Professional Learning Communities in Vietnamese Primary Schools in the Educational Reform Context: Forms and Challenges

Hong-Van Thi Dinh [ID]
Hue University of Education,
VIETNAM

Quynh Anh Thi Nguyen* [ID]
Hue University of
Education, VIETNAM

Ngoc Hai-Tran [ID]
Thu Dau Mot University,
VIETNAM

Le-Hang Thi-Do [ID]
Viet Nam Academy of Social
Sciences, VIETNAM

Hung Thanh Nguyen [ID]
Hue University of Education, VIETNAM

Long Minh Dau [ID]
Hue University of Education, VIETNAM

Bao-Phan Phung-Dinh [ID]
Hue University of Education, VIETNAM

Abstract: Professional learning communities (PLCs) are important for improving student achievement and school development. According to PLC research, teachers' knowledge and practice in teaching are significantly improved by various PLC forms and favorable working environments. This qualitative research was conducted to find out what forms of PLCs were popular and what challenges were facing three primary schools in a province in Vietnam. The study utilizes a multiple-site case study design relating to PLCs in those schools with the data from interviews with the principals, group leaders and teachers, observations of PLC activities and related policy documents. The two forms of PLCs were identified in this research, including professional groups and groups of core teachers. Besides, four challenges facing PLCS implementation in those schools included the old habit of professional learning in PLCs, structural conditions of schedules and facilities, economic conditions of teachers and motivation for reforms. The study provides recommendations based on the findings for PLC research and practice within and beyond the Vietnamese context.

Keywords: *Principal leadership, professional learning community, teacher learning, Vietnamese schools.*

Introduction

In recent years, professional learning communities (PLCs) have attracted researchers worldwide. International evidence shows that the success of education reform is closely related to the ability of individual teachers at the personal and school levels to support student learning. Meanwhile, the capacity of teachers is sustainably built and developed through working in PLCs (Harris & Jones, 2010; Vescio et al., 2008). Therefore, developing effective PLCs in schools is an effective solution to enhance the quality of education.

Vietnam has been undergoing a fundamental and comprehensive innovation from educational objectives to programs, methods, forms of education as well as methods of examination and assessment (Central Communist Party of Vietnam, 2013). This change is a shift in education from teacher-centred to learner-centred. The general education program is approached based on output standards, aiming to form and develop essential qualities and competencies of students (Ministry of Education and Training [MoET], 2018b).

To achieve the above goal, the new general education program emphasises the core points: Learning contents designed to integrate the knowledge of many fields/parts and subjects so that students can flexibly apply knowledge to real life; Enhancing practical experience activities for students; Teaching is conducted based on differentiation, towards the needs, interests, and abilities of each student, ensuring that no student is left behind in the classroom (MoET, 2018b). According to MoET (2018b), the target is the qualities and capabilities of learners, so education programs become ordinances, and textbooks are only sources of reference for teachers.

---

* **Corresponding author:**

Quynh Anh Thi Nguyen, Department of Psychology and Education, University of Education, Hue University, Vietnam. ✉ ntqanh@hueuni.edu.vn

Primary education was the first level of education to implement the new General Education Program in 2020-2021, leading to many challenges for primary school teachers who directly implement the new program. The way the class is organised is different from the traditional style. Teachers are not allowed to teach the lessons in the old way of knowledge transmission as in many previous studies (Nguyen, 2019; Nguyen, Ha et al., 2022; Nguyen, Huynh et al., 2022; Tran, Nguyen et al., 2020; Tran, Truong et al., 2020; Truong et al., 2021). Instead, the new education program forms a new role for teachers who create a learning environment that stimulates students' learning activities and supports students throughout their learning process (Hallinger et al., 2021; Kwakman, 2003).

It is crucial to create PLCs in schools to help teachers meet the 2018 general education curriculum requirements. PLCs are considered a sustainable learning approach (Stoll et al., 2006). Various studies have researched the correlation between the PLCs and the enhancement of teachers' educational and teaching abilities, thereby positively affecting students (Bolam et al., 2005; Hallinger et al., 2021; Harris & Jones, 2010; Lalor & Abawi, 2014; Stoll et al., 2006, 2007; Thompson et al., 2004; Vescio et al., 2008).

In Vietnam, the concept of PLCs is relatively new and has only been used in recent years in some documents on educational innovation (MoET, 2020a). Some studies have also investigated PLCs in Vietnam (Hallinger et al., 2019, 2021; Lalor & Abawi, 2014; T. K. D. Nguyen, 2019; Nguyen, Huynh et al., 2022; Saito & Tsukui, 2008; Tran et al., 2021; Tran, Nguyen et al., 2020; Tran, Truong et al., 2020). However, these studies only introduced some forms and assessed PLCs' impact before schools carried out educational reforms. In the context of Vietnam's educational reform, it is necessary to explore the forms of PLCs in primary schools to determine which forms are highly effective and identify the challenges when implementing PLCs in Vietnam.

Literature Review

Definition of PLCs

There are many definitions of PLCs (Stoll et al., 2006), and a global definition remains a matter of research and debate (Hairon et al., 2017). PLCs and a number of other terms, including professional learning communities, organizational (shared, collaborative, collective) learning, community of practice, and school-based teacher learning communities, are often used interchangeably (Lee & Smith, 1996; Louis et al., 1996; Louis & Marks, 1998; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; Mitchell & Sackney, 2000; Newmann et al., 2000). Although there are differences among the authors, in general, most of the authors believe that the PLC is a collective of teachers and school staff who seek and share career-related learning on an ongoing basis for the benefit of the student and the growth of the school (Stoll et al., 2006, 2007; Vangrieken et al., 2017).

Characteristics of PLCs

Different researchers seem to describe characteristics to a PLC differently. Our study identified PLCs characteristics based on the theoretical basis of Kruse et al. (1993). Accordingly, PLCs have five elements (See Figure 1). *Reflective dialogue* is described as conversations between teachers, which focus on exchanging and sharing information and knowledge to help teachers improve teaching behaviours and learning outcomes. *Focus on student learning* means that all activities in PLCs should focus on student learning activities, assisting students to study well and improve learning outcomes. *Interactions among teacher* colleagues, also called *de-privatisation of practice*, refer to professional relationships that encourage teachers to openly share and help each other, such as observing other teachers' classes and giving formal and informal feedback. *Collaboration* is reflected in teachers participating in professional development activities and sharing teaching materials. *Shared values and norms* indicate that members of PLCs have a consensus about the mission of their school and the values and norms of professional behaviours among members of the PLCs.
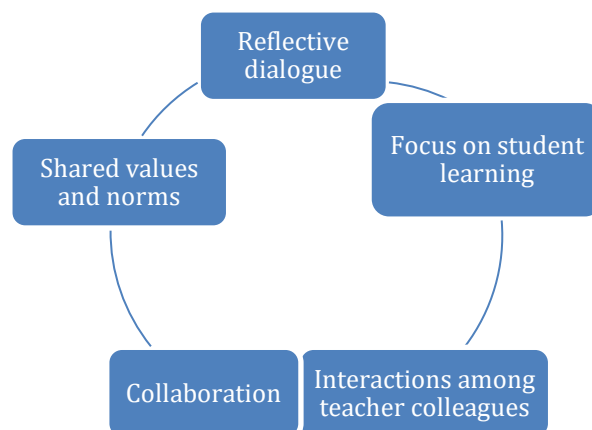

Figure 1. Characteristics of PLCs, based on Kruse et al. (1993)

Forms of PLCs

Despite sharing some common features, PLCs can exist in various forms of communities practice in different educational contexts. Vangrieken et al. (2017), in a systematic review of teacher-learning communities as a context for professional development, found three common forms of PLCs among 40 final studies reviewed. The first type is formal teacher communities organised by government initiatives, whereas teachers' participation can be compulsory or voluntary. Second, PLCs can be member-oriented communities with pre-set continuous agendas. The final form is formative communities with no pre-set goals or schedules. Participation in formative communities is voluntary, considered their crucial success (Vangrieken et al., 2017).

