

Exploring Teachers' Perceptions of Professional Learning Community Implementation in Cambodian Secondary Schools

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Abstract

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in Cambodian New Generation Schools (NGS) seeks to foster collaboration and professional growth. This study investigates the teachers' perceptions in secondary school in Kampong Cham and identifies the challenges hindering their effective implementation. This issue is crucial for strengthening teacher development and advancing Cambodian educational reforms in line with the international standards. A quantitative research was designed, with the structured questionnaire administered to 66 secondary school teachers and six school leaders selected by using the purposive sampling. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Results indicated that teachers and school leaders generally perceived the PLC implementation positively, particularly organizational structures and support systems. However, two major challenges emerged: heavy workloads and time constraints, and misconceptions about PLC principles. Additional difficulties included limited collaboration, passive participation, and lack of trust among members. While the PLCs are promising for enhancing the teacher collaboration and instructional practices, addressing these challenges is essential. Findings provided valuable insights for policymakers, school leaders, and educators aiming to strengthen professional learning cultures in Cambodia.

Keywords: *Professional Learning Communities; New Generation Schools; teachers' perceptions; challenges*

1. Introduction

1.1. Context and Problem Statement

With the vision 2030-2050, Cambodia will become an upper-middle-income country by 2030 and a high-income country by 2050 (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport [MoEYS], 2021b). To meet this vision, the Royal Government of Cambodia has identified human capital development as the first pillar of its Phase 4 Quadrant Strategy (Royal Government of Cambodia [RGC], 2021). In the Phase 1 Quadrant Strategy, human capital development is placed in the first of the five pentagons. The first pillar of the first pentagon identifies strengthening the education quality, sports, science and technology, which are linked to the first and fifth key priorities of the five key priorities: people, roads, water, electricity and technology (RGC, 2023). The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports has a key role to play in producing human resources that meet these development goals. To support Cambodia's Vision 2030-2050, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports has incorporated the Education Sector Roadmap 2030 into the Education Sector Strategic Plan 2019-2023, identifying a number of key strategies that include a focus on the entire education system, schools, teachers and students (MoEYS, 2019). The primary goal of this effort is to achieve better learning outcomes. Achieving learning outcomes requires mutual support among education staff (Burns et al., 2017). In the third strategy of Continuous Professional Development Framework for Teachers and Principals on Providing Continuous Professional Development, the Professional Learning Community is a model of continuous capacity development that includes a variety of activities, including mentoring, coaching, and consulting (MoEYS, 2019).

The establishment of a Professional Learning Community (PLC) is an appropriate response to promote collaborative learning activities among education staff in order to improve student learning outcomes (Hangchuon, 2020). In particular, in high-quality professional development in new-generation schools, teachers need to participate in professional learning communities that are held at least two to three times a month to collaboratively reflect on teaching practices and strengthen professional ethics, which are the core of the new-generation school model (Donaher & Wu, 2020). According to DuFour (2004), PLCs are focused on changing the way we teach and assess students' learning for a new era of education. In this sense, teachers need to focus on three questions: (1) What do we want students to know? (2) How do we know that students have acquired the knowledge that has been taught? and (3) How do we respond when students struggle to learn? PLCs are an educational reform initiative, a model for the

development of educational staff, a strategy for building school capacity, transforming schools into communities that extend beyond the classroom, teaching methods, and curriculum to advance students' learning and teachers' teaching (Mullen, 2009).

The implementation of PLCs in countries in the region and around the world has become a topic of discussion and research. According to Harris & Jones (2010), in Wales, PLCs are an opportunity to create transformative professional practices. Harris & Jones (2010) added that through PLCs, teachers can learn from new practices and create new knowledge that contributes to the development of the entire education sector. Similarly, in the Philippines, through PLCs, teachers can understand their strengths and know what needs to be improved in order to develop appropriate capabilities to address challenges in their profession (Tayag, 2020). According to Hairon & Tan (2016), the implementation of PLCs focuses on three main concepts and four key questions, which are modeled on the work of DuFour (2004). The three concepts include (1) enabling students to learn, (2) building a collaborative culture, and (3) focusing on student learning outcomes. The four key questions include (1) What do we expect students to learn? (2) How will we know that they have learned? (3) How should we respond when they have learning difficulty? and (4) How should we respond when they have learned and mastered?

The value of implementing PLCs is to create a culture of collaboration, focus on student learning outcomes, and reflective discussion (MoEYS, 2021a). However, most studies on the implementation of PLCs have been conducted in various countries, as shown above. Studies on this topic in the Cambodian context do not seem to be available or are not yet widespread. Therefore, the researchers are interested in the implementation of professional learning communities in the Cambodian context, focusing on the implementation of PLCs within the framework of the new generation school program.

