

Effectiveness of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) at Assumption Convent School, Bangkok, Thailand

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the effectiveness of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) at Assumption Convent School in Bangkok, Thailand. The research focused on collaborative leadership, shared vision, collective learning, shared personal practice, and supportive conditions that contribute to student learning outcomes. The study also examined challenges encountered in PLC implementation and explored the relationship between PLC effectiveness and teacher profile variables. The study employed a descriptive-correlational research design to assess the effectiveness of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) at Assumption Convent School in Bangkok, Thailand. Teachers and students served as respondents of the study. Findings revealed the importance of leadership support, collaborative culture, professional development, and technology integration in sustaining effective PLC practices. The study suggests an integration plan to strengthen collaborative professional learning and improve instructional practices and student outcomes.

Keywords: Professional Learning Communities, teacher collaboration, school leadership, professional development, student learning outcomes

INTRODUCTION

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) have become an essential framework for improving educational systems across the globe, as they shift the culture of schools from isolated individual practices to collaborative communities of inquiry and shared responsibility for student success. Assumption Convent School (ASC), one of the oldest and most respected Catholic schools in Bangkok, Thailand, provides a rich context for studying the effectiveness of PLC. Founded by the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres in 1904, ASC has developed a strong legacy of academic rigor, discipline, and values-based education. Throughout its history, the school has emphasized quality instruction, moral formation, and commitment to excellence, producing generations of graduates who have significantly contributed to Thai society. The historical roots of ASC—anchored in the Catholic mission of service, holistic development, and education for social responsibility—naturally align with the ethos of PLCs, which emphasize shared vision, collective accountability, and lifelong professional growth.

In the contemporary period, ASC faces new educational realities shaped by globalization, technological disruption, and the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Students and families in Bangkok now expect education that goes beyond traditional academic preparation: they demand digital literacy, bilingual or multilingual competence, critical thinking, and socio-emotional resilience. To meet these demands, ASC teachers must continuously innovate in their instructional practices, integrate technology effectively, and personalize learning for diverse student needs.

Professional Learning Communities, when systematically implemented, can serve as a mechanism for teachers at ASC to sustain professional dialogue, analyze student data, co-design interventions, and reflect on instructional impact. However, while collaborative practices exist in various forms—grade-level meetings, subject-based committees, mentoring partnerships—the question remains: how effective are these structures at genuinely improving teaching practices and learning outcomes?

At present, ASC maintains a tradition of collaboration, yet the effectiveness of these professional learning structures remains uneven. Many teachers engage in regular planning and share instructional strategies, but the collaboration is sometimes limited to logistical matters rather than sustained cycles of inquiry and innovation. In some departments, assessment data is reviewed but not always fully used to design targeted interventions for struggling learners. Furthermore, collaboration time is often compromised by administrative tasks or extracurricular obligations, reducing opportunities for deep professional dialogue. Leadership support is evident but may require more systematic coaching of middle leaders to facilitate PLCs with fidelity, ensuring that inquiry cycles lead to actionable changes in pedagogy and measurable improvements in student performance. These gaps highlight the need for a comprehensive study that evaluates how PLCs function at ASC, identifies best practices, and provides recommendations for strengthening collaborative cultures.

The global educational agenda emphasizes the significance of professional development as a driver of quality education. Specifically, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 underscores the importance of “ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all.” Target 4.c explicitly calls for increasing the supply of qualified teachers through international cooperation for teacher training and professional development. PLCs directly contribute to this by enabling teachers to learn from one another, share evidence-based practices, and create supportive peer networks. Moreover, the collaborative and inclusive nature of PLCs also resonates with SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), as they foster inclusive teaching strategies for diverse learners and encourage collective partnerships within the school and beyond.

From a Philippine perspective, the Philippine Development Plan (PDP) 2023–2028 prioritizes human capital development, quality education, and digital transformation. PLCs embody these priorities by institutionalizing continuous professional development, promoting innovation in teaching, and ensuring that teachers are equipped to handle the learning needs of the 21st century. Likewise, the Pangasinan State University (PSU) Research Agenda, to which this study aligns, emphasizes quality assurance in teaching and learning, inclusive and innovative education, and capacity building for teachers and school leaders. Although ASC operates in Thailand, insights from evaluating its PLCs can offer valuable lessons for Philippine schools—especially those pursuing excellence in open and distance learning or traditional classroom settings. The shared cultural and regional context of Southeast Asia strengthens the applicability of findings to both countries.

