



Professional Learning Community: Analysis and Impact on the Quality of Learning in Nusantara Capital Buffer School (IKN)

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the impact of the Professional Learning Community (PLC) on the quality of learning in Nusantara Capital Buffer Schools (IKN). A mixed-method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative elements, was employed to understand the phenomenon comprehensively. The results indicate a significant improvement in learning outcomes, as evidenced by the increase in the average post-test score (70) compared to the pre-test score (48.75). The PLC program provided a platform for teachers to collaborate, share insights, and develop effective strategies to address learning challenges. Furthermore, implementing the PLC fostered a more supportive school environment, making students feel more comfortable and engaged. The findings underscore the importance of enhancing and expanding PLC initiatives to improve students' academic and non-academic achievements. Practically, these results suggest that the PLC model can be a valuable tool for teacher development and improved student outcomes. Academically, this study contributes to the growing literature on collaborative learning environments and their role in enhancing educational quality.

INTRODUCTION

A nation's capital city plays a central role in shaping its identity, acting as a political, economic, and cultural hub (Donnan & Wilson, 2020). In the case of Indonesia, the development of Nusantara Capital (IKN) is expected to be more than a mere administrative relocation—it symbolizes a broader vision of national progress, innovation, and sustainability (Kalalinggi et al., 2023; Susmiyati et al., 2023). Positioned in an increasingly globalized and competitive economic environment, IKN is not only a future centre of governance but also a strategic focal point for fostering human resource development and infrastructure enhancement (Berawi, 2022; Hermawan & Shebubakar, 2024; Rifaid et al., 2023). Education is at the heart of this transformation, with the integration of educational programs such as the Professional Learning Community (PLC) having the potential to significantly impact the quality of learning, contributing to the overall national agenda for sustainable development (Antinluoma et al., 2021; Meesuk et al., 2021; Schaap et al., 2019). The effective implementation of PLC within educational institutions in IKN could provide a collaborative platform for teachers, administrators, and educational stakeholders to collectively address challenges, innovate learning methods, and enhance overall educational outcomes (Putro et al., 2024; Saputra et al., 2023).

In parallel with the development of IKN, Indonesia's Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (*Kemendikbudristek*) introduced the Independent Curriculum (*Kurikulum Merdeka*) as part of a broader initiative to reform the nation's educational landscape. The Independent Curriculum emphasizes student-centred learning by allowing flexibility in the curriculum and focusing on nurturing students' character, skills, and creativity ([Irawati et al., 2022](#); [Zendrato & Agatha, 2023](#)). Central to the curriculum's philosophy are four key reforms: the discontinuation of the National Standardized Examination (USBN) and National Examination (UN), the simplification of lesson planning (RPP), and new student admission policies (PPDB) based on zoning systems ([Muhammad Ade Kurnia et al., 2023](#); [Syahrir et al., 2024](#)). The curriculum seeks to create a more autonomous and participative learning environment where both teachers and students enjoy the freedom to explore, innovate, and engage in a dynamic, less formal educational atmosphere ([Hadi et al., 2023](#); [Kamila & Agus RM, 2023](#); [Madu et al., 2024](#)). In this respect, the objectives of PLC align closely with the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, as both frameworks emphasize teacher agency, collaboration, and reflective practice to foster a holistic educational experience.

The concept of PLC integrates three essential components: professional development, collaborative learning, and community building ([Fred et al., 2020](#); [Johannesson, 2022](#)). This approach encourages teachers to critically reflect on and share their educational practices in a continuous cycle of improvement, fostering an environment of mutual support and innovation ([Admiraal et al., 2021](#); [Prenger et al., 2019](#)). PLC is built on the idea of learning communities where educators can engage in meaningful dialogue, exchange ideas, and collectively develop strategies to address pedagogical challenges ([Antinluoma et al., 2021](#); [Schaap et al., 2019](#)). Furthermore, PLC programs are designed to be dynamic, incorporating elements such as empathy, ideation, and prototyping, which mirror design-thinking approaches and facilitate innovative learning practices ([Goodyear et al., 2019](#); [Phusavat et al., 2019](#)). These aspects of PLC support creating a professional community focused on improving the quality of teaching and learning.

