

# Challenges and Support Systems for Headteachers in the Implementation of Professional Learning Communities Concept in Effutu Municipality, Ghana

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**Abstract:** *Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) concept was introduced in the pre-tertiary education system in Ghana in 2019 as a model of continuous professional development policy, following the education reforms. The aim is to offer teachers opportunity to take charge of their own professional learning so as to become competent professionals in the field of education as well as to promote collaboration and collegiality among them. This study explored the challenges facing the basic school headteachers in Effutu Municipality of Ghana in the implementation of PLCs concept as well as the support systems they needed. It was qualitative research underpinned by the interpretivist paradigm and employed a case study research design. Using maximal variation sampling strategy, 15 headteachers were selected for a semi-structured interview and the data collected was analysed thematically. The study revealed that the challenges confronting the headteachers in the implementation of PLCs in the municipality included time constraints and limited space for reflective activities, perceived lack of value, and inadequate knowledge about the concept. It also emerged that financial and material support from both internal and external sources within the fraternity were needed for effective implementation of the PLCs in the municipality, The study recommended that the Municipal Education Directorate should intensify school sensitization campaigns to raise awareness, and to promote the benefits of PLCs among the headteachers, teachers, and relevant stakeholders to ensure effective implementation of the concept.*

**Keywords:** headteachers, professional learning communities, challenges, teachers, support systems.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Collaboration and accountability among teachers lead to effective student learning and achievement. When educators receive and participate in high-quality professional development, it has a positive impact on their quality of teaching and their students' learning achievement (Blank, 2013). Schools around the world are implementing Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), in order to attain quality teaching and effective student learning (Hadar, & Brody, 2021). PLCs consist of educators working together to reach a common goal related to improving education and student learning. PLCs need shared leadership and the commitment of all members in order to build a culture of learning and create school change that improves student learning and achievement. PLCs are held in collaborative groups of educators who work together to improve their teaching practices, enhance student learning outcomes, and create a culture of continuous improvement within schools (Dufour et al., 2016). These communities provide a platform for teachers to engage in ongoing professional learning, share best practices, and collectively address challenges and opportunities in their classrooms.

PLCs have gained considerable attention globally as an effective approach for teacher professional development and school improvement (Haiyan & Allan, 2020). It have been implemented in many countries and have shown promising results in enhancing teacher practices and student achievement. The concept of PLCs originated in the United States and has been widely implemented in schools across the country. Likewise, in Australia, PLCs have become a cornerstone of educational reform strategies. Gore and Rosser (2022) note that such communities have helped transform teaching practices by providing opportunities for collaborative inquiry and knowledge sharing. The Asian continent has also embraced PLCs, with a study conducted in Singapore highlighting how PLCs have promoted reflective practice among teachers and fostered a more learner-centered approach (Hairon & Tan, 2017). Moreover, PLCs have proven to be highly beneficial for educational contexts across Africa, with South Africa being a notable example. In that country, PLCs serve as valuable platforms for fostering rich dialogue and exchanges among teachers.

PLCs provide a structured environment where educators can engage in critical discussions concerning their teaching practices (De Clercq & Shalem, 2012). Such conversations often lead to mutual learning and shared understanding among educators, encouraging a collaborative approach towards problem-solving and innovation in instructional techniques. This shared learning experience also translates to an enhanced instructional quality within the classrooms, as teachers can apply the insights and strategies gleaned from their PLC interactions.

In the context of Ghanaian schools, the implementation of PLCs has demonstrated substantial promise and positive outcomes, which align with findings from various other global contexts. Notably, these PLCs have been instrumental in facilitating teacher collaboration, refining instructional practices, and enhancing student achievement. In a study by Akyeampong et al. (2013), it was observed that schools with well-implemented PLCs exhibited higher levels of teacher collaboration, fostering a collegial environment where educators could share ideas, resources, and strategies. This collaborative approach, in turn, translated into improved student learning outcomes, attesting to the positive ripple effects of effective teacher collaboration on the educational experience of students. In another study, Ampiah and Oduro (2017) discovered that PLCs had a significant impact on teachers' professional growth and instructional practices. These findings clearly highlight the significant role PLCs can play in fostering a culture of collaboration, promoting professional growth among educators, and enhancing instructional quality, leading to improved student learning outcomes in the Ghanaian educational landscape.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The concept of PLCs was only introduced in the Ghana's Standard Based Curriculum (SBC) in September 2019 and recognised key roles of school leaders in its implementation within the educational landscape (Ministry of Education, Ghana, 2019). The new curriculum requires teachers to devote an hour, each week, to engage in PLC activities, with the intended outcome of enhancing teacher performance and subsequently boosting students' academic performance and achievement. Heads of schools play key/crucial role in effective implementation of PLCs by shaping the school culture and establishing norms for teacher collaboration and continuous professional development (Gümüş et al., 2022). Leaders set the vision, manage resources, and create an environment conducive for collaboration and learning (Yusuf and Pattisahusiwa, 2021).