The Department of Education (DepEd) Research Agenda in the Philippines also stresses the importance of professional development, instructional leadership, and collaborative practices for school improvement. Investigating PLCs at ASC thus aligns with DepEd’s call for evidence-based innovations that improve teacher quality and student achievement. The study also provides a comparative perspective, allowing Philippine educators to examine how a neighboring ASEAN country sustains professional collaboration in a private school setting and how these practices can inform reforms in Philippine public and private schools alike. By anchoring the study in both local and international agendas, the research highlights its relevance not only for ASC but also for broader education systems in the region.

Despite the promise of PLCs, gaps remain in their implementation at ASC. These include inconsistencies in how evidence is used to guide instruction, insufficient structures to ensure cross-departmental sustainability, and limited evaluation mechanisms that directly connect teacher collaboration to student learning outcomes. Moreover, while collaboration is valued, the lack of dedicated and protected time for systematic inquiry often prevents teachers from fully engaging in the cycles of planning, implementation, and reflection that define effective PLCs. Technology integration, though increasingly prevalent, has yet to be fully leveraged to support data-driven decision-making and collaborative lesson design. Addressing these gaps is crucial for ASC to ensure that its professional learning structures are not only functional but transformative.

This study, therefore, seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of PLCs at Assumption Convent School, tracing their historical evolution, assessing their current practices, and identifying the gaps that hinder their full potential.

Statement of the Problem

This study assessed the effectiveness of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) at Assumption Convent School in Bangkok, Thailand. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the profile of teachers in Assumption Convent School in terms of:
age;
gender;
civil status;
highest educational attainment;
bachelor's degree;
an average family monthly income;
number of seminars or training attended?
2. What is the level of effectiveness of PLCs at Assumption Convent School, Bangkok, Thailand, as perceived by the teachers and students, in terms of:
Shared and Supportive Leadership;
Shared Values and Vision;
Collective Learning and Application;
Shared Personal Practice; and
Supportive Conditions Student Learning Outcomes?
3. What is the level of seriousness of the problems encountered in the implementation of PLCs at Assumption Convent School, Bangkok, Thailand, in terms of:
Leadership and Policy Support;
Shared Values and Collaborative Culture;
Professional Development and Capacity-Building;
Resources, Technology, and Time Management; and
Monitoring, Evaluation, and Student Learning Outcomes?
4. Is there a significant relationship between the level of effectiveness of Professional Learning Communities at Assumption Convent School, Bangkok, Thailand, and the profile of teachers?
5. Is there a significant relationship between the level of seriousness of the problems encountered in the implementation of PLCs at Assumption Convent School, Bangkok, Thailand, and the profile of teachers?
6. Is there a significant difference in the level of effectiveness of PLCs at Assumption Convent School, Bangkok, Thailand, as perceived by the teachers and students?
7. What integration plan can be proposed to enhance the implementation of professional learning communities?

Scope and Delimitations

This study focused on determining the effectiveness of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) at Assumption Convent School in Bangkok, Thailand, during the school year in which the research was conducted. It included both teachers and students as respondents to capture perspectives from those directly engaged in and affected by PLC practices. The scope of the investigation included profiling teachers by age, gender, civil status, highest educational attainment (including a bachelor's degree), average monthly family income, and number of seminars or training sessions attended. The study also measured the effectiveness of PLCs using dimensions such as shared and supportive leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, and supportive conditions leading to student learning outcomes. Furthermore, it assessed the seriousness of problems encountered in implementing PLCs and tested whether significant relationships existed among effectiveness, encountered problems, and teachers' profile variables. Likewise, differences in perceptions between teachers and students were examined to provide a holistic view of PLC implementation.