2. Literature Review

Professional Learning Communities

According to various sources, a PLC has various definitions (DuFour, 2004; MoEYS, 2021a; Stoll & Louis, 2017). DuFour (2004) states that a PLC is a group of individuals who share a common interest in education, including teachers, school boards, education offices, ministries of education, or organizations. Another definition of a PLC is a group of teachers who share and discuss their daily practices in a reflective, collaborative, learning-focused, and growth-promoting manner (Stoll & Louis, 2007). MoEYS (2021a)

defines a PLC as a group of teachers, instructors, and principals who are committed to working together to learn from each other through action research, lesson study, and self-reflection on practice to improve the motivation, performance, and learning outcomes of the students they teach. Therefore, a common definition can be that a PLC is a regular discussion meeting between educational actors to explore ways to improve student learning outcomes. DuFour (2004) suggested that to create a PLC, one must focus on student learning, collaborate, and focus on student learning outcomes. MoEYS (2021a) identified three principles for the creation and functioning of PLCs. The three principles include (1) a culture of collaboration, (2) a focus on student learning outcomes, and (3) reflective discussion.

Educators who create PLCs recognize that they must create a structure that allows them to work together to achieve a common goal: improving student learning outcomes (DuFour, 2004). In this sense, teachers are given the opportunity, power, and freedom to collaborate and plan and discuss their own perceptions and practices (MoEYS, 2021a). At the same time, collaboration requires a positive culture, shared purpose, openness, time, and recognition of professional development (Henderson, 2018). PLCs assess the effectiveness of their work through student outcomes. In this sense, groups of teachers work collaboratively to discuss and assess their students throughout the school year. This allows teachers to see how their students are performing on a range of skills in comparison to other students (DuFour, 2004). According to DuFour (2004), the mission of formal education is not to ensure that students are taught, but to ensure that they have learned. This means that learning needs to be focused. In the discussion, teachers need to focus on three key questions: (1) What do we want students to learn? (2) How do we know that students have learned what we want them to learn and what are the challenges in their learning? and (3) What do we do if students have not learned what we want them to learn? (MoEYS, 2021a).

Key Activities Implemented in PLC

According to Caine & Caine (2010), there are many ways that can be done to implement a PLC, in particular four ways that should be considered: group study, action research, community of practice and dialogue cycle. According to MoEYS (2021a), three key activities are identified as being implementable in a PLC. These key activities include action research, lesson study and self-reflection. Action research is conducted with the aim of responding to real-world problems based on evidence from research. MoEYS (2020) suggests

that action research should be conducted in four stages: (1) defining the problem, (2) developing and implementing a plan, (3) collecting and analyzing data, and (4) using and sharing the results. After defining the problem, the researcher begins to plan by determining what to do, who to involve, when to start and where to meet for interperceptions, etc. The next step is to collect and analyze data through individual or group interperceptions. The data collected and analyzed must be disseminated, shared, and implemented in the classroom (MoEYS, 2020).

In addition to action research, lesson study is also one of the three main activities that can be carried out in PLCs. MoEYS (2021a) also shows that lesson study is a group work in which teachers collaborate to review and analyze teaching practices and help provide methods and produce teaching materials, etc. MoEYS (2021a) states that there are four stages in a cycle of lesson study. Stage 1 is lesson planning. In this stage, teachers need to discuss and assign a teacher to prepare for teaching. After receiving the assignment, the teacher needs to study the lesson content and prepare the lesson plan. After completing the plan, the whole group needs to work together to review the lesson plan. Finally, feedback is provided. Stage 2 is teaching practice and observation. In this stage, the group of teachers needs to have recording devices to record the activities of the assigned teacher. Observation focuses on the teacher's teaching methods and the students' learning styles. Stage 3 is discussion on teaching and learning. In this stage, all group members need to discuss and find out points to be tested and points to be improved in teaching. The final stage is continuous improvement. During this phase, all team members help drive continuous improvement and continue to assign others to implement the teaching to continue learning and sharing experiences (MoEYS, 2021a).

The final key activity is self-reflection on practice. According to MoEYS (2021a), self-reflection is manifested through examining one's own daily teaching practice and gaining self-awareness and making a thorough evaluation of one's teaching practice. Through self-reflection on practice, teachers can learn from experience to gain deeper self-awareness and create a culture of lifelong learning (Finlay, 2008). Self-reflection on practice occurs in four key stages: (1) teach, (2) measure one's own teaching performance or ability, (3) consider new ways to improve student learning, and (4) try out new ideas from others or oneself, and finally, repeat (MoEYS, 2021a). The three key activities highlighted are all aimed at promoting a culture of collaboration between teachers and school leaders. The overall goal of the above activities is to help foster mutual support between teachers and

teachers, and between teachers and school leaders to improve student learning outcomes, since good collaboration between teaching teams can achieve better results (Ronfeldt et al., 2015).