Despite these key roles played by school heads in successful implementation of PLCs, literature suggests that limited training opportunities are provided for them to develop their capacities for such efforts..... Kusi (2017) indicated that provision of inadequate training opportunities for heads of schools in Ghana to acquire relevant knowledge, skills and competencies translates into ineffective implementation of most school-based in-service training programmes led by such heads. The limited training opportunities provided for the heads to develop their capacities could impede the effective implementation of PLCs, affecting the quality of instructions provided by teachers, students academic performance and school improvement in general.

Nevertheless, in the context of Ghanaian basic schools under the new SBC, little empirical research has been conducted to explore the challenges headteachers face in the implementation of PLCs (Akyeampong et al., 2013) in their schools as well as the support systems that could be put in place for them. A study by Anderson (2016) argued for the consideration of PLCs as a concept to improve teaching and learning, while that of Atta, Acheampong and Atta-Asiamah (2022), examined the influence of John Dewey's philosophy on the development of PLCs concept. Moreover, these studies were literature-based research and focused on other phenomenon other than leadership challenges in the implementation of PLCs and the support systems that could be put in place in such efforts. It is against this backdrop that this empirical study was conducted to explore the challenges facing the headteachers in Effutu Municipality of Ghana in the implementation of PLCs in their schools and well as the support systems that could be put in place for them. To achieve the purpose of this qualitative research, the following research questions were formulated:

- What challenges do the headteachers face in the implementation of PLCs in the municipality?
- What are the support systems that could be put in place to enable headteachers overcome the challenges they face in the implementation of PLCs in the municipality?

This study is significant in some ways. Firstly, by exploring the challenges, and the support systems for the heads in the implementation of PLCs, the findings will form the basis of training for the heads and collaborators for a more meaningful implementation of the policy in the municipality. As indicated earlier on, there is scanty empirical literature on implementation of PLCs in the Ghanaian education context. This study adds to existing knowledge on PLCs and the findings could form the basis of further studies in the the phenomenon. Last, but not the least, the findings could form the basis for local policy on support systems for heads of basic schools in the implementation of PLCs in the Municipality.

### **Effutu Municipality in Context**

The study was conducted in the public basic schools Effutu Municipality in the Central region of Ghana. The Municipality lies between Gomoa East District to the West, North, and East flanks. On the Southern flanks is the Gulf of Guinea. It covers an area of 417. 3 Square kilometers (163sq. miles) and the population of the area, according to 2021 Population and Housing Census, stands at 107, 798 with 54, 728 males and 53, 075 females – [www.ghanadistricts.com](http://www.ghanadistricts.com)>district

The municipality is divided into three Circuits (education zones) (Central, East, and West) for the purpose of education management. It has a number of pre-schools, primary and 3 Senior High Schools, and a University mandated for teacher training. Most of the inhabitants in the Municipality are Guans, who are mostly fisher-folks and speak Fante, their dominant language, and "Effutu," their native language. They are mostly traditionalists, observing several festivals, with the

“Aboakyir,” being the most famous one. Some of the inhabitants however practice/profess Christianity (Agyeman, 2016).

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Communities of Practice**

The concept of Communities of Practice (CoPs) emerged as a theoretical framework based on the research conducted by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, prominent social learning theorists, throughout the 1990s (Renga,2022). CoPs are collectives of individuals who possess a shared interest or professional background who convene with the purpose of engaging in ongoing interactions and collaborative endeavours, hence facilitating mutual learning and knowledge exchange.

The CoPs are distinguished by three fundamental components, namely, domain, community, and practice (Romero, G., & Vasilopoulos, 2020). The concept of “domain” pertains to the common interest or specialized field of knowledge that unites members within a society. The platform facilitates a shared space wherein participants may actively participate in dialogues, exchange personal anecdotes, and collectively cultivate a comprehensive comprehension of the topic at hand.