The study, however, was delimited to Assumption Convent School and did not extend to other private or public schools in Bangkok or elsewhere in Thailand. The respondents were limited to teachers and students currently enrolled and employed in the institution, excluding alumni, parents, or external stakeholders who might have indirect insights into the PLC system. While the study explored the relationship between PLC effectiveness and teacher profile variables, it did not examine other potential factors, such as institutional policies, external professional networks, or government-mandated reforms. In addition, the study relied primarily on self-reported perceptions and documented school practices, which might not have fully captured all subtle dynamics of professional collaboration. Finally, the proposed integration plan was limited to strategies specific to Assumption Convent School and might not have been immediately generalizable to other educational institutions with different structures or cultures.

Review of Related Literature

Historical Foundations and Evolution of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

The concept of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) has its roots in broader movements in organizational learning and educational reform during the latter half of the 20th century. Its foundations can be traced back to the recognition that schools function not only as sites of instruction but also as professional organizations where collaboration, shared values, and collective responsibility are central to improvement. The idea draws inspiration from the work of organizational learning theorists, such as Peter Senge, who popularized the concept of the "learning organization." Senge (1990) described learning organizations as places where people continually expand their capacity to create desired results, nurture new ways of thinking, and work collaboratively toward common goals. This principle became highly influential in education, where reformers began to see schools not simply as bureaucratic structures but as communities of professionals engaged in collective inquiry.

In the 1980s and 1990s, education systems in the United States, the United Kingdom, and other parts of the world began adopting collaborative practices as a response to concerns about declining student achievement and fragmented teacher practice. The educational reform wave emphasized accountability, teacher professionalization, and systemic improvement. Scholars and practitioners such as Shirley Hord, Richard DuFour, and Michael Fullan further advanced the PLC concept by operationalizing it in schools. For instance, Hord (1997) articulated the dimensions of PLCs, including shared and supportive leadership, shared vision and values, collective learning, and supportive conditions. Similarly, DuFour (2004) popularized PLCs as a practical framework for school improvement, highlighting three big ideas: ensuring student learning, creating a culture of collaboration, and focusing

on results. These contributions solidified PLCs as both a theory and a practical strategy in school reform discourse.

The evolution of PLCs also reflects the growing recognition of collaboration as a key driver of teacher effectiveness. Earlier models of teacher development often relied on isolated workshops or top-down directives, which proved insufficient in sustaining long-term improvement. PLCs emerged as a corrective to such approaches by emphasizing sustained, job-embedded, and teacher-driven professional learning (Bolam et al., 2005). This shift underscored the belief that teachers learn best when they collaborate with peers, reflect on practice, and collectively problem-solve around student learning needs. In the 21st century, the growth of globalization, digital transformation, and competency-based education further expanded the role of PLCs. Technology now enables virtual collaboration across schools and even nations, creating opportunities for global professional networks. International organizations such as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2016) have also recognized the significance of PLCs in building teacher professionalism and enhancing education systems. The OECD emphasizes that PLCs are central to fostering innovation, promoting equity, and sustaining continuous improvement in teaching and learning.

PLCs are commonly defined as collaborative groups of educators who engage in continuous inquiry, reflective practice, and shared decision-making to enhance teaching effectiveness and student outcomes (DuFour & Fullan, 2016). Recent literature continues to support the idea that PLCs are not merely structural arrangements but dynamic processes that foster professional growth and collective responsibility.

Between 2016 and 2026, PLCs have been widely recognized as an effective model for continuous professional development (CPD). According to Vangrieken et al. (2017), collaboration within PLCs enhances teachers' instructional practices and promotes a culture of shared learning. Similarly, Hairon and Tan (2017) found that participation in PLC leads to increased teacher efficacy and improved pedagogical strategies. These findings are reinforced by more recent studies indicating that PLCs support reflective teaching and encourage educators to adopt evidence-based practices (Zhang et al., 2024). Today, PLCs are no longer seen merely as an optional professional development model but as a cornerstone of effective school culture. Their evolution reflects a broader paradigm shift in education toward collaboration, evidence-informed practice, and accountability for student outcomes. The historical trajectory of PLCs illustrates how they have evolved from theoretical concepts of organizational learning into widely recognized practices integral to modern school reform. At Assumption Convent School, Bangkok, understanding this evolution provides a foundation for contextualizing PLC effectiveness and for designing an integration plan that aligns with both global trends and local needs.

