year, there is clear evidence of growth in terms of teacher learning, the school's progress in its objective of personalized learning and becoming a leader of future learning, and our adaptability in shifting to virtual learning. Our approach to expanded PLC has helped create real change within our school and will hopefully continue to do so for years to come.

PLC in an Omani school

This section presents the case of a PLC in a private school in Oman from the perspective of a school leader. As such, the discussion applies to some but not all private schools in Oman.

The school leader believes that PLC comprises professionals in a learning community. Administrators may assign a teacher to a PLC according to their grade level or subject, or in a diverse network of other educational communities to learn from each other. In this case, the school leader prepared the PLC program to cultivate "subject-based" teachers, that is, those without a focus on the general educational primary age group.

PLC at a private school: 2019–2020

Our private school in Muscat created a PLC program called "21st Century After School Training" (21CAST). In this program, PLC participants collaborated through weekly staff meetings and teachers attended evening activities intended to enhance their skills. The program had not been in operation long before the advent of COVID-19 and the resulting lockdown. Before lockdown, the program concentrated on providing teachers with valuable classroom-based practical applications by educating a control group of students after school.

21CAST was designed to offer a two-year ongoing schooling to subject-based teachers, providing and guiding teachers to improve their classroom teaching while benefiting students at the same time. In this respect, students could have their registration fee returned after completing the classes for a whole year.

21CAST teacher formation: Forming PLC

The 21CAST included 12 hours of professional development per month for over eight months. Objectives of the first year focused on different teaching practices, including effective and inquiry-based lesson planning, assessments, classroom management, differentiation, yearly and curriculum mapping, inquiry-based education, policies and procedures, parental involvement, the "dos and don'ts" of field trips, and risk assessments. Teachers were also given practical professional engagement, such as observing and then putting their observations into practice in 96 hours of training.

They also received a mentor for observations and keeping track of their training. Monthly assessment results showed that teachers improved their classroom teaching strategies. At the end of the first eight months, participating teachers had to pass a final examination with 70%.

In the second year, teachers remained part of their PLC, which were divided according to the age group that they taught with a 95% practical load and assignment as a classroom teacher. Self-management and development as researching and practicing teachers were an essential focus of the teacher workshops. Assessment was conducted through a reflection paper on the PLC and their journey; submitted to an educational community, papers were assessed by the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Education, or through the selected university or college. In addition to written work, teachers were evaluated on the basis of their control of training and teaching practices and presentation.

Participating teachers were likely to remain in their private school communities for another year. As these private schools have turned into a training school to some extent, third-year trainee teachers would have their “own” classrooms to facilitate the learning environment. They would also be given an opportunity to remain a member of the community, as this special professional network will have become a PLC for all community teachers, not just those within their school groups. As such, teachers are given the lifetime support of people with whom they engaged and are able to audit their professional development by improving their skills and keeping abreast of new educational practices.

Private bilingual schools in Oman: Benefits of implementing 21CAST

21CAST seeks to provide the education necessary for a subject-based teacher to become a professional classroom teacher by offering continuous education. The program could be offered as a college course in a university, institute, or teacher’s college. The program is designed to aid teachers who are already teaching by providing practical exposure and opportunities to learn about practical obstacles beyond those encountered in their degree. The objective is that every teacher involved in this organization learns what it means to be a team player, how to cover the curriculum and create a positive and creative classroom environment, and why different forms of assessment are key in studying the growth of students. The program also seeks to provide teachers with opportunities and the ability to form new and long-lasting professional relationships with like-minded individuals to help them progress in their educational journeys.

If we can shape our current teachers in our country to be facilitators able to help students discover, learn, research, and utilize the resources that they are given, then we will have accomplished what the 21CAST program set out to do. In other words, the 21CAST program is founded on the objective to provide the tools educators need to help them improve their skills and create a network of national PLCs. Together, teachers will learn and contribute to the goal of improving education.

Reflections and implications for policy and practice

Both Bahrain and Oman direct their educational systems toward improving the learning outcomes of students and developing educational processes to suit the requirements of quality and high accountability. In line with Harris and Jones (2017), we found that in order for schools to cope with these changes and requirements, it is necessary to review the professional development processes of teachers. This study's exploratory research aligns with Bolam et al. (2005), who argued that teachers must become more independent and work together to solve the distinct problems facing them in their daily teaching activities. They also have to master the working skills essential for promoting 21st-century learning, such as good communication, teamwork, critical thinking, self-reflection, lifelong learning, organized planning, and commitment to both higher professional and ethical behavior skills. In addition to learning outcomes, it is important to replace traditional professional development based on lecturing and discussions and the provision of similar training methods to a large group of teachers with different levels of abilities, expertise, and needs, with new and innovative professional development approaches (see Olivier & Huffman, 2016).