Notably, lesson study stands out as a specific form of classroom-based PLC that originated in Japan (Gutierez, 2016; Widjaja et al., 2019). Lesson study is prevalent in primary school education and has attracted attention from educators in South-East Asia and the West (Widjaja et al., 2019). Lesson study embodies many characteristics of high-quality PLC as advocated by Kruse et al. (1993), and can be considered a type of teacher learning communities (Vangrieken et al., 2017). In lesson study (also known as 'research lesson' – Gutierez, 2016), a team of teachers identify a common goal within a particular content area and meet frequently to plan lessons. One member of the lesson study team then teaches the research lesson while the other team members are observers (Gutierez, 2016). They subsequently organize post-lesson discussions to draw out strategies to enhance future lessons (Lewis et al., 2009; Saito & Atencio, 2013). In other words, lesson study emphasizes the importance of reflective dialogue, interactions and collaboration among teacher colleagues to promote student learning and school development. Additionally, lesson study is a sustainable form of PLC (Saito & Atencio, 2013). It enables teachers to strengthen PLC (Doig & Groves, 2011) as it motivates teachers to become dynamic and competent to cater for the diversity of learners (Gutierez, 2016). Thus, lesson study helps teachers become critical players of PLC and improve their capacity to enhance students' learning outcomes (Gemeda et al., 2014).

These forms, as mentioned above, of PLCs, are teacher communities, whereas teachers are vital members. However, throughout this history, PLCs have undergone many changes in the perspectives of core participants. Teachers and school leaders are traditionally viewed as the core leaders of PLCs (Stoll et al., 2006). That view has then broadened to include the participation of support staff groups in schools in PLCs to promote student learning and school development (Meaby, 2018; Stoll et al., 2006). A PLC should be built by the contribution of both teaching staff and support staff across the school, such as teaching assistants, office administrators, caretakers, and cleaning staff (Meaby, 2018; Stoll et al., 2006). Establishing a PLC with diverse members reflects inclusion in education and the power of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 2011; Meaby, 2018).

Challenges in the Application of PLCs

Many researchers acknowledged the complexity and challenges in the application of PLCs. Based on a pretty comprehensive viewpoint about PLCs, Wiseman et al. (2013) argued that developing an authentic PLC culture may lead to conflicts or struggles, depending on different schools' unique persona and culture. The researchers viewed those struggles as both negative experiences and new opportunities for the development of individuals and the whole team. Specifically, Wiseman et al. (2013) claimed that struggle leads to the creation of new ideas, more chances for PLC members to learn about themselves and from others, the ability to accept different perspectives, and the development of practical communication skills (Wiseman et al., 2013).

On the other hand, Saito and Atencio (2013) focused exclusively on the challenges in applying lesson study, a specific form of PLC. The authors pointed out that reforming schools through lesson study requires changes in pedagogical styles among teachers. Saito and Atencio (2013) argued that teachers and students should be allowed by their teachers to ask questions to each other during group activities to support their teachers and schools in their innovation implementation. Such changes in the nature of teacher-student relationship reflect the 're-alignment of power relations' (Saito & Atencio, 2013), which can be challenging in some South-East Asia countries where teachers hold traditional teacher-directed learning approach (Saito & Atencio, 2013; Tran, Ha et al., 2021; Tran, Hallinger et al., 2018; Tran, Nguyen et al., 2020; Tran, Truong et al., 2020; Wang & Lin, 2019) and reluctance to empower students (Hallinger et al., 2019, 2021; Pham & Renshaw, 2013).

Additionally, Saito and Atencio (2013) also mentioned the issues with lesson observation as a part of lesson study. It is critical for teachers of the lesson study team to observe and discuss strategies to improve practices mutually. However, one of the biggest challenges when promoting lesson study in some Asian countries is the teachers' fear of observation by their colleagues and heavy criticism from others (Saito & Atencio, 2013; Tran, Ha et al., 2021; Tran, Hallinger et al., 2018; Tran, Nguyen et al., 2020; Tran, Truong et al., 2020; Truong et al., 2021). The researchers clearly explained this from a post-structural point of view, indicating that "the observation of lessons accompanied by heavy criticism that may occur in more hierarchical and authoritarian school structures reflects the power of 'surveillance', whereby ascendant peers use observation to enact power upon those who are teaching the lessons" (Saito & Atencio, 2013, p. 92). Hence, it is necessary to pay attention to the influence of political and cultural factors when applying lesson study to contextual practice in different countries.

Moreover, the researchers also mentioned that time management would be an issue for teachers while applying lesson study (Saito & Atencio, 2013; Widjaja et al., 2019). Teachers are generally time-poor (Widjaja et al., 2019), so finding time for lesson study can be problematic in reality (Saito & Atencio, 2013). Consequently, some researchers have also highlighted the importance of offering teachers support, especially allocating time for teachers to participate in lesson study (Saito & Atencio, 2013; Widjaja et al., 2019).

Research on PLCs in Vietnam

A few studies on PLCs in Vietnam have been conducted in the past two decades. Notably among them is Saito and Tsukui's (2008) research on the challenges of building PLCs in primary schools in Bac Giang province, Vietnam. This research focused on building PLCs mainly through lesson study and analyzed the data from five schools participating in a project. The data were collected from 200 professional teacher meetings in five primary schools. Five lessons were drawn from the research findings. First, changing the beliefs of teachers is time-consuming. Second, the large-scale delivery of the educational project should review its effectiveness because teachers were often reluctant to change. Third, developing trust among participants, including outside resource people, was necessary for a learning community. Fourth, in order to earn the respect of teachers, outside resource people should keep learning diligently. Fifth, the idea of sustainability needed to be reconsidered as an endless process that will never be perfect.

Lalor and Abawi (2014) conducted a case study at an international school in Vietnam. Their study results revealed the impact of PLCs on improving student achievement, teachers' professional development, and building a culture of cooperation and mutual support in schools. In addition, some other studies shared experiences in organizing activities according to lesson study (Ho & Le, 2019; Nguyen, 2019; Pham et al., 2018; Vu, 2020).