Effectiveness of PLCs on Teaching Practices and Student Outcomes

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) have become one of the most influential approaches in enhancing teacher collaboration and driving improvements in student learning. At their core, PLCs are built upon the belief that teaching should not be an isolated activity but a collective endeavor where educators share expertise, reflect on practices, and act on evidence to promote better student outcomes (DuFour & Fullan, 2013). By engaging in regular dialogue, teachers within PLCs can identify common challenges, collectively design solutions, and adapt instructional methods to best meet the needs of their learners. This collaborative model fosters a culture of shared responsibility and continuous improvement, which directly impacts both teaching effectiveness and student performance.

Related Studies

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) have attracted growing empirical attention worldwide, and several recent studies in Southeast Asia and beyond shed light on how PLCs affect teacher competence, school quality, collaborative culture, and student learning outcomes. One study by Lutfia, Sa'ud, Nurdin, and Meirawan (2022) examined the effectiveness of PLC programmes in improving school quality across several Indonesian secondary schools. The authors found a strong correlation between robust PLC implementation and school quality, especially in terms of teacher competence and student academic achievement in language and mathematics; this suggests that when PLC components like collaborative learning, shared vision, and effective leadership are present, substantial improvements can be observed (Lutfia et al., 2022).

Similarly, in Malaysia, “An Analysis on the Implementation of Professional Learning Communities in Malaysian Secondary Schools” by Tai Mei Kin and Omar Abdull Kareem (2021) surveyed nearly one thousand principals, senior assistants, and teachers across Malaysian states. They reported that PLC practices were rated “quite good,” with the organizational (i.e. leadership, structural) factors scoring higher than non-organizational ones. However, sub-dimensions like collaborative learning, reflective dialogue, and collective inquiry scored lower, indicating that while schools had some formal structures, deeper cultural and practice dimensions lagged (Tai & Kareem, 2021). This reflects a common pattern: structural readiness is more easily achieved than the less tangible but more impactful aspects of PLCs.

Chua, Foo, and Tham (2020), in “Unveiling the Practices and Challenges of Professional Learning Communities in a Malaysian Chinese culture-dominated secondary school,” explored how culture interacts with PLC implementation. They found that while the school had adopted many PLC practices, there were significant challenges around trust, teacher autonomy, and hierarchical traditions, which slowed the uptake of more peer-based or reflective practice components of PLCs (Chua et al., 2020). Such findings suggest that context matters greatly, especially in school systems with strong existing hierarchies or centralized supervision, where shared leadership or shared personal practice may be harder to embed.

In the ASEAN region beyond Malaysia and Indonesia, Dinanty, Setiawan, and Putro (2024) studied the impact of PLCs in Nusantara Capital Buffer Schools in Indonesia. Their mixed-methods research found significant improvements in learning outcomes—including increases in average post-test scores relative to pre-test scores—after PLC implementation. Teachers reported enhanced collaboration and more effective instructional strategies, and the school environments were perceived as more supportive of student engagement (Dinanty et al., 2024). This kind of evidence is directly relevant to ACS, suggesting that even in settings with mixed resources, strong PLCs can yield measurable gains in student outcomes.

Another study, though not exclusively in ASEAN, that contributes to understanding is “Professional learning communities: Research and practices” by Pang, Wong, and Shi (2016), which aggregates findings from multiple Asian contexts. They found consistent themes: leadership that supports collaboration, shared values, trusting relationships among educators, and alignment of PLC work with school goals are critical; conversely, heavy teacher workload, insufficient time for reflection, and weak follow-through on decisions are frequent barriers (Pang et al., 2016).

A more recent meta-analysis by Nguyen, Hoang, and Truong (2024) reviewed empirical research literature on PLCs for teachers in the Global South. They reviewed some 70 empirical articles and found that PLC engagement tends to produce positive effects on instructional practices and teacher motivation, especially in settings where school leadership is proactive. They also noted that PLCs are more effective when embedded within policies that institutionalize teacher collaboration and where external supports (professional development, resources) are available (Nguyen et al., 2024).