In the broader context of Indonesian education, the PLC model is particularly relevant given the country's commitment to cultivating students with strong Pancasila values ([Liang et al., 2023](#); [Trilaksono et al., 2019](#)). The Pancasila student profile emphasizes attributes such as mutual cooperation, tolerance, and unity—qualities also reflected in PLC's collaborative ethos. By fostering a spirit of lifelong learning, PLC encourages teachers to continuously develop their competencies, aligning their professional growth with the values embedded in the Pancasila student profile ([Fitriyani et al., 2023](#); [Laila et al., 2022](#); [Soraya & Supadi, 2022](#)). This synergy between the values of Pancasila and the principles of PLC underscores the importance of community-oriented and value-driven educational approaches in shaping future generations.

The effectiveness of PLC in improving educational outcomes requires rigorous evaluation. It is essential to assess their impact on key educational indicators such as teaching quality, student engagement, and academic performance to ensure the sustainability and success of PLC programs ([Antinluoma et al., 2021](#); [Meesuk et al., 2021](#); [Prenger et al., 2019](#)). Evaluation frameworks should focus on how PLC programs contribute to teacher leadership, professional development, and collaborative learning environments ([Fred et al., 2020](#); [Johannesson, 2022](#)). By systematically analyzing these components, schools can identify the factors contributing to the success of PLC programs and make informed decisions to enhance their implementation ([Defianty et al., 2021](#); [Rahman, 2022](#)). Moreover, the continuous evaluation of PLC initiatives aligns with the spirit of *Kurikulum Merdeka*, which emphasizes flexibility, reflection, and innovation in teaching and learning practices.

Given the critical role that collaboration and professional development play in enhancing educational quality, this study aims to investigate the implementation of PLC programs at the junior high school level within the IKN Buffer Schools. Specifically, it seeks to explore the objectives, benefits, and challenges of PLC and its alignment with the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. The study will also assess the extent to which PLC fosters teacher collaboration and improves the overall quality of education in the context of IKN's vision for sustainable development.

METHODS

The mixed research method is an approach that combines qualitative and quantitative elements in a study to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being studied. In the context of

scientific research, using mixed methods offers advantages in overcoming the limitations of each method individually. This approach allows researchers to combine the power of deep qualitative analysis with the clarity and generalization power of quantitative analysis ([Strijker et al., 2020](#)).

This research uses a qualitative approach. The data collection method uses observation, interviews, document analysis of school implementation programs related to the Professional Learning Community program conducted with principals and teachers in junior high schools and data collection through quantitative methods by distributing pre-test and post-test questionnaire data to principals and teachers at Santa Maria Junior High School Banjarmasin as one of the supporting schools in the archipelago capital that implements the implementation of the program Professional Learning Community.

Research with an ethnographic model is an empirical and theoretical approach that aims to analyze the culture and dynamics of a group, in this context, the school environment ([Risku et al., 2022](#)). In conducting observations, ethnographic research focuses on observations of the Professional Learning Community program. Through observation, research, and interviews, as well as mine, it is hoped that researchers can identify the implementation of the Professional Learning Community program to improve the quality of effective learning at Santa Maria Junior High School Banjarmasin.

This research focuses on implementing the Professional Learning Community program to improve the quality of effective learning at Santa Maria Junior High School Banjarmasin. This research is expected to produce a complex effect on the role of teacher collaboration in realizing the development of an effective Professional Learning Community program. The narrative of ethnographic research aims to describe and present facts.

RESULTS

The results of interviews with teachers, the school committee chairperson, and the principal of a secondary school in Buffer, the Capital of Nusantara, indicate that the Professional Learning Community (PLC) initiative represents an intensive collaborative effort between teachers and the principal. The PLC aims to enhance the quality of student learning, both academically and non-academically. In schools supporting the development of Nusantara's capital, PLCs serve as a regular forum for discussing various educational aspects, including teaching methods, student behaviour, student interests, and the challenges students face.