Key Elements Supporting the Implementation of PLCs

According to MoEYS (2021a), the implementation of PLCs focuses on (1) group learning, (2) classroom observation and mentoring, (3) participation in professional learning community tasks, (4) stakeholders in the implementation of PLCs, and (5) a clear support and incentive system. Group learning is considered a practice method in PLCs that aims to set a specific plan and time for teachers to meet. In addition, group learning helps teachers to discuss and provide knowledge to each other. Two or more teachers can study together to reflect on their work practices (MoEYS, 2021a). Group learning is an opportunity for teachers to learn from each other and gain good experiences that help them respond well to student learning (Donegan et al., 2000). At the same time, group discussions create mutual understanding and enhance closer collaboration. Indeed, peer learning is a way to build trust and rapport that also supports professional development (Pollara, 2012). Gutierrez & Kim (2018) found that it is essential for teachers to learn from their experiences in collaboration with their colleagues to ensure the development of quality learning outcomes. They added that the creation of PLCs in schools will provide opportunities for teachers to learn from their experiences in practice, as they are the foundation for further reflection and practice (Gutierrez & Kim, 2018). At the same time, drawing on and sharing experiences can be achieved through trusting dialogue. Rhodes' (2017) research shows that peer learning for new teachers is an effective way to support them. He added that for new teachers to use peer learning to develop and reflect on their practice, they need formal dialogue and learning with peers (Rhodes, 2017).

Classroom observation is one of the activities that helps to collect information to reflect and tailor teaching methods to the specific situation of each classroom. Each classroom observation should be planned and recorded clearly so that it can be used to reflect on the next observation (MoEYS, 2021a). A study by Vincent (2018) showed that classroom observation is an effective tool that benefits both the observer and the observed, as it helps to promote professional development. He also emphasized the importance of participants in using classroom observation as a professional development tool and providing sufficient time for participation in classroom observation activities (Vincent, 2018). Another study by Carroll & O'Loughlin (2014) showed that classroom observation

brings about teacher-teacher relationships, improves teaching and improves learning engagement. In addition, classroom observation should be conducted especially for new teachers. Involving selecting observation partners, being self-directed and being voluntary in order to build mutual trust and cooperation between participants is necessary (Carroll & O'Loughlin, 2014).

In addition to the above activities, PLCs also require community members to actively participate in various activities, including group study, lesson study, classroom observation, consultation, sharing experiences, and reflecting on and evaluating student learning outcomes (MoEYS, 2021a). Good participation in PLCs will have a positive impact on the entire organization. Toole & Louis (2002) suggested that participation in PLC tasks supports teachers' work lives. It creates a supportive work environment and creates a career path that attracts and retains teachers. In addition, it also supports teachers' learning. Regular participation in PLCs will continuously improve teachers' work practices. In particular, this participation creates a school culture that influences the prediction and positive change in schools (Toole & Louis, 2002). Along with the above activities, PLCs also require a strong and clear support system to ensure effective and sustainable implementation. Relevant entities such as ministries, departments and offices of Education, Youth and Sports, teacher training institutions, school principals and teachers are included in the composition that supports the establishment and implementation of PLCs in schools (MoEYS, 2021a).

PLC Implementation

Studies have also been conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the support for PLCs from various stakeholders. Saad (2019) conducted a study on the implementation of PLCs in Malaysia and found that school-based support for teachers is essential. The study highlighted that school strategic planning is an important factor that helps to promote the implementation of group learning activities in PLCs. The study also highlighted the importance of teacher leadership in the implementation of PLCs in schools (Saad, 2019). In addition, a study by Gray & Summers (2015) found that local traditions and school norms influence the implementation of PLCs. The development of a PLC depends on the well-structured school system, trust in the administration, trust between teachers, and shared achievement (Gray & Summers, 2015). Therefore, school leadership is important for the implementation of PLCs. In addition, culture and social context are also fundamental factors that influence PLCs (Hairon & Dimmock, 2012).

Kaminski (2021) conducted a study on the design, implementation, and testing of PLCs in Massachusetts, USA. The study highlighted the importance of empowering staff, providing staff with opportunities to reflect, and collaborate in the learning environment. Eyanagho (2019) also found that opportunities for teachers to reflect on the knowledge they gain from PLC meetings influenced their teaching practices and had an impact on student learning. For PLCs to be sustainable, school cultures need to shift to a focus on collaborative, and supportive leadership, using research evidence in the teaching process (Hefner, 2011). This provides opportunities for teachers to build relationships, closeness, trust, and build team structures and leadership (Held, 2017). Another study by Somprach et al. (2007) in a number of schools in Thailand found that principals and teachers were actively involved in PLCs. Active participation in PLCs by teachers occurs because of the knowledge of the principal's leadership, which helps guide the principal to motivate teachers and, as a result, improve student learning (Somprach et al., 2017). In addition, motivation in PLCs is a necessary factor to promote the participation of community members in implementing PLC better (MoEYS, 2021a). Motivation can be done by providing opportunities for community members to participate in professional development programs, providing sufficient time, providing technical support, or providing rewards, etc. In addition, creating satisfaction, sharing, and mutual understanding within the community are also considered motivational (van den Beemt et al., 2018).