In the Philippine setting, though fewer PLC studies are published, one study by Tayag (2020) titled “Professional Learning Communities in Schools: Challenges and Opportunities” examines how teacher learning groups function in Philippine schools. This work discusses that while PLCs (or analogous groups) are present, challenges include teacher workload, conflicting priorities (e.g., administrative duties vs. collaboration), lack of clarity of roles, and inconsistent leadership support; these factors hinder full realization of PLC potential (Tayag, 2020).

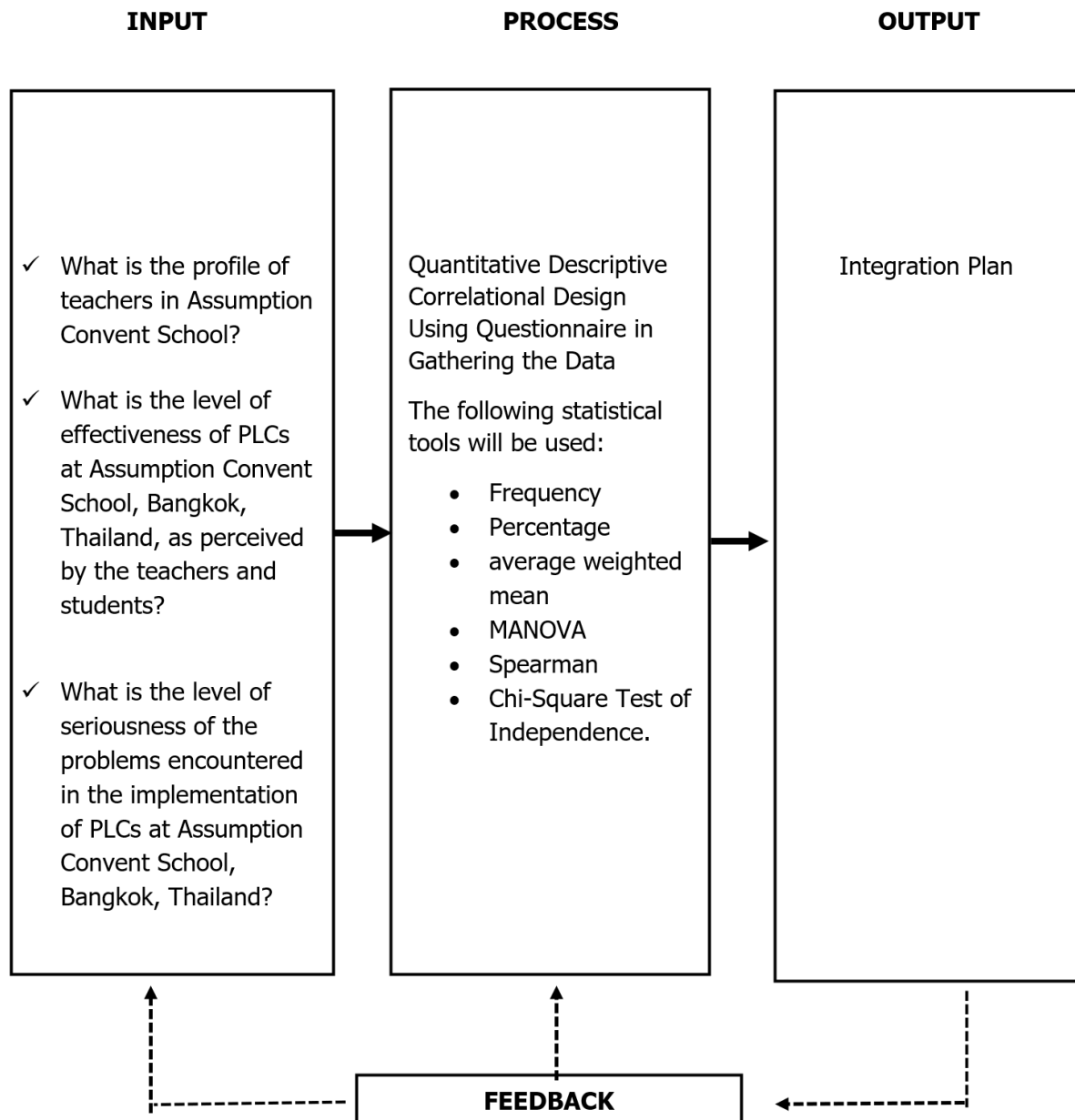
Also in the Philippines, a very recent descriptive-correlational study (Dumandan & Paglinawan, 2025) explored the relationship between teacher engagement in PLCs and their instructional competence. Using elementary school teachers, the study found high levels of engagement in areas such as collaborative culture, focus on learning, and shared practice; it then showed a statistically significant positive relationship between those engagements and self-reported competence in content knowledge, pedagogical skills, and assessment practices (Dumandan & Paglinawan, 2025). This underlines that strong PLC involvement correlates with stronger teacher capability, especially when multiple PLC dimensions are present.