This program facilitates dialogue between teachers and principals regarding teaching methods and encourages the creation of concrete solutions for issues arising in the teaching and learning process. For example, one teacher mentioned that weekly discussions in the PLC helped identify students' difficulties in understanding abstract concepts in mathematics. Following these discussions, teachers collaborated to design new teaching methods that were more visual and interactive, significantly improving students' comprehension. After implementing the new methods, the principal also confirmed this improvement and reported increased student participation in class.

Moreover, every Monday's weekly evaluations serve as reflective moments for teachers and principals to assess whether the teaching methods applied are relevant to students' needs. One of the outcomes from the PLC discussions revealed that a project-based approach was more effective in developing students' critical thinking skills than traditional lecture methods. Therefore, the PLC functions as a forum for discussion and serves as a medium for continuous evaluation and development.

Quantitative Results: Pre-test and Post-test Analysis

The following table summarizes the results of the pre-test and post-test conducted for teachers at Santa Maria Junior High School in Banjarmasin:

	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Mean	48.75	70
Variance	3.30	4.55
Observations	12	12
Pearson Correlation	0.564	
t stat	-39.476	
t Critical (one-tail)	1.796	

	Pre-Test	Post-Test
t Critical (two-tail)	2.201	

The pre-test and post-test data collected from teachers at Santa Maria Junior High School in Banjarmasin show a significant improvement following the implementation of the PLC program. The average pre-test score was 48.75, while the post-test score increased to 70. This improvement indicates the positive impact of the PLC intervention on teaching competencies. The results of the Pearson correlation test showed a value of 0.564, indicating a moderately strong relationship between the pre-test and post-test scores. This correlation confirms that the increase in scores is not coincidental but the result of a structured intervention.

Furthermore, the t-statistic value of -39.476 and the extremely low probability values ($P(T \leq t)$ one-tail and $P(T \leq t)$ two-tail) indicate a highly significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores. It suggests that the PLC program substantially improved the quality of teaching in the schools that participated in the study.

Impact on Learning and Character Development

This improvement in teaching quality is expected to have long-term effects on developing the Pancasila Student Profile. With the continued support of the PLC program in enhancing teacher competencies, students are anticipated to develop critical thinking skills, creativity, and a deep understanding of Pancasila values. These competencies are highly relevant in preparing students to contribute to the vision of Nusantara's capital city (IKN), which emphasizes the importance of integrity, innovation, and adaptability in a multicultural environment.

Moreover, the early development of student's character through this approach can prepare a generation capable of thinking creatively and innovatively and highly adaptable to global challenges. The PLC plays a crucial role in ensuring that each student not only achieves academic excellence but is also prepared to become an individual who can positively contribute to national development.

DISCUSSION

Implementing the *Merdeka Belajar* (Independent Learning) curriculum aims to empower teachers by granting them greater autonomy in the learning process. This approach has proven effective in fostering a more dynamic and conducive learning environment, as it encourages the development of student potential in a manner that is both interactive and relevant ([Hadi et al., 2023](#); [Irawati et al., 2022](#); [Putro et al., 2024](#)). Through the Professional Learning Community (PLC) program, teachers are provided with the opportunity to collaborate, innovate, and support creative learning strategies that enhance the overall learning experience ([Johannesson, 2022](#); [Prenger et al., 2019](#); [Saputra et al., 2023](#)).

The findings of this study align with previous research that emphasizes the effectiveness of collaborative learning strategies in promoting active participation from both students and teachers ([Mubarok et al., 2023](#); [Nisa et al., 2023](#); [Wijaya & Hadijaya, 2024](#)). The PLC program, in particular, facilitates such collaboration by creating structured environments where educators and stakeholders work together to achieve shared academic goals. This collaborative environment is essential for successfully implementing 21st-century learning skills, as it fosters the development of students' critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving abilities ([Ng & Latife, 2022](#); [Saadah et al., 2019](#)).

The role of the PLC in supporting the goals of the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum cannot be overstated. As previous research, the PLC program provides educators with a platform for professional development, where they can continuously improve their teaching methods and adapt to the evolving needs of their students ([Antinluoma et al., 2021](#); [Elfaragy et al., 2022](#); [Meesuk et al., 2021](#)). This study further confirms that the PLC fosters an environment of mutual learning where teachers can exchange ideas and best practices, ultimately improving student outcomes.