The concept of the “community” component pertains to the establishment of social connections and relationships among individuals within a certain group. The establishment of these links fosters a collective sense of affiliation and reciprocal assistance among members of the community. Finally, the term "practice" encompasses the collective actions, tools, and resources that individuals partake in to enhance their knowledge and cultivate their proficiency (Romero & Vasilopoulos, 2020). Learning is perceived as a social phenomenon that transpires through active engagement in the activities of CoPs. Members acquire knowledge and skills by engaging in processes such as observation, mentoring, collaboration, and reflection with one another.

The CoPs can be observed in several settings, encompassing professional organizations, virtual communities, academic institutions, and working environments (Malik & Haidar, 2023). The character of communities can vary in terms of formality, ranging from formal to informal, contingent upon the community's organization and objectives. Formal CoPs may be characterized by the presence of appointed leaders or facilitators who provide guidance and oversight to the group's activities, with the aim of achieving defined learning objectives.

In contrast, informal CoPs tend to arise organically among individuals who share common interests and willingly gather together. The application of this notion within the context of PLCs in

educational institutions offers a valuable perspective through which the experiences of school heads are examined. PLCs can be regarded as a distinct manifestation of CoPs in which the collective focus is centered on enhancing the quality of teaching and learning. School heads play a crucial role as active participants within these PLCs, rather than merely serving as facilitators or leaders. The responsibilities of educational leaders go beyond mere administrative and managerial tasks. They are actively engaged in participating in PLCs, where they contribute to and acquire information from a collective pool of expertise. Additionally, they play a crucial role in shaping the culture and practices of these communities (Huijboom et al., 2021). The involvement of educational heads in PLCs highlights the democratic and collaborative essence of these communities, hence potentially influencing their efficacy. The involvement of leaders in the process of leadership can have a significant impact on the cultivation of trust, transparency, and a collaborative culture, all of which are essential elements for the achievement of success in PLCs (Bush, 2019). Moreover, the engagement of school heads in PLCs offers them firsthand understanding of the tangible obstacles and advantages associated with these collaborative networks (Bush, 2019; Haiyan & Allan, 2020). This experiential knowledge can significantly contribute to their decision-making processes and leadership strategies. Hence, the use of the Communities of Practice paradigm can provide insight into the manner in which school heads in the Effutu Municipality enable, engage in, and exert influence on the operations of PLCs, and how these dynamics impact their experiences, leadership strategies, and the overall efficacy of PLCs within their respective schools.

### **Transformational Leadership**

The transformational leadership theory, originally introduced by James V. Burns in 1978 and subsequently developed by Bernard M. Bass in 1985, has made a substantial contribution to the comprehension of leadership dynamics (Ladkin & Patrick, 2022). According to the theory, effective leaders are generally considered to be those who inspire and empower their followers to achieve a shared vision. They foster a positive and inclusive work culture and encourage innovation and creativity. The aforementioned leadership style is characterized by four discernible components, namely idealized influence, inspiring motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized concern.

Idealized influence, commonly known as charisma, pertains to leaders who serve as exemplars for their followers. According to Northouse (2016), these leaders demonstrate elevated moral and ethical principles and employ their own conduct to cultivate a sentiment of respect, trust, and adoration within their subordinates. Supporters typically exhibit a sense of identification with these leaders and strive to mentor their behaviours.

Inspirational motivation is a leadership approach that entails the ability of leaders to effectively motivate and inspire their people through the provision of distinct and captivating visions of the future. According to Hardman (2023), these leaders establish ambitious expectations while simultaneously displaying a steadfast dedication to objectives and fostering a feeling of enthusiasm and optimism among their followers.

Intellectual stimulation encompasses the actions of leaders who actively challenge the prevailing norms and encourage their followers to engage in creative and innovative thinking. Northouse (2016) explains that these leaders promote critical thinking and problem-solving skills, creating a climate that embraces inquiry and innovation. Individualized consideration refers to the extent to which a leader demonstrates attentiveness towards the unique needs of each follower, assumes the role of a mentor or coach, and actively listens to and addresses the problems and requirements expressed by the follower.