Synthesis of Related Studies

The reviewed studies consistently recognize Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) as an effective framework for improving teacher competence, school culture, and student outcomes across diverse contexts. In Indonesia, Lutfia, Sa’ud, Nurdin, and Meirawan (2022) as well as Dinanty, Setiawan, and Putro (2024) highlighted the effectiveness of PLC programs in enhancing school quality, teacher collaboration, and student achievement, particularly in core subjects. Similarly, Tai and Kareem (2021) found in Malaysian secondary schools that while structural factors such as leadership and organizational support were well established, deeper cultural elements like reflective dialogue and collaborative inquiry remained underdeveloped. This cultural influence was further examined by Chua, Foo, and Tham (2020), who revealed that hierarchical traditions and limited trust hindered deeper engagement in PLC practices within a Malaysian Chinese culture-dominated school. Complementing these findings, Pang, Wong, and Shi (2016) reviewed PLC research across Asia and concluded that leadership, shared values, and teacher trust are universal enablers, while heavy workload and lack of time remain common barriers.

From a broader perspective, Nguyen, Hoang, and Truong (2024) conducted a meta-analysis of PLCs in the Global South and affirmed their positive influence on teacher motivation and instructional practices, particularly when embedded within supportive policy frameworks. In the Philippines, Tayag (2020) found that PLCs—operating mainly through Learning Action Cells—were constrained by teacher workload, leadership inconsistencies, and lack of clarity in roles. On a more positive note, Dumandan and Paglinawan (2025) established that teachers’ engagement in PLCs had a strong positive relationship with instructional competence in content knowledge, pedagogy, and assessment. Meanwhile, cultural and contextual variables were also shown to play a role in PLC effectiveness. Liu, Ou, and Wu (2023) discovered in Chinese schools that power distance moderated PLC impact, indicating that hierarchical environments required deliberate leadership strategies to foster authentic collaboration and teacher agency. Collectively, these studies affirm that PLCs are effective vehicles for professional development but require supportive leadership, adequate resources, and cultural sensitivity to thrive.

Conceptual Framework



METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive-correlational research design to assess the effectiveness of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) at Assumption Convent School in Bangkok, Thailand. Teachers and students served as respondents of the study. Data were collected through survey questionnaires and analyzed using appropriate statistical tools to determine relationships, differences, and the severity of problems encountered in PLC implementation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings revealed that Professional Learning Communities at Assumption Convent School were generally perceived as effective in promoting collaboration, shared leadership, and professional growth among teachers. Leadership support, collective learning, and collaborative culture emerged as key strengths, while time constraints, resource limitations, and inconsistent implementation practices were identified as challenges affecting PLC sustainability.

CONCLUSIONS

Professional Learning Communities play a significant role in enhancing teacher professional growth, collaboration, and student learning outcomes at Assumption Convent School. Strengthening leadership support, providing protected time for collaboration, and integrating technology-driven practices can further improve PLC effectiveness and sustain a culture of continuous improvement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends strengthening leadership support, institutionalizing structured PLC schedules, enhancing teacher training, and maximizing technology integration to improve collaboration and instructional practices. Future studies may also explore the long-term impact of PLCs on student achievement and school improvement.

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AI DECLARATION STATEMENT

AI-supported tools helped with grammar and structure in creating this article. No AI tools were used to collect, analyze, or interpret data; all authors are credited for their academic contributions.

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