Challenges in Implementing PLC

According to several research studies, a number of challenges have occurred in implementing PLCs (Chua et al., 2020; Hairon & Tan, 2017; Tayag, 2020). These challenges include workload and time constraints, unclear understanding of PLC, lack of discussion culture, passive behavior of community members, lack of collaborative culture, and lack of trust. Chua et al. (2020), Hairon & Tan (2017), and Tayag (2020) found that the first challenge is workloads and time constraints. Workload and time constraints make it difficult to achieve good results in implementing PLCs. Spending time attending PLC meetings can also affect the time spent on core tasks. Hairon & Tan (2017) conducted a study on the implementation of PLCs in Singapore. The results showed that the main obstacle to commitment to implementing PLCs is severe workloads. These workload arise from the increasing demands placed on them by stakeholders, including policymakers, parents, and leaders (Hairon & Tan, 2017). A study by Tayag (2020) in the Philippines also found that instead of attending meetings, teachers choose to use that time

to perform other tasks, such as advising students, preparing teaching materials, and assessing student learning outcomes. Teachers are unable to fully attend meetings due to the high administrative workloads and the fact that principals encourage short meetings (Tayag, 2020). A study in a high school in Malaysia also found that workloads were a challenge (Chua et al., 2020). The study showed that teachers not only have regular teaching duties but also many administrative tasks to complete. Therefore, they have difficulty finding time to attend community meetings regularly (Chua et al., 2020).

The second challenge is the lack of clear understanding of PLCs (Chua et al., 2020; Hairon & Tan, 2017). Misunderstandings about the implementation of PLCs are a problem among administrators, schools, and teachers. The main reason for this lack of understanding stems from the lack of detailed documentation on the implementation of PLCs, with no comprehensive document detailing the role of PLCs or how to implement PLCs in detail. Therefore, when it comes to documenting the implementation of PLCs in regions outside Europe and the United States, there is a lack of clarity (Hairon & Tan, 2017). For example, a misunderstanding of the implementation of PLCs is a misunderstanding of the purpose of PLC meetings. In this regard, a study by Chau et al. (2020) found that some school principals saw PLC meetings as meetings that only focused on determining what to teach, what was in the curriculum, and what tasks to assign students to do. Some principals, however, believe that PLC meetings are about engaging students in classroom activities such as Gallery Walk, a teaching technique used to develop speaking skills (see Yeourng, 2021) in the classroom.

The third challenge is the lack of a discussion culture (Harris & Jones, 2010; Park & So, 2014). In the past, most teachers preferred to work alone and tried to hide their difficulties in order to save face (Park & So, 2014). Therefore, open discussion is a new thing that is difficult to adapt to immediately. For example, research shows that in some schools, PLCs encounter resistance from teachers who are unfamiliar with how to work or who are uncertain about working in groups (Harris & Jones, 2010). In addition, a study in South Korea also showed a lack of confidence in discussion. Some teachers felt that they did not gain anything from participating in discussions. This is one reason why discussions are seen as not helping teaching practice (Park & So, 2014).

The fourth challenge is teacher passiveness (Chua et al., 2020; Park & So, 2014). Most teachers feel that they are doing their job well and are reluctant

to ask for advice from others. Chua et al. (2020) highlighted that this is often the case among teachers with many years of experience who are reluctant to ask for advice from others. Their study was conducted in a school with a majority of Chinese teachers. Therefore, the culture of maintaining face can be a barrier to being open to asking for advice from others. Another study conducted by Park & So (2014) also found a similar challenge, which they called “psychological barriers” (p. 103). In this sense, Park & So (2014) refer to the issue of personal risk. In Korea, opening up classroom work to other teachers is still relatively new. Similar to the Chinese teachers in the school that Chua et al. (2020) studied, Korean teachers were afraid of revealing their classroom problems to other teachers and receiving evaluations from other teachers (Park & So, 2014).

The fifth challenge is the lack of trust in other teachers (Tayag, 2020). For a PLC to be successful, trust needs to be built among teachers and stakeholders. Lack of trust creates barriers to open discussions about student practice and learning. Tayag’s (2020) research showed that teachers are reluctant to share what they have and what they have implemented with other teachers after being criticized when they first presented it. In general, research on the implementation of PLCs has been conducted in countries other than Cambodia. The researcher has not yet been able to find any research articles on PLCs in Cambodia. Therefore, in this study, the researcher studied the implementation and challenges of PLCs in two target schools in Cambodia. However, this study only studied PLCs at the secondary level. In this study, the researcher sought to understand high-quality professional development in New Generation Schools (NGSs) that was implemented in 2015 (Donaher & Wu, 2020).