The qualitative findings from the interviews conducted with teachers, school committee chairs, and junior high school principals in Buffer, the archipelago capital, reveal that PLC activities are highly collaborative. These discussions, which address various aspects of student learning, such as methods, behaviour, and interests, create a feedback loop that ensures learning objectives are constantly reassessed and adjusted to better serve student needs. Regular meetings and evaluations allow teachers to reflect on their instructional strategies, identifying areas where new approaches might be necessary

([Firestone et al., 2020](#); [Nurwidodo et al., 2023](#); [Su et al., 2023](#)). This iterative process is key to the PLC program's success in improving academic and non-academic outcomes for students.

The quantitative analysis of the pre-test and post-test results from Santa Maria Banjarmasin Junior High School further supports the effectiveness of the PLC program. The significant increase in post-test scores (mean increase from 48.75 to 70) underscores the positive impact of the PLC intervention. The Pearson correlation value of 0.564 indicates a moderate positive correlation between the pre-test and post-test scores, suggesting that the improvements observed were not random but a result of the PLC activities. The t-statistic value of -39.476, coupled with the extremely low p-values, confirms a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores, indicating the substantial impact of the PLC program on teacher performance and student achievement.

These findings are consistent with the broader literature on the role of PLCs in enhancing teacher collaboration and professional growth ([Qu et al., 2022](#); [Zhu et al., 2019](#)). By fostering a culture of continuous learning and shared responsibility, the PLC program has created a more supportive and innovative learning environment. Teachers who participate in PLCs are better equipped to address modern education's challenges and implement strategies that improve student engagement and success ([Ingias et al., 2022](#); [Wardani et al., 2023](#)).

Moreover, the structured nature of the PLC program, particularly after its formal adoption under the guidelines of the Ministry of Education ([Hadi et al., 2023](#)), has further enhanced its effectiveness. The program now operates with a clear framework for regular meetings, evaluations, and the incorporation of external expertise, all of which contribute to the ongoing professional development of educators. This formalization has ensured that PLC activities are more goal-oriented and focused on measurable outcomes, as reflected in the improved academic performance of students at Santa Maria Junior High School.

Overall, implementing the PLC program within the framework of the Merdeka Belajar curriculum has had a profound positive impact on teacher performance and student achievement. The findings of this study highlight the importance of collaboration, continuous evaluation, and professional development in improving the quality of education. As the PLC program continues to evolve, it is expected to play an even greater role in supporting the development of essential 21st-century skills among students, particularly in the context of Indonesia's National Capital development goals. Further research should focus on expanding the scope of the PLC program to include a broader range of schools and educational settings to understand better its long-term impact on student outcomes and the professional growth of teachers.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that implementing the Professional Learning Community (PLC) within the framework of the Merdeka Belajar curriculum significantly contributes to improving learning quality at the junior high school level. Qualitative findings indicate that PLC provides a collaborative space for teachers and school principals to discuss, exchange ideas, and design more effective teaching strategies. Through regular discussions and periodic evaluations, educators can proactively identify and address challenges in the learning process, both in academic and non-academic areas.

Quantitatively, the pre-test and post-test analysis results show a significant improvement in teachers' teaching abilities after implementing the PLC program. The higher average post-test scores and the significant difference between pre-test and post-test reinforce that PLC is crucial in enhancing teacher performance and student learning outcomes. The positive correlation between pre-test and post-test scores also indicates a strong relationship between the PLC intervention and the improvement of teacher competencies.

Overall, the PLC program at Santa Maria Junior High School in Banjarmasin has positively impacted teacher performance, student interest, and engagement in the learning process. It aligns with the goals of the Merdeka Belajar curriculum, which emphasizes the development of students' potential and enhancing education quality. The success of this program also supports the vision and mission of the development of Nusantara's capital city, which requires students with 21st-century competencies such as critical thinking, creativity, and adaptability in a multicultural environment. Recommendations for future research include expanding the scope of this study to various educational levels and other

school contexts to better understand the PLC program's long-term impact on education quality and teacher professional development.

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