The trend of using PLC approaches on a practical level has been explored in previous studies and applied in school practice, results showing its value when used in an organized and systematic manner in both schools and teacher preparation colleges. It is anticipated that using PLC approaches on a practical level will show an upward trend in several Arabian Gulf countries (e.g., Al-Mahdy & Sywelem, 2016). Therefore, like Jensen et al. (2016), we argue that PLC contributes to developing and reforming multiple areas in the educational field. In view of the teacher preparation programs offered by the local teachers' colleges in our cases, we found that there was a clear focus on the development of learning communities by encouraging teacher candidates to prepare action research, work on graduation projects, engage in practical training in the school setting, as well as recognize group projects as an important part of the evaluation process in all courses. However, it is also evident that greater focus and attention on this type of professional development remains necessary, especially with respect to professional development courses for in-service teachers and school leaders. As these programs are under review in the study context, there is an opportunity to include new ideas and trends based on the global experiences of various countries or regions, including the United States and Asia, as discussed in the literature review. In this respect, we also strongly suggest taking the local culture and the nature of educational systems into context, thereby ensuring that these trends are adapted to suit local contexts.

In line with the findings of Carpenter (2015) and Wang (2016), we found that, when planning to establish PLC, it was necessary to begin preparing and qualifying educational leaders who value and are able to develop these communities. A school leadership team comprising such educational

leaders must believe in the feasibility and importance of PLC; possess the leadership skills necessary for planning, implementation, and evaluation; and be able and willing to address the challenges that these learning communities will experience at all stages. PLC also requires special support, such as the provision of qualified and highly efficient human resources as well as technical and financial resources (Kyndt et al., 2016). The findings of this study support those of Senge (1994) and Wang (2016) that school leadership plays an important role in building and promoting shared values among members of the school community, supporting cooperation and promoting trust among teachers, and working to develop teachers' professional values, behaviors, and attitudes.

Teachers participating in PLC are expected to be cooperative, innovative, and able to shift from the teacher- to learner-centered educational system so that there is less teaching and more learning. As a result, learners will have the opportunity to initiate proper research, gather information, and problem-solving by themselves. As Kyndt et al. (2016) noted, this goal can only be achieved if the teachers themselves are able to work with other colleagues on common tasks, including planning lessons, preparing activities, conducting mutual visits, engaging in joint research, and working on lesson studies and other activities. In this regard, the goal is that the teacher becomes an example for the students as a lifelong learner. Therefore, it is necessary to change the school culture to ensure the development of an interconnected network. A connected network—as suggested by Wang (2016)—seeks to achieve a common goal, namely open communication, trust, and continuous development. Moreover, building such communities does not happen in a short period of time, as it requires time and continued commitment to planning, design, implementation, and evaluation.

The value of building collaborative environments through PLC in schools cannot be overstated. The shared responsibility for learning and student growth in these collaborative learning environments can help build professional relationships, increase teacher efficacy, and prepare students for “jobs of the future.” Independence and working individually in the workplace are outdated; teachers need to embrace collaboration for the benefit of students. Corroborating the findings of Kyndt et al. (2016), we believe that the best way to do this is by building active learning communities that continue learning and sharing together.

It is important to conduct more studies on PLC, particularly insofar as few studies have been conducted in Gulf Cooperation Council countries and Bahrain in particular. Indeed, despite the importance of this topic and the worldwide efforts of educational systems to apply these approaches in their schools, markedly few studies have been published in international scientific journals. The shortage of studies on such a topic may limit the spread of improved practices in schools, compounding unawareness about the value of PLC and continued reliance on traditional methods of professional development for teachers. PLC studies can also provide more evidence for decision makers regarding the usefulness and feasibility of applying PLC in educational systems and

schools. In this regard, local teachers' colleges are essential in promoting the use of PLC by offering college courses to bachelor's degree students aligned with the program.

We contend that building our school communities from within will not only promote engaging on a journey with one another but aid in establishing our position among other strong educational communities across the world. In short, we seek to build an improved community of "lovers of learning" and thereby promote lifelong learning for all as highlighted by the fourth sustainable development goal (SDG) (<https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4>). Our improved educational systems will demonstrate our success in building an amazing network of collaborative teachers who have worked together to improve the quality of education, thereby contributing to other social areas that will support our future generations.

Contributorship

Osama Al Mahdi has made a substantial contribution to the concept or design of the article, drafted the article or revised it critically for important intellectual content, approved the version to be published, and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved. Marloes de Munnik contributed to the concept or design of the article and drafted the article or revised it critically for important intellectual content. She contributed in writing additional parts related to the changes requested by the peer reviewers. She proofread the paper, approved the version to be published, and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved. Luke Meinen worked on the data collection and data analysis related to the first school case, approved the version to be published, and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved. Marissa Green worked on the data collection and data analysis related to the second school case, approved the version to be published, and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

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