3. Methodology

This study was conducted with a quantitative approach with a questionnaire survey for participants. Survey research was used to gather information about their personality, opinions, attitudes, and experiences (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). In this study, the main focus was on teachers’ perceptions of the PLC process and the challenges they face.

Population and Sample

This study was conducted with two target secondary schools in Kampong Cham province that are currently implementing the New Generation School program. In this study, the two schools were not identified by name, but were referred to as NGS 1 and NGS 2. Because it was a case study, a purposive sampling was used to identify participants who met the criteria for the research topic (Mills & Gay, 2019). Therefore, teachers from the two

new generation schools were selected to complete the research questionnaire. By verifying teachers’ perceptions on the implementation of PLCs and the challenges in implementing them, the researchers also asked the school leaders of the target schools to participate in completing a questionnaire for school leaders. A total of 72 people participated in the questionnaire, of which 6 were the school leaders and 66 were teachers in 11 specialized subjects. The total number of teachers in the two schools was 101, with NGS 1 having 37 teachers (20 female) and NGS 2 having 64 teachers (29 female). The sample size was not determined by any statistical formula because the study was conducted in a small population setting (Denscombe, 2017). In addition, due to the researcher’s limited time and the busy schedule of the participants, data from only 72 people (37 female) were directly collected. Of the six school leaders (one female), two were from NGS1 and four from NGS 2. Of the 66 teachers (36 female), 20 were from NGS 1 and 46 from NGS 2. All teachers taught from grades 7 to 12. The 11 specialized subjects included Khmer, English, mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, earth science, history, geography, moral-civics, and information technology. Information about the participants in this study is presented in Tables 1.

Table 1: Information about research participants (N =72)

Participants		Number		%
		Female	Total	
NGS1	School leaders	1	2	2.78
	Teachers	12	20	27.78
NGS2	School leaders	0	4	5.56
	Teachers	24	46	63.88

Data Collection Tools

This research used a questionnaire based on the content extracted from the “Guidelines on Establishing PLCs in Public Educational Institutions” published in 2021 by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS, 2021a) for teachers and administrators to complete in order to meet the two research objectives of the topic. After being developed, the questionnaire was submitted to the main advisor and assistant advisor to decide on its use in data collection. The questionnaire used a Likert scale and was divided into three parts: Part 1 was demographic information that asked about the role, gender, age, specialty, teaching level, work location, qualifications, and work experience. Part 2 was questions related to the implementation of PLCs, which were further divided into two points: (1) work practices (31 indicators) and (2) PLC support systems (31 indicators). The third section is a set of

questions regarding challenges in implementing PLCs (17 indicators) that build on previous research as described in the literature review. At the end of the questionnaire, the researcher left space for participants to write additional comments.

Data Collection

After receiving a letter of permission from the Department of Education, Youth and Sports of Kampong Cham Province, the researcher, the first author, went to the target schools and collected data directly through the completion of a questionnaire by the school leaders and teachers on printed sheets. Data collection took place over a period of 25 days, between July 5 and 30, 2022. During data collection, the researcher met with the participants in person and handed over the questionnaires to the participants to complete on site. Data collection continued until the total number of participants who completed the questionnaire was 72, as described above. The first researcher then decided to analyze the data in order to meet the deadline required by the educational institution to write a master's degree graduation report.

Data Analysis

The collected data were inserted into SPSS 26 to calculate the mean and standard deviation. The calculated mean and standard deviation were analyzed using descriptive statistics, with the following formula to interpret the average score of each indicator:

$$\frac{\text{Highest score} - \text{Lowest score}}{\text{Number of indicator levels}} = \frac{5 - 1}{5} = 0,80$$

1.00 to 1.80 means very poor

1.81 to 2.60 means poor

2.61 to 3.40 means average

3.41 to 4.20 means good

4.21 to 5.00 means very good.

Research Ethics

This research process was based on the principles of non-involvement of research participants. Research participants were not coerced, and the identity of the participants is kept confidential and anonymous. Participants had the right not to return the questionnaire without any pressure.

4. Findings

Teachers' and School Leaders' Perceptions of the Implementation of PLCs

Table 2 shows that, from the teachers' perceptions, the implementation of PLCs at the secondary level in Kampong Cham province was at the "good" level ($M = 3.90$; $SD = 0.73$). All five major implementation points received the

same “good” result, especially the participation in the tasks of the PLC, which had a value of $M = 3.97$. This result indicates that the PLC members participated in the implementation of group studies and class observations and counseling regularly, and received good support and encouragement.