In general, studies on PLCs in Vietnam are limited in both quantity and scale of implementation. In addition, some individual studies have also shown that Vietnam's PLCs were ineffective in building a school-wide community and lack sustainability in promoting the self-improvement of individual teachers (Phan, 2017; Saito & Tsukui, 2008; Tran et al., 2018). It is necessary to explore the current situation of PLCs and the challenges of implementing PLCs as the new General Education Program has been implemented at the primary education level. This study aims to identify the forms/types of PLCs in primary schools in Vietnam in the context of educational innovation and implementation challenges. The research questions are as follows:

1. What are the types/forms of PLCs employed in Vietnamese primary schools?

2. What are the challenges when implementing PLCs in Vietnamese primary schools?

Methodology

Research Design

This research follows a qualitative case study research design. A qualitative case study helps explore participants' experiences of PLCs in primary schools in Vietnam in the context of educational reforms and provides a complex and detailed understanding of the issue (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). As the academic literature about PLCs is fairly limited in Vietnam, we decided to employed Merriam's interpretive case study approach (Merriam, 2007). Accordingly, an interpretive case study is suitable when "there is a lack of theory, or if existing theory does not adequately explain the phenomenon, hypotheses cannot be developed to structure a research investigation" (Merriam, 2007, p. 38).

Sample

Three principals, three team leaders and six teachers from three primary schools in Thua Thien Hue Province, Vietnam, were invited and voluntarily participated in our study. One of the critical criteria when selecting participants is the ability to provide rich and thick information about the phenomenon (Merriam, 2007; Patton, 2015). Those schools were selected purposively because their principals were key managers at the primary education level in this province, recommended by the Hue Provincial Department of Education and Training. They had extensive experience in organizing and implementing the new general education programs in primary schools. These principals had received direct training from experts of the MoET on modules for general education administrators and were responsible for providing support to primary school principals in the Thua Thien Hue Province. Detailed information of research sites is in Table 1.

Table 1. Sample Characteristics

School	No. of students	No. of classes	No. of teachers and staff	School management board	School size *
School A	675	20	34	1 Principal 1 Vice-principal	2
School B	878	27	49	1 Principal 2 Vice-principals	2
School C	1027	29	70	1 Principal 2 Vice-principals	1

Note: *School size is specified by Ministry of Education and Training and Ministry of Domestic Affairs (2006)
School size 1: The school has more than 28 classes; School size 2: The school has from 18 to 27 classes.

Data Collection

Data was collected by using direct observation of PLC activities and semi-structured interviews with the three principals, three team leaders, and six teachers (two from each school) at three selected primary schools (Merriam, 2007; Patton, 2015). More specifically, each interview took place in a staff room or office for roughly 90 minutes. The purpose of these interviews was to learn more about the viewpoints of the participants regarding PLCs and professional learning activities for teachers in their respective schools. Each interview was audio recorded, and the Vietnamese transcriptions were done subsequently. Only the data extracts that were used in this study as quotes were translated into English by a proficient English lecturer and verified by the research team.

We also observed PLC activities in the three schools during three months in order to gather more information, confirm the information provided in the interviews, and assess the relevant school policies. The PLC activities mainly included professional learning groups, seminars for teacher learning for educational reforms in three schools. Each meeting was observed and recorded by the authors, who took turns doing so. These notes served as a source of information. These data sources provided a variety of viewpoints and made it possible to triangulate in order to check the credibility of various perceptions (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2017; Patton, 2015).

Analyzing of Data

We used "within-case analysis" and "cross-case analysis" in this multi-site case study (Patton, 2015). The within-case analysis involves creating in-depth summaries for each school in accordance with the research's main points. Coding data according to sources was the first step in analytical techniques. First, we examined the transcripts of the interviews to generate initial codes. The codes were then connected to the PLC activity notes and policy documents. After that, the information was organized by placing it in a database for each primary school (Patton, 2015).

In the "cross-case analysis", a general explanation for each school case was developed, even though the school cases have different details. Open coding, axial coding, and the constant comparative approach were employed during the data synthesis procedure (Patton, 2015). We created categories as we looked for patterns, commonalities, and inconsistencies among three primary schools (Patton, 2015). Data were then analyzed based on the six-steps of thematic analysis from Braun and Clarke (2013), comprising "(1) Getting familiar with the data, (2) Generating initial codes; (3) Searching for themes; (4) Reviewing themes; (5) Define and naming themes; (6) Producing the report" (p. 89). Thematic analysis is a technique that can be used in a variety of data analysis approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2013).

Findings

Forms of PLCs in Vietnamese Primary Schools

In primary schools in Vietnam, teachers often work together to share teaching experiences or support each other. Although these activities have different names, they can fully embody the characteristics of PLCs as teachers working together for their professional development, thereby promoting learning quality and achievements of students and the school development (Harris & Jones, 2010; Lalor & Abawi, 2014; Stoll et al., 2006, 2007; Vangrieken et al., 2017). Two forms of PLCs in three Vietnamese primary schools are identified based on data collected, including professional groups and groups of core teachers.

Professional Groups

According to the Charter of Primary Schools (MoET, 2020b), "The professional group consists of teachers by grade or subject, staff in charge of the library, educational equipment, and information technology, or educational support staff for disabled people, and in school counseling" (p. 10). The professional group has a meeting at least once every two weeks to improve teachers' professional learning and professional capacity in the group (MoET, 2020b). Therefore, professional groups as defined by the MoET can be seen as a form of PLCs, in which groups of teachers and support staff are involved with the ultimate aim of supporting the development of students (Meaby, 2018; Stoll et al., 2007).

Recently, in order to improve the working effectiveness of professional groups to meet the requirements of educational reform, the MoET has issued policies and related documents guiding the renewal of lesson study-based professional activities in primary schools in the Official Dispatch No 4612/BGDĐT-GDTrH on guiding the implementation of the new primary education programme in the direction of developing students' quality and capacity from the school year 2017-2018, which emphasizes the need to: "Focus on renewing professional activities and subjects of professional groups based on the lesson study approach" (MoET, 2017), the Official Dispatch No 1315/BGDĐT/GDTH on guiding professional activities to implement the new primary education programme, including the guidelines for lesson study-based professional activities (MoET, 2020a). This Official Dispatch provides detailed instructions on the process of lesson study approach and how to organize it at the levels of provincial departments, district departments and primary schools in Vietnam.

Professional groups were nominated/cited as a form of PLCs by the study's participants, and lesson study was the most common form of activities within professional groups. All three principals, three group leaders and six teachers at three primary schools A, B, and C had similar views on the significance of lesson study activities as they believed that application of the lesson study approach in their schools as PLCs is becoming more and more popular. The comments related to highly appreciating lesson study such as 'important', 'popular', 'useful', 'meaningful', 'feasible', 'applicable' were found in the interviews with the principals, professional group leaders and teachers. They agreed that their professional groups at their school had a meeting once every two weeks focusing on lesson study, as required by MoET.

"In the past, we had the intention of lesson study as a form of professional activities but had no chance to do it. After the Official Dispatch No 4612/BGDĐT-GDTrH and the Official Dispatch No 1315/BGDĐT/GDTH, issued by MoET, the lesson study-based professional activities have been carried out at the meetings of professional groups once every two weeks and these are more effective" (school B principal). In a similar vein, the principal of school A reinforced, "From this school year, the groups have been active in professional activities in the direction of lesson study which more focus is given to student learning and the relationship between teaching and learning. Although MoET requires the meeting of professional groups once every 2 weeks, many professional groups at my school hold professional activities every week. I promote this by letting all the teachers in the same group have one off day/week together to organize professional activities to share ideas for implementing the new primary education" (school A principal). "My school has followed the guidelines of MoET, based on the contents of the newly-renovated textbooks to carry out lesson study-based professional activities for professional groups and these are very useful in realistic teaching at school." (school C principal).