Within the realm of school leadership, the theory of transformational leadership provides valuable perspectives on how school heads might successfully cultivate and maintain PLCs. Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) argue that this framework offers a theoretical foundation for comprehending the leadership behaviours that foster active engagement in PLCs, stimulate creative thinking, and address the unique professional development requirements of educators

### **The Concept of PLCs**

A PLCs is a collaborative group of educators who work together to improve their teaching practices and enhance student learning outcomes. PLCs are characterized by shared norms and values, a collective focus on students' learning, collaboration, and the de-privatization of teaching practices (Sompong et al., 2015). The objectives of developing a PLC in primary schools include studying the current situation and identifying the need for developing a PLC, developing a model for the development of a PLC, and studying the findings of the development of a PLC in terms of knowledge, comprehension, and competency in developing a PLC, teaching behaviour, and students' quality (Sompong et al., 2015). The development of a PLC is a continuous and on-demand problem-solving process that allows learners, teachers, parents, and administrators to collaboratively resolve problems and implement evidence-based practices (Bunnaen et al., 2022). PLCs also promote teacher quality and student learning, and they have been found to be paramount in improving teacher competence.

The implementation of a PLC requires certain key characteristics and factors. Successful professional development programmes that incorporate PLCs are long-term and developmental, focus on artifacts of practice such as student thinking and instructional practices, use actual classroom data, encourage design and reflection on the part of teachers, are job-embedded (school-based), and promote the development of PLCs (Brodie, 2013). The development of a PLC is not without its challenges. Some of the main challenges include a lack of commitment from school administrators and teacher colleagues, passive participation from teachers, resistance to change, and difficulty in accepting the concept of PLCs (Jalaludin et al., 2022). It is important for school administrators and teachers to be committed to the implementation of PLCs and actively participate in the collaborative learning process.

Chauraya and Barmby (2022) emphasize that, to develop effective PLCs, it is necessary to create opportunities for learning that are tailored to the specific needs of teachers and students. This includes addressing the knowledge of learners' problem-solving needs and specific instructional practices to address those needs. The development of effective and sustainable PLCs is a gradual process that takes time and involves shifts in roles by both facilitators and teachers. Also, Şahin and Yenel (2021) states that, it is important to establish an enabling school structure that supports the formation of PLCs and encourages teachers' social networking intentions. In all, PLCs are collaborative groups of educators who work together to improve their teaching practices and enhance student learning outcomes. PLCs have been found to have positive impacts on teacher professional development and student achievement. However, the implementation of PLCs can be challenging and requires commitment from school administrators and teachers. Creating opportunities for learning, establishing an enabling school structure, and promoting social networking intentions among teachers are important factors in developing effective PLCs.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This was a qualitative research underpinned by the interpretivist paradigm. Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning which individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Specifically, a case study was employed for the study. The design was considered because we intended exploring the phenomenon in-depth and in its natural context.

The target population of the study was all Junior high school headteachers in Effutu municipality in Ghana. Using maximal variation sampling technique, 15 headteachers consisting 7 females and 8 males, The technique allowed us to use the ranks, academic/professional qualifications, and their



length of experience to select the participants so as to build multiple perspectives into the data collection and analysis.

Data for the study was collected through a semi-structured interview guide. The instrument was considered because it allowed the participants or interviewees to freely express themselves regarding issues raised. Moreover, the instrument provided us the opportunity to seek clarification on responses of the interviewees. However, the instrument, if not carefully handled, provide opportunities for interviewees to engage in “aimless rambling”.

The semi-structured interview guide was both face and content validated before being used for data collection. To establish the face validity, the instrument was given to colleague lecturers and selected postgraduate students at the School of Education and Life-Long Learning for their comments. Some experts in educational leadership and management at the School also helped to establish the content validity of the instrument. The comments given were used as the basis of the refinement of the instrument before being used for data collection. Thereafter, a pilot study was conducted among others, to improve upon the quality of the instrument before being used. The pilot study was conducted in Gomoa West District, which shares a boarder with the setting of this current study, and with JHS headteachers who share similar characteristics in terms of academic/professional qualifications, ranks and teaching experience.

The qualitative data collected for the study was analysed thematically. The process of the analysis involved repeated listening of the recordings, transcribing the data recordings, typing of up the field-notes, and sorting and arranging the data into different types depending on the sources of information (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Then we immersed ourselves in the data, followed by data coding. The identified codes were collapsed into themes. The next step of the process involved description of the themes, using direct verbatim quotes from the participants to add realism to the analysis and discussion. To attribute comments to participants, the female headteachers were given the serial number PFM-1 to PFH-7, where PFH represents ‘Participant Female Headteacher.’ The male headteachers were given the serial number PMH-1 to PMH-8, where PMH represents ‘Participant Male Headteacher.’

Qualitative research are often