Table 2: Teachers’ perceptions of the implementation of PLCs (N = 66)

No	Items	M	SD
1	Group Study	3.91	0.78
2	Class Observation and Counseling	3.95	0.69
3	Participation in the Tasks of the PLC	3.97	0.65
4	Key Stakeholders	3.88	0.77
5	Incentive System for the PLC	3.81	0.77
	Total	3.90	0.73

Table 3 shows that the school leaders’ perceptions of the implementation of PLCs at the secondary level in Kampong Cham province are consistent with the teachers’ perceptions. Overall, the implementation of PLCs at the secondary level in Kampong Cham province is at the “good” level ($M = 4.05$; $SD = 0.62$). In the principals’ perceptions, the most prominent feature is group study, with a mean value of “very good” ($M = 4.44$; $SD = 0.53$).

Table 3: School leaders’ perceptions of the implementation of PLCs (N = 6)

No	Items	M	SD
1	Group Study	4.44	0.53
2	Class Observation and Counseling	4.16	0.78
3	Participation in the Tasks of the PLC	4.01	0.62
4	Key Stakeholders	3.80	0.55
5	Incentive System for the PLC	3.83	0.64
	Total	4.05	0.62

Table 4 shows that the implementation of PLCs at the secondary level in Kampong Cham province is generally “good” ($M = 3.98$; $SD = 0.68$). The results can be summarized as follows: The implementation of PLCs at the secondary level in Kampong Cham province is working well. Both the management and teachers have an understanding of group learning and are able to implement classroom observation and counseling. In addition, teachers are aware of the tasks they have to perform in PLCs. On the other hand, the results show that the management has encouraged and participated in supporting the implementation of PLCs.

Table 4: Teachers' and school leaders' shared perceptions of the implementation of PLCs (N = 72)

No	Items	M	SD
1	Group Study	4.18	0.66
2	Class Observation and Counseling	4.06	0.74
3	Participation in the Tasks of the PLC	3.99	0.64
4	Key Stakeholders	3.84	0.66
5	Incentive System for the PLC	3.82	0.71
	Total	3.98	0.68

Teachers' and School Leaders' Perceptions of Challenges in Implementing PLCs

Table 5 shows that from the teachers' perspective, there are two main challenges in implementing PLCs. The first main challenge is workload and time constraints, which are at the "medium" level ($M = 3.34$; $SD = 0.93$). The second main challenge is a lack of clear understanding of PLC implementation, which is also at the "medium" level ($M = 3.34$, $SD = 0.89$). The other three challenges are at the "weak" level. The results indicate that the lack of a collaborative culture, passive behavior of PLC members, and lack of trust in other members are secondary challenges in implementing PLCs at the secondary level in Kampong Cham province.

Table 5: Teachers' perceptions of challenges in implementing PLCs (N = 66)

No	Items	M	SD
1	Workload and time constraints	3.34	0.93
2	Unclear understanding of PLC implementation	3.34	0.89
3	Lack of collaborative culture	2.45	1.00
4	Passive behavior of PLC members	2.32	0.97
5	Lack of trust in other members	2.33	0.99

Table 6 shows the school leaders' perceptions of the challenges in implementing PLCs at the secondary level in Kampong Cham province. The principals' perceptions show that there are two main challenges in implementing PLCs, similar to the teachers' perceptions. The first main challenge is workload and time constraints. It is noteworthy that the school leaders' perceptions are at the "good" level ($M = 3.43$; $SD = 0.57$), which is slightly higher than the teachers' perspective. The second main challenge is the lack of clear understanding of the implementation of PLCs, which is at the "average" level ($M = 3.38$; $SD = 0.80$). The other three challenges are at

the “weak” level. The results indicate that the lack of a collaborative culture, passive behavior of PLC members, and lack of trust in other members are secondary challenges in implementing PLCs at the secondary level in Kampong Cham province.

Table 6: School leaders’ perceptions of challenges in implementing PLCs (N = 6)

No	Items	M	SD
1	Workload and time constraints	3.43	0.57
2	Unclear understanding of PLC implementation	3.38	0.80
3	Lack of collaborative culture	2.46	0.92
4	Passive behavior of PLC members	2.50	0.84
5	Lack of trust in other members	2.33	0.52

Table 7 shows that there are two main challenges in implementing PLCs at the secondary level in Kampong Cham province. The first main challenge is workload and time constraints, which are rated “medium” (M = 3.39; SD = 0.75), and the second main challenge is unclear understanding of PLC implementation, which is also rated “medium” (M = 3.36; SD = 0.85). The other three challenges, such as lack of collaborative culture, passive behavior of community members, and lack of trust in other members, are all rated “weak,” indicating that these three challenges are secondary issues.