The effectiveness of professional groups was echoed in all 3 group leaders and 6 teachers of the three primary schools: "My professional group has many forms of activities, but the most outstanding is still the lesson study. We are trying to focus more on student learning." (Teacher 1 of school A, referred to as AT1); A group leader at school A elaborated, "We do it every two weeks. For a lesson study, I often carry out in 3 stages. First, we as a group choose the lesson together, then a teacher is selected for teaching will go home to prepare the lesson. Then, that teacher will give the draft lesson plan, and the group members discuss together for a better lesson plan. Third stage is that the selected teacher teaches the lesson, and the rest observes the class. After attending the class, all of us gather and discuss the lesson together for strengths and weaknesses for better teaching. We find these activities realistic and useful for us." (school A group leader, referred to as AL). For the detailed information of lesson study in school B, the group leader stated, "The contents of the lesson study discussions mostly focus on developing students' capabilities, qualities and methods to plan lessons. The basis for choosing the lesson depends on the monthly topic that I have planned. For example, if an experiential activity falls on Tet (New Year) holiday, including the activity 'I am happy on Tet holiday', I would choose that activity for the lesson study plan. This lesson study was just launched from last year, so teachers were just starting to choose on that basis." (school B group leader or BL).

These findings seem to reinforce the earlier studies as the most common form of lesson study for teachers to attempt to generate practical ways to implement curriculum contents (Takahashi & McDougal, 2016). According to the researchers, institutional procedures and characteristics are crucial for optimizing the impact of lesson study (Lieberman, 2009) and that lesson study enhanced education, teaching resources, and instructor for teachers (Lewis et al., 2009).

According to the principals of three primary schools, beside lesson study-based professional activities, the three schools conducted professional activities based on seminar topics. Based on the new primary education program, the actual situations of the school, and the needs of the teachers, the professional groups will develop thematic activities of seminars, for example, thematic topics on active teaching methods/technologies, to find out more about the new general education curriculum. Thematic activities on new and difficult issues in the educational curriculum of each grade level were explored at these three primary schools. The school C principal said, "Apart from lesson study-based professional activities, I promoted inter-group and school-level topics for seminars. Recently, I also did a number of seminar topics, they worked in different groups, but this form was also very effective. Last year, I promoted outdoor teaching, that was, I wanted to change from forms to methods". The school C group leader also explained, "Topics for seminars are always a must to be held every year, usually at midterm or at the end of term. Topics are normally selected by the school. For example, this year my school does a special activity about teaching outside the school, for

example, the school will select that topic and ask the groups, then the groups will study from the beginning of the year for a selected topic and prepare a demonstration lesson. After that, they report to the group and do the demo lessons to the whole group observation, and then the experts gather for a discussion and draw the experiences from the taught lessons." (school C group leader or CL).

"From the beginning of the year, the professional groups have registered for school-wide seminars on the issues that they find significant in the school year, and need to be changed, but when a problem arises, they also choose that to register for seminars, once a month. They actively register for the activity; the school will arrange it and I still work hard on Saturday or Friday afternoons for organizing those activities in professional groups." (school A principal). This is reflected in school A group leader 1, "our school organized two seminars for the whole schoolteachers focusing on experimental activities for Grade 1 students and Vietnamese language."

School B also has changed how they organize other activities of professional groups beside the lesson study-based activity, as the principal stated, "Regarding seminars, 2 years ago, my school held the seminars as the District department had guided, or teachers took turns to be the presenter of a seminar. From the last year now, the school selects topics for seminars according to the needs of teachers such as what teachers are missing and what difficult things are. This means that they do not focus much on what are their strengths anymore, but they choose problems that are difficult for them. In addition, how to organize seminars are also changed to create equality, not in a hierarchical way. In the past, for example, when organizing a school-level seminar, a selected teacher would report in front of others in a meeting room facing up to the front. However, now, all sit in a circle, so everyone has a chance to share, discuss the new knowledge from the seminar." (school C principal). The documents and our observations also confirmed the effective activities of professional groups at these schools.

The results reflecting the similar seminars held in the studies by Tran et al. (2018), Tran, Ha et al. (2021), Tran, Truong et al., (2020) and Hallinger et al. (2021) and such seminars were effectively conducted in the principals', group leaders' and teachers' views.

Groups of Core Teachers

Core teachers are usually those who have a good moral character, understand the educational situation, have good professional knowledge and capacity, have prestige in the school community, and are capable of providing advice, mentoring, supporting, leading and sharing with their colleagues in developing and improving professional learning activities for better improvements of individuals and the school as a whole (MoET, 2018a). With such characteristics, core teachers are the pioneering force in the school, providing special assistance to the principal in the implementation of the new general education program and other professional activities. Our observation also confirmed the significance of core groups in three schools.

All three schools have this kind of group of core teachers. "My school has a PRO group led by Ms. Y – school A vice principal as the group leader. This group always pioneers in the application of new things, for example, applying IT in teaching. When they found out that their colleagues were facing many difficulties in IT application for teaching, this group met together and identified teachers' difficulties. Then, they registered for the online IT application course and re-trained other teachers. I create conditions for teachers to participate and have a reward: Whoever does the best will get cash" (school A principal); "I set up a group of core teachers with excellent subject knowledge, teaching skills, and responsibility to support other colleagues in professional learning. This group has helped me to deploy initiatives in promoting professional activities to all teachers at school. I highly appreciate this group" (school B principal); "In the early years of being this school principal, I often provided professional learning support for the teachers by myself, but after that, the principal role was busy. I couldn't provide good support and I thought about building a group of core teachers to help me consisting of all professional team leaders. It took me 2 years to set up this team and now in my 3rd year, I feel completely able to assign work to this group of core teachers. The group leaders are now very proficient and efficient in their work. I think the school group of core teachers must be the leaders of all professional groups, because they have expertise and are close to the teacher. Whenever the problems arise, the group leaders solve them first. If they can't solve them, they will transfer it to the school leader for advice or solutions" (school C principal).

The groups of core teachers have provided much useful support to not only the principals but the teachers as well. Comments were illustrated by teachers such as "These groups have helped us in several ways such as supporting groups for teachers to participate in the competition for good excellent teachers' title at school, district or provincial level. When giving a lesson, we study it very deeply and conduct trial lessons in many different classes with many different teachers, then we gather to give comments and finalize the final plan to participate in the competition. Through those occasions, teachers gain experience and learn a lot from each other." (CT3); "I got the great support from the group of core teachers in preparing lesson plans for my teaching competition at the Provincial level last year which I could not have got the title without their support" (BT2); "Like the last time, I participated in the city's best form teacher contest, not only teachers in my professional group but also teachers in other groups were mobilized to work with me. We share our experiences to have better knowledge and skills to win in the competition. This is a good way for us to participate and share with each other." (AT3)

Challenges in Implementing PLCs in Vietnamese Primary Schools

For a year of implementing the new general education program, the three primary schools carried out various types of PLCs activities with a variety of successes, in the participants' views, plus our observation. However, the implementation of PLCs in their schools faced a number of challenges.

The Old Habit of Professional Learning in PLCs

The teachers' old way of learning was mainly learning alone. In the process of having professional activities with other teachers, there was a tendency to observe, evaluate and give comments on other teachers in criticism rather than sharing and supporting each other in a supportive way.

However, following the MoET guidelines, these three primary schools have carried out lesson study-based professional activities in an effort to improve the drawbacks. This lesson study form requires teachers to focus on students' learning activities, not on evaluating teachers' teaching demonstrations (MoET, 2020a). However, when implementing this form in reality, many teachers are still not used to this new change and still keep the old habit in professional activities. In the words of school A principal, "Older teachers have a lot of experience, but they seem to offend the innovations and they still keep their old disciplined and stereotyped ways. While the new way gives them more autonomy for being more active and proactive, but sometimes my teachers are still doing the old way". The school B principal had a similar view when she said, "Those limitations are from the sitting position to observe and give feedbacks. All observers still sit at the back of the class, when observing other teacher's lesson, they still focus on the teacher's teaching more than on students' learning. When meeting to give feedback after observation for the things to be improved, observers still tend to give more criticism rather than positive feedbacks. I think teachers need to be really conscious to adjust themselves to a new way of providing more comments in a supportive manner". The school C principal provides a more detailed explanations in her teachers resisting to the innovation changes, "Of the four steps of lesson study-based professional activities, the most difficult is the feedback-giving step after class observation which still remains the old way. I have also advised teachers to talk more about the observed teacher's students' learning, so that they can draw experiences of what good points and points to be improved for the next lessons. However, they still pay more attention to teaching activities of the observed teacher as an old habit of feedback-giving. In my school, there are more older teachers than younger teachers, so change is quite difficult taking more time and efforts."

This view is reinforced in school A group leader, "The sharing focus started to move from the teacher to students' learning. However, sometimes it is still the old habit for observers in commenting on the teaching activities of the observed teacher. Teachers are also gradually forming the habit of paying attention to students' learning activities but they are still affected by old habits" (AL); in school B group leader as "The feedback giving process will take a longer time because of changing teachers' old habit into the new way of providing comments to observed teachers' teaching" (BL); and in school C group leader's comment, "In the past, when teachers observing others' class, it was to observe the teacher's teaching, but now the observers are changing to observe students' learning activities to draw experiences from that observation. The position of sitting to give feedbacks after observation has also changed, teachers have to sit in front or on both sides of the class to observe how students are learning. However, many teachers are shy and still sit in the back" (CL).

The thinking of resistance to innovation in professional learning activities is evident in teachers' views, a school A teacher said, "I know that some teachers are very positive, but some other teachers are still afraid and reluctant to change. They argue that there is no need to innovate because the goal of Grade 1 students is to become fluent in reading and writing Vietnamese. If so, it is fine to teach in the old way." (AT2); "The new way of lesson study-based professional activities and feedback-giving made me feel unconfident and uncomfortable at first and sometimes felt reluctant to make changes. However, step by step, with the requirements, the instruction from senior departments and my colleagues, I am doing much better." (BT1). These challenges of teachers facing required reforms were evident in meetings observed by us as researchers.

The above-mentioned findings related to teachers' readiness and willingness to have innovation changes seem to repeat the research results of previous studies as teachers are often more reluctant to take on new duties than other professionals (Haiyan et al., 2017; Hallinger et al., 2021; Harris et al., 2017; Nguyen, Ha et al., 2022; Nguyen, Huynh et al., 2022; Somprach et al., 2016; Tran et al., 2018; Tran, Nguyen et al., 2020; Tran, Truong et al., 2020, 2021; Wang, 2016).

Structural Conditions of Schedules and Facilities

According to the requirement of MoET (2018b), for teachers to be able to learn and cooperate other, teachers need to access the favourable conditions of time and common learning space to be able to exchange with each other. Currently, according to the new primary education programme, teachers in the school have to attend class all day. Although most schools arranged a weekday afternoon to have 2 hours off for professional activities, this period of time did not yet meet the learning needs of teachers.

Teachers of the three primary schools realized that the difficulties facing them in having professional learning activities in a new way. "Many seminars are held on Saturdays or Sundays, but many teachers find it difficult to arrange. Most school teachers are young, with young kids off on weekends at home. Teachers have to go to school all weekdays and stay at home on weekends to take care of their children. I think it is difficult to arrange a reasonable time for teachers in the whole school" (CL).

Teachers also mentioned the time-consuming challenges and others in lesson study-based professional learning. Teacher 1 of school A said, "In order to conduct a lesson study-based professional activity, once-every two-week schedule for a meeting is not enough in my opinion. A lesson study usually takes over several sessions, for about 2 months. If so, there cannot many activities in a semester as desired. Therefore, we often take advantage of breaks to briefly discuss urgent things" (AT1). Teacher 3 of school B also had similar challenges, "I want to participate in the professional learning seminars as the whole school, but the organization frequency of such seminar is very low. For the whole school to participate, the preparation would take a longer time and ensure the conditions of time available for the teachers are busy with their classes and the space to teach or organize that activity is large enough" (BT3). The space challenge is echoed in school C teacher's comment, "One of the reasons teachers cannot sit in front of the class or on either side in the classroom when carrying out lesson study-based professional activities is that the classroom is currently too small. Thus, teachers have to sit in the back and find it difficult to move around to observe students' learning activities" (CT2).

Economic Conditions of Teachers

Economic conditions of teachers could promote or hinder their quality of participation in professional learning in these three primary schools. In order to actively participate in professional groups, and focus on their teaching, teachers' income must be stable. However, their salary is not enough to take care of their own family. "Currently, my school has many young teachers which means they have low salaries. So, they have to spend time working part-time to support their family. This prevents them from spending more time to participate in professional activities" (school A principal). This is also evident in school B, as the principal stated, "There are many young teachers in my school, only ten percent of the staff is over 40 years old. The advantage is that young staff have a higher demand for learning. However, they are busy with their children and working a part-time job for their living, so there is not much time for their professional learning as desired." "My young teachers have great motivation in professional activities at school to learn to improve their subject knowledge and teaching skills. However, because of low salaries, they face financial challenges in spending time on such activities." (school C principal).

Motivation for Reforms

Motivation played a very important role in supporting teachers to be active in learning in these three schools as they were motivated to enhance their knowledge and skills for the new primary education programme. In these schools, the motivational system frequently consisted of policies, guidelines, incentives, recognition, and punishment. It seemed that the three principals employed various forms of teacher professional development.

The principals reportedly understood their teachers so they had applied appropriate incentive tactics to each one of their unique demands. Generally, the principals were aware of the personal circumstances of their teachers.

When employing professional development strategies, three principals were aware of the disparities in their teachers' needs, ages, genders, and financial situations. This was mirrored in the mandatory and elective methods used in the schools. For instance, degree upgrading was optional, whereas observations, scientific investigations, and self-learning were all compulsory. All teachers valued these insights. In the interview or surveys, there were no hints of unjust treatment or teachers' negative sentiments toward their principal's recognition of various requirements. Our observations and reports from the school confirmed these. The actions made by the three principals appeared to be consistent with what earlier research findings had found (He & Ho, 2017; Tran, Hallinger et al., 2018; Tran, Nguyen et al., 2020; Tran, Truong et al., 2020). They claimed that in order to encourage teachers to grow, it is crucial to utilize motivating techniques that are appropriate for each teacher and based on their requirements and work qualities (Haiyan et al., 2017; Wang, 2016).

In all three schools, teacher learning was implemented and promoted using incentive and punishment systems. Teachers who excelled or made significant progress, such as those who upgraded their higher degrees successfully, earned the title of 'excellent teacher', earned high marks in scientific studies, and so forth, were commended, shown appreciation, and given financial rewards. These teachers received widespread appreciation and praise. The principal of school A claims that after a teacher completes a 'degree upgrading' course, that graduate is given 'a small present as a type of appreciation and acknowledgement of his/her endeavor' during the staff meeting. In schools A, B, and C, teachers who received the titles of "excellent teacher" were honored and given financial rewards. If their students won the 'good student' competition at the district or provincial department of education and training, their teachers at three schools also received financial rewards. The teachers benefited financially and socially as the levels rose. These

incentives, which are not typically supported in Western institutions, seemed to stimulate competition among these Vietnamese primary teachers (Hallinger et al., 2021; Tran, Nguyen et al., 2020).

However, three school principals mentioned the challenges in rewarding teachers because of educational policy regulations, and financial constraints. Their views were evident as follows: "Although I have tried my best to reward my teachers for their great efforts in professional learning in particular and in all their achievements such as 'good teacher' titles or 'upgrading qualifications', such rewards are still limited compared to their contributions" (school A principal); "Teachers want their efforts to be recognized from the school leaders, students' family, and the community. However, the recognition from society and family is not clear, so their motivation to strive is always encouraged. For my school, financial constraints do not allow much reward to my teachers." (school C principal); "My school has many teachers who are active in professional learning. At the end of the year, the school wants to reward those teachers, but according to the current regulations, the number of good teachers to be recognized as excellent task achievers are not allowed to exceed 20% of the number of staff in the whole school. Therefore, some teachers, despite their efforts, are not ranked as excellent. Every year-end grading for teachers, I have a lot of concerns regarding this" (school C principal). The motivational strategies done at three schools were evident in school documents and in teachers' interviews.

Apart from the barriers of innovation motivation from the schools' finance and senior department policies, a number of teachers themselves become hinders of the renovation process. "They are not aware of the need to innovate so working without self-motivation." (school A principal); "My school has some teachers who do not really want to make necessary changes towards professional learning for the new education curriculum renovation" (school B principal); "Some teachers work in a way that fulfills their responsibilities without having real passion or full responsibilities" (school C principal).

Discussion

The Diverse Forms of PLCs Help Vietnamese Primary Schools Meet the Requirements of Educational Reforms

Research results show that in the context of educational innovation, these primary schools have been very flexible in creating various forms of PLCs, including three common forms of PLCs as advocated by Vangrieken et al. (2017). In addition to the official forms prescribed and guided by MoET, such as professional groups (MoET, 2020a), there are groups of core teachers established by schools themselves and groups of self-initiated teachers to support each other on a case-by-case basis in the implementation of the new General Education Program. According to MoET (2018b), primary school is the first level to implement the 2018 general education program, leading to a big challenge for primary schools and forcing them to be active in finding ways to foster teachers. The building of diverse groups of PLCs is considered a fostering measure for teachers to meet the requirements of effective educational innovation. At the same time, it also clearly demonstrates the active learning and autonomy of the teachers. Research by Nguyen, Huynh et al. (2022), Truong et al. (2021), and Hallinger et al. (2021) also showed that primary school teachers were very active in learning and developing their careers.

Lesson Study-Based Professional Activities are the Most Popular Form of PLCs in Vietnam

Research results also show that lesson study-based professional activities are the most common form of PLCs in these Vietnamese primary schools. According to the classification of Vangrieken et al. (2017), lesson study is a form of formal teacher communities. Compared with other forms, lesson study-based professional activities are the form that MoET has issued guidelines and requirements for implementation (MoET, 2017, 2020a). Therefore, since the school year 2020-2021, all primary schools in Vietnam have taken it seriously. Three schools used lesson study as a form of professional development so that their teachers could work together to create, carry out, reflect on, and revise a number of instructional artifacts in order to enhance their teaching (Arslan, 2018; Stigler & Hiebert, 2009).

Lesson study-based professional activities have created a collaborative and positive learning environment among teachers in three primary schools as learning through lesson study to improve learning outcomes and not evaluate teachers as in the old days. Such activities help teachers organize classroom teaching activities according to the philosophy of "no students left behind" (MoET, 2020a). It can be said that lesson study-based professional activities are an effective teacher training model when primary schools are implementing educational reforms. Compared with other forms, lesson study-based professional activities are also the form that clearly shows the characteristics of PLCs (Kruse et al., 1993; Vangrieken et al., 2017).

The Biggest Challenge is old Study Habits

The development of PLCs is an urgent requirement of Vietnamese primary schools in the context of educational reform. However, the research results also show that the implementation of PLCs is still facing many challenges, which the biggest challenge is the old professional learning habits of teachers. The teachers' learning in PLCs is completely different from the old way of learning, emphasizing cooperative learning and sharing experiences to promote professional development for teachers and improve academic achievement for students (Bolam et al., 2005; Hallinger et al., 2021; Harris & Jones, 2019; Lalor & Abawi, 2014; Nguyen, Ha et al., 2022; Stoll et al., 2006; Thompson et al., 2004;

Tran et al., 2018; Tran, Nguyen et al., 2020; Tran, Truong et al., 2020; Vescio et al., 2008). Models of collaborative learning and professional practice are popular today (Haiyan et al., 2017; Hallinger et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2016). However, this way of learning differs from the traditional way of learning in the Vietnamese community. Therefore, the interweaving of the old way of learning in implementing the new one is understandable. The school year 2020-2021 was the first year that primary schools implemented a new general education program and simultaneously implemented lesson study-based professional activities, so challenges, including time, facilities, teachers' themselves are inevitable. To master this new way of learning, teachers may need time to adapt and become aware of the need to change their thinking and habits, thereby improving their teaching methods. Research by Saito and Tsukui (2008) has also shown that changing teacher attitudes takes a long time.

Conclusion

It is critical to build PLCs in Vietnamese primary schools as a model of teacher training to meet the requirements of educational innovation. In recent years, Vietnamese primary schools have implemented various forms of PLCs, in which lesson study-based professional activities are the most popular. However, the implementation of PLCs faces many challenges, in which old professional learning habits of teachers themselves are the biggest obstacle. To improve the effectiveness of PLCs, primary schools need to raise awareness among teachers about the need to change the way they learn and develop professionally.

The study findings on lesson study-based professional activities are consistent with themes that have been well discussed and studied in Western countries. However, it was evident how in which these elements were implemented in Vietnam's typical primary schools differed, reflecting the Vietnam's political, cultural, and socioeconomic context (Nguyen, Ha et al., 2022; Nguyen, Huynh et al., 2022; Saito & Atencio, 2013; Tran et al., 2018; Tran, Nguyen et al., 2020; Truong et al., 2021; Tran, Truong et al., 2020).

The task of studying similarities and variations in lesson study-based professional activities in a larger context in Vietnam or even within East Asian countries should be taken on by future studies. This will help create a more diverse worldwide literature in teacher professional development, educational leadership, and management. It will also provide policymakers, educational authorities, and practitioners in the region with insights into future development directions (Hallinger et al., 2021).

Recommendations

Several recommendations are made as a result of this study's findings. First, this study can lay the foundations for implementing potential solutions to improve the PLCs at school and favorable conditions established by the principals for their teachers at three primary schools, specifically in Thua Thien Hue province and other primary schools in Vietnam generally. The principals, their teachers, and other educational authorities of Thua Thien Hue province should raise the standards of PLCs in order to improve students' educational outcomes and achievements to fulfill the educational reforms by MoET. Furthermore, this study will bring about significant insights and implications for educational authorities as they find measures to enhance PLCs in primary schools in the broader contexts of primary schools in Vietnam. Future researchers could explore the forms of PLCs and the challenges when implementing PLCs in other regions of Vietnam or in other countries. They could also consider adopting the longitudinal approach to discover how these forms and challenges transform over time.

Limitations

There are a number of limitations of this research. Firstly, like other qualitative case study research, this involved a limited and specific population of participants in only three primary schools. The findings of this research could not be generalized to a larger population. Secondly, differences in culture and language created certain barriers in conveying the participants' and the researchers' ideas. Though the meanings of original ideas of the participants were kept faithful and clear, the original Vietnamese language styles and contexts were more or less changed due to translation. English equivalents for several Vietnamese words or phrases could not be found in the English language. Thirdly, we, as researchers, were also a research instrument (Patton, h2015).

Acknowledgment

Authorship Contribution Statement:

Dinh: Conceptualization, design, supervision, final approval. Q. A. T. Nguyen: Editing/reviewing, design. Hai-Tran: Writing concept and design. Thi-Do: Critical revision of manuscript, technical and material support. H. T. Nguyen: Data acquisition, drafting manuscript. Dau: Data analysis/interpretation. Phung-Dinh: Analysis.

References

Arslan, F. Y. (2018). The role of lesson study in teacher learning and professional development of EFL teachers in Turkey: A case study. *TESOL Journal, 10*(2), Article e00409. http://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.409

Bolam, R., McMahon, A., Stoll, L., Thomas, S., Wallace, M., Greenwood, A., Hawkey, K., Ingram, M., Atkinson, A., & Smith, M. (2005). *Creating and sustaining effective professional learning communities* [Research Report no RR637]. https://tinyurl.com/mwj9hp54

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013). *Successful qualitative research - a practical guide for beginners*. SAGE.

Central Communist Party of Vietnam. (2013). *Resolution No 29-NQ/TW on comprehensive renovations on education and training, meeting the demands of industrialization and modernization during the socialist-oriented economy and international integration.* https://tinyurl.com/3w7f9yjk [Vietnamese]

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Sage.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2017). *Handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed.). Sage.

Doig, B., & Groves, S. (2011). Japanese lesson study: Teacher professional development through communities of inquiry. *Mathematics Teacher Education and Development*, *13*(1), 77–93.

Gardner, H. E. (2011). *Frames of mind - the theory of multiple intelligences*. Basic Books.

Gemeda, F. T., Fiorucci, M., & Catarci, M. (2014). Teachers' professional development in schools: Rhetoric versus reality. *Professional Development in Education*, *40*(1), 71–88. https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2012.759988

Gutierez, S. B. (2016). Building a classroom-based professional learning community through lesson study: Insights from elementary school science teachers. *Professional Development in Education*, *42*(5), 801–817. https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2015.1119709

Hairon, S., Goh, J. W. P., Chua, C. S. K., & Wang, L. Y. (2017). A research agenda for professional learning communities: Moving forward. *Professional Development in Education*, *43*(1), 72-86. https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2015.1055861

Haiyan, Q., Walker, A., & Xiaowei, Y. (2017). Building and leading a learning culture among teachers: A case study of a Shanghai primary school. *Educational Management Administration and Leadership*, *45*(1), 101–122. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143215623785

Hallinger, P., Liu, S., & Piyaman, P. (2019). Does principal leadership make a difference in teacher professional learning? A comparative study China and Thailand. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, *49*(3), 341–357. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2017.1407237

Hallinger, P., Tran, N. H., & Truong, T. D. (2021). Mapping the professional learning of primary teachers in Vietnam: A multi-method case study. *Professional Development in Education*, 1-15. https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2021.1879218

Harris, A., & Jones, M. (2010). Professional learning communities and system improvement. *Improving Schools, 13*(2), 172-181. https://doi.org/10.1177/1365480210376487

Harris, A., & Jones, M. (2019). Leading professional learning with impact. *School leadership and management*, *39*(1), 1-4. https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2018.1530892

Harris, A., Jones, M., & Huffman, J. (2017). *Teachers leading educational reform: The power and potential of professional learning communities*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315630724

He, P., & Ho, D. (2017). Leadership for school-based teacher professional development: The experience of a Chinese pre-school. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, *20*(6), 717-732. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2016.1180431

Ho, T. L., & Le, T. C. M. (2019). Innovating professional activities according to lesson study - a solution to improve teaching quality according to the new general education program in junior high schools. *Vietnam Journal of Education*, *5/2019*(2), 283-286. [Vietnamese]

Kruse, S. D., Louis, K. S., & Bryk, A. (1993). An emerging framework for analyzing school-based professional community. In K. S. Louis & S. D. Kruse (Eds.), *Professionalism and community: Perspectives on reforming urban schools* (pp.23-42). Corwin Press.

Kwakman, K. (2003). Factors affecting teachers' participation in professional learning activities. *Teaching and Teacher*

Education, *19*(2), 149-170. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X(02)00101-4

Lalor, B., & Abawi, L. (2014). Professional learning communities enhancing teacher experiences in international schools. *International Journal of Pedagogies and Learning*, *9*(1), 76-86. https://doi.org/10.1080/18334105.2014.11082021

Lee, V. E., & Smith, J. B. (1996). Collective responsibility for learning and its effects on gains in achievement for early secondary students. *American Journal of Education*, *104*, 103–147. https://doi.org/10.1086/444122

Lewis, C., Perry, R., & Hurd, J. (2009). Improving mathematics instruction through lesson study: A theoretical model and North American case. *Journal of Mathematics Teacher Education, 12*, 285-304. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10857-009-9102-7

Lieberman, J. (2009). Reinventing teacher professional norms and identities: The role of lesson study and learning communities. *Professional Development in Education, 35*(1), 83-99. https://doi.org/10.1080/13674580802264688

Liu, S., Hallinger, P., & Feng, D. (2016). Learning-centered leadership and teacher learning in China: Does trust matter? *Journal of Educational Administration*, *54*(6), 661–682. https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-02-2016-0015

Louis, K. S., & Marks, H. M. (1998). Does professional community affect the classroom? Teachers' work and student experiences in restructuring schools. *American Journal of Education*, *107*, 532-575. https://doi.org/10.1086/444197

Louis, K. S., Marks, H. M., & Kruse, S. (1996). Teachers' professional community in restructuring schools. *American Educational Research Journal*, *33*(2), 757-798. https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312033004757

McLaughlin, M. W., & Talbert, J. E. (2001). *Professional communities and the work of high school teaching*. University of Chicago.

Meaby, V. (2018). Establishing professional learning communities to support the promotion of equality and celebration of diversity: reflections from a north-east community learning teacher. *Teaching in Lifelong Learning, 8*(2), 45-84. https://doi.org/10.5920/till.538

Merriam, S. B. (2007). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education. Revised and expanded from case study research in education* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Ministry of Education and Training. (2017). *Official Letter 4612/BGDDT-GDTrH on guiding the implementation of the current general education program in the direction of developing students' quality and capacity from 2017-2018.* https://tinyurl.com/3huxc6x2 [Vietnamese]

Ministry of Education and Training. (2018a). *General education program – Master program.* https://tinyurl.com/yj3j787v [Vietnamese]

Ministry of Education and Training. (2018b). *Circular 22/2018/TT-BGDDT on promulgating regulations on professional standards for teachers of general education institutions dated August 22, 2018*. https://tinyurl.com/yc6uh2t9 [Vietnamese]

Ministry of Education and Training. (2020a). *Official dispatch 1315/BGDĐT/GDTH on guiding professional activities to implement the Primary Education Program on April 16, 2020*. https://tinyurl.com/58fbhjk2 [Vietnamese]

Ministry of Education and Training. (2020b). *Circular 28/2020/TT-BGDDT on promulgating the charter of primary schools dated September 4, 2020*. https://tinyurl.com/389n63r3 [Vietnamese]

Ministry of Education and Training and Ministry of Domestic Affairs. (2006). *The Joint Circular No 35/2006/TTLT-BGDĐT-BNV guiding distribution of officers in public education schools.* https://tinyurl.com/5hxks38k [Vietnamese]

Mitchell, C., & Sackney, L. (2000). *Profound improvement: Building capacity for a learning community.* Swets & Zeitlinger.

Newmann, F. M., King, M. B., & Youngs, P. (2000). Professional development that addresses school capacity: Lessons from urban elementary schools. *American Journal of Education*, *108*(2), 259-299. https://doi.org/10.1086/444249

Nguyen, C. D., Huynh, T. N., & Tran, N. H. (2022). Overcoming contextual constraints: Implementing classroom pedagogical innovation through teacher leadership. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2021.2013543

Nguyen, T. K. D. (2019). Measures to develop the professional capacity of high school teachers according to the method of organizing learning communities in schools. *Hanoi National University of Education Journal of Science, 64*(3), 28-37. [Vietnamese]

Nguyen, Y. T. X., Ha, X. V., & Tran, N. H. (2022). Vietnamese primary school teachers' needs for professional development in response to curriculum reform. *Education Research International*, *2022*, Article 4585376. https://doi.org/10.1155/2022/4585376

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (4th ed.). Sage.

Pham, T. T. H., Nguyen, D. K., & Doan, N. L. (2018). Applying lesson study to develop a learning community, case study at Nguyen Truc Secondary School in Hano]. *Vietnam Journal of Education*, *430*(2-5/2018), 42-46. [Vietnamese]

Pham, T. T. H., & Renshaw, P. (2013). How to enable Asian teachers to empower students to adopt student-centred learning. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, *38*(11), 65–85. https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2013v38n11.4

Phan, Q. N. (2017). *Professional learning communities: Learning sites for primary school English language teachers in Vietnam* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Technology Sydney]. Open Publications of UTS Scholars. https://tinyurl.com/z8tfmcu4

Saito, E., & Atencio, M. (2013). A conceptual discussion of lesson study from a micro-political perspective: Implications for teacher development and pupil learning. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 31*, 87-95. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2013.01.001

Saito, E., & Tsukui, A. (2008). Challenging common sense: Cases of school reform for learning community under an international cooperation project in Bac Giang Province, Vietnam. *International Journal of Educational Development, 28*(5), 571-584. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2007.12.006

Somprach, K., Tang, K. N., & Popoonsak, P. (2016). The relationship between school leadership and professional learning communities in Thai basic education schools. *Educational Research for Policy and Practice*, *2*(16), 157-175. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10671-016-9206-7

Stigler, J. W., & Hiebert, J. (2009). *The teaching gap: Best ideas from the world's teachers for improving education in the classroom*. Free Press.

Stoll, L., Bolam, R., McMahon, A., Wallace, M., & Thomas, S. (2006). Professional learning communities: A review of the literature. *Journal of educational change, 7*(4), 221-258. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-006-0001-8

Stoll, L., Louis, K. S., & Stoll, L. (2007). *Professional learning communities: Divergence, depth and dilemmas*. Open University Press.

Takahashi, A., & McDougal, T. (2016). Collaborative lesson research: Maximizing the impact of lesson study. *ZDM: Mathematics Education*, *48*(2), 513–526. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11858-015-0752-x

Thompson, S. C., Gregg, L., & Niska, J. M. (2004). Professional learning communities, leadership, and student learning. *RMLE Online, 28*(1), 1-15. https://doi.org/10.1080/19404476.2004.11658173

Tran, N. H., Ha, X. V., Le, V. A., Nguyen, A. N., & Pham, K. T. (2021). Principal leadership and teacher professional development in a Vietnamese high school for gifted students: Perspectives into practice. *European Journal of Educational Research, 10*(4), 1839-1851. https://doi.org/10.12973/eu-jer.10.4.1839

Tran, N. H., Hallinger, P., & Truong, T. D. (2018). The heart of school improvement: A multi-site case study of leadership for teacher learning in Vietnam. *School Leadership & Management, 38*(1), 80-101. https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2017.1371690

Tran, N. H., Nguyen, C. D., Nguyen, V. G., Ho, N. T., Bui, T. Q. T., & Hoang, H. N. (2020). Workplace conditions created by principals for their teachers professional development. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, *25*(2), 238-252. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2019.1708472

Tran, N. H., Truong, T. D., Dinh, V. H. T., Do, H. L. T., Tran, A. T. T., & Phan, H. M. T. (2020). Significance of TPD in response to the current general education reforms in Vietnam: Principals and teachers' perceptions. *Problems of Education in the 21 Century, 78*(3), 449-465. https://doi.org/10.33225/pec/20.78.449

Truong, D. T., Dinh, T. H. V., Nguyen, T. Q. A., & Tran, H. N. (2021). Current status of professional learning of school teachers during the educational reforms in Vietnam. *Vietnam Journal of Educational Sciences, 37*(2), 48-53*.* [Vietnamese]

Vangrieken, K., Meredith, C., Packer, T., & Kyndt, E. (2017). Teacher communities as a context for professional development: A systematic review. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *61*, 47-59. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2016.10.001

Vescio, V., Ross, D., & Adams, A. (2008). A review of research on the impact of professional learning communities on teaching practice and student learning. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 24*(1), 80-91. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2007.01.004

Vu, T. T. H. (2020). Strengthening the lesson study-based professional development for improving teaching capability of document reading comprehension for secondary school literature teachers. *Vietnam Journal of Education*, *473*(1-3/2020), 18-20. [Vietnamese]

Wang, J., & Lin, J. (2019). Traditional Chinese views on education as perceived by international students in China: International student attitudes and understandings. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, *23*(2), 195–216. https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315318797356

Wang, T. (2016). School leadership and professional learning community: Case study of two senior high schools in Northeast China. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, *36*(2), 202-216. https://doi.org/10.1080/02188791.2016.1148849

Widjaja, W., Vale, C., Groves, S., & Doig, B. (2019). Theorizing professional learning through lesson study using the interconnected model of professional growth. In R. Huang, A. Takahashi, & J. P. da Ponte (Eds.), *Theory and practice of lesson study in mathematics: Advances in mathematics education* (pp. 103-133). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-04031-4_6

Wiseman, P. P., Arroyo, H., & Richter, N. (2013). *Reviving professional learning communities: Strength through diversity, conflict, teamwork, and structure*. Rowman & Littlefield.