Table 7: Shared perceptions of the teachers and the school leaders on the challenges in implementing PLCs (N = 72)

No	Items	M	SD
1	Workload and time constraints	3.39	0.75
2	Unclear understanding of PLC implementation	3.36	0.85
3	Lack of collaborative culture	2.46	0.96
4	Passive behavior of PLC members	2.41	0.91
5	Lack of trust in other members	2.33	0.76

5. Discussion

Perceptions on the PLCs Implementation

The goal of PLCs is to create a culture of collaboration between teachers and stakeholders. Group learning is a mechanism that helps to create excellence in the profession of teachers and educators. Teachers’ perceptions indicate that group learning by PLC members is at the “good” level, with a mean value of 3.91 and a standard deviation of 0.78. The principals’ perceptions are similar and even higher, with a “very good” level, with a mean value of 4.44

and a standard deviation of 0.53. The overall results are at the “good” level ($M = 4.18$; $SD = 0.66$). Based on the results presented through the indicators in this section, it is clear that PLCs (1) meet weekly and monthly, (2) meet via ZOOM or Google Meet (especially during COVID-19), (3) compile and store content in a folder, and (4) store evidence of implementation in their professional portfolio. This result shows the participation of teachers who are members of the PLCs in new generation secondary schools in Kampong Cham province in teamwork. This result is consistent with the studies of Donegan et al. (2000), Gutierrez & Kim (2018), and Pollara (2012), who studied teamwork and stated that teamwork leads to the development of professional competence by building trust, sharing experiences and knowledge to better respond to students’ learning needs. At the same time, Rhodes (2017) also studied teamwork and suggested that teamwork can greatly help teachers, especially new teachers. Overall, the teachers’ and school leaders’ perceptions of teamwork showed that community members are committed to participating in collaborative work and achieving good results.

Classroom Observation and Counseling

To reflect on their teaching practices, teachers are required to learn from others’ experiences of using methods through classroom observation and consulting with those who are more experienced than themselves. Classroom observation and consulting explore good methods to be applied in teaching according to the actual situation of their classrooms will help to increase the effectiveness of teaching to improve student learning outcomes. The teachers’ and the school leaders’ perceptions show the same perceptions of the implementation of classroom observation and counseling in PLCs at the secondary level in Kampong Cham province. The responses of the teachers and the school leaders are at the “good” level. The teachers’ perceptions received a mean value of 3.95 and standard deviation 0.69, and the school leaders’ perceptions received a mean value of 4.16 and standard deviation 0.78. The overall results are at the “good” level ($M = 4.06$; $SD = 0.74$). This result indicates that the classroom observation and counseling process is well implemented in PLCs. The management structure of the New Generation Schools in the two high schools in Kampong Cham province has a vice principal in charge of technical affairs and a community leader who leads all community activities and coordinates community work. The community leader works closely with the vice principal in charge of technical affairs to support community implementation and professional development of community members. Community members also conduct

classroom observations and record information for reflection on their work. In addition, consultation with highly qualified and experienced people also received a good response. Vincent (2018) suggests that classroom observation provides many benefits to both the observer and the observed. It is an activity that will provide clear information for reflection during subsequent observations. Carroll & O'Loughlin (2014) also found similar findings to Vincent (2018). They suggest that classroom observation helps to build good teacher-teacher relationships that facilitate consultation and lead to improved learning. Overall, the classroom observation and counseling of PLCs at the secondary level in Kampong Cham province went well due to the participation of the school leaders and community leaders, as well as mutual consultation and advice.

Fulfilling the tasks of the PLCs

PLC members are required to actively participate in various aspects, such as group study, lesson study, classroom observation, consultation, sharing experiences and reflection, evaluating student learning outcomes, etc. The results of this study showed that the implementation of PLC tasks at the secondary school level in Kampong Cham province was at the “good” level ($M = 3.99$; $SD = 0.64$). This result indicates that community members participated in their tasks well. Based on the results shown through the indicators in this section, community members participated in the designated activities, ranging from lesson study, conducting evaluations, sharing experiences, to identifying students who are slow learners, to a good extent. Participation in PLC tasks also supports teachers’ professional lives. It helps create a supportive work environment and creates a career path that can attract and retain teachers (Toole & Louis, 2002). In addition, it also supports teacher learning. Participation in PLC tasks will improve teachers’ daily work practices (Graham, 2007). In particular, participation in PLC tasks creates a school culture that influences school-wide settings and changes (Toole & Louis, 2002).

Key Stakeholders in Supporting Professional Learning Communities

The involvement and support of key stakeholders is essential for the implementation of PLCs. Ministry-level units, provincial departments of education, youth and sports, district education, youth and sports offices, teacher training institutions, school leaders and teachers all play a role in helping the implementation of PLCs to run effectively and sustainably. The responses of teachers and the school leaders to the questionnaire showed results at the “good” level. From the teachers’ perceptions, the mean value $M = 3.88$ and the standard deviation $SD = 0.77$. From the administrators’

perspective, the results obtained a mean value $M = 3.80$ and the standard deviation $SD = 0.55$. The overall results are at the “good” level ($M = 3.84$; $SD = 0.66$). This result indicates that all relevant units, especially the school principals, participated in the creation of PLCs and helped to support the activities of the created community. Saad’s (2009) study found that support from the school itself is a necessary element that stems from the leadership of the school principal. Gray & Summers (2015) also suggested that establishing a clear school structure, building teachers’ trust in the administration and in other teachers, leads to the development of PLCs. In addition, supporting the implementation of PLCs requires skillful school management and leadership (Hairon & Dimmock, 2012). Principals who work closely with PLCs build trust, team spirit, and leadership that create good relationships and strong team structures (Hefner, 2011; Held, 2017; Somprach et al., 2017). Overall, this research can be concluded that the implementation of PLCs at the secondary level in Kampong Cham province has received good support from stakeholders, especially from the school leaders.

Incentive System for PLCs

In addition to the cooperation of stakeholders, the implementation of PLCs also requires an incentive system to promote better implementation. The teachers’ and school leaders’ perceptions are at the same level of “good”. Teachers’ perceptions have a mean value of 3.81 and standard deviation 0.77, while the school leaders’ perceptions have a mean value of 3.83 and standard deviation 0.64. The overall result is at the “good” level ($M = 3.82$; $SD = 0.71$). This result indicates that PLC members receive sufficient encouragement through opportunities to participate in various programs and receive opportunities to develop professional skills. In addition, the schools also support them materially and spiritually by providing suitable places for teaching and self-study, etc. A study by van den Beemt et al. (2018) found that in motivating, encouragement can be used by participating in professional development programs, providing sufficient time, providing technological support, or providing rewards, etc. In addition, motivation can also be achieved by creating satisfaction, sharing, and mutual understanding within the community. Overall, teachers’ perceptions on the motivation system for PLCs show a good level of agreement.

Challenges of PLC Implementation

Based on the teachers’ perceptions, which are similar to those of the administrators, several major challenges were found in implementing PLCs

at the secondary level in Kampong Cham Province, Cambodia. The first major challenge is workload and time constraints. Workload and lack of time are factors that affect PLC meetings as well as other community activities, including group study, classroom observation, and counseling. This research shows similar results to studies by Chua et al. (2020), Hairon & Tan (2017), and Tayag (2020). Hairon & Tan (2017) found that work demands imposed by the stakeholders such as superiors or guardians were obstacles to the commitment to implementing PLCs effectively. Tayag (2020) and Chua et al. (2020) suggested that due to heavy workload and lack of time, teachers did not participate in PLC meetings. They had to spend time on administrative and other tasks related to their teaching. The second major challenge is lack of clear understanding of PLCs. According to teachers and administrators, these are challenges that need to be addressed in order to improve the implementation of PLCs. Some studies have shown that the lack of clear understanding of PLC implementation is due to the lack of detailed guidance documents and new experiences in implementation. For example, Hairon & Tan (2017) found a lack of rich literature on PLCs and the implementation of PLCs in non-European or American contexts. This lack of rich literature is because in Asian contexts, such as Cambodia, the establishment and implementation of PLCs only occurred after the above two regions (Hairon & Tan, 2017). This lack leads to unclear understanding, including misconceptions about PLC meetings, etc. In fact, a study by Chua et al. (2020) found that some principals in Malaysia perceived these meetings as only reviewing the content of the curriculum and determining the content to be taught, and some principals thought that PLC meetings were some classroom activities.

In addition to the above challenges, there are other secondary challenges such as lack of collaborative culture, passive behavior of PLC members, and lack of trust in other members. Regarding the lack of collaborative culture, studies by Harris & Jones (2010) and Park & So (2014) found that it is a challenge in implementing PLCs in Wales and Korea. In this study, the perceptions of the school leaders and teachers show that this is a secondary problem, according to the average value of the indicators is $M = 2.46$. Meanwhile, the problem of passive behavior of PLC members and lack of trust in other members are also secondary problems, with the average values of the indicators being $M = 2.41$ and $M = 2.33$, respectively. The results of this study are similar to the study by Chua et al. (2020), Park & So (2014), and Tayag (2020) also found that passive behavior of PLC members and lack of trust in other community members are also challenges in

implementing PLCs in Korea and Philippines. Overall, the above challenges are challenges that need to be addressed. Addressing these issues will improve the implementation of PLCs, which will contribute to improving teaching and learning effectiveness.

6. Conclusion

The results of this study showed that principals and teachers had a common perception of the implementation of PLCs at the secondary school level in Kampong Cham Province, Cambodia, where they considered the implementation to be “good”. Along with these results, this study also found some challenges that occurred in the implementation of PLCs. The first major challenge is workloads and time constraints, which are needed to be addressed. The results show that teachers have many tasks to complete, which are factors that affect the implementation of PLCs. The second major challenge is a lack of clear understanding of the implementation of PLCs. In addition to these two problems, secondary problems, as already shown, are also points that need to be addressed by various stakeholders, such as the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, provincial/district departments/offices of education, youth and sports, and school management committees, etc., to ensure that the implementation of PLCs in schools is more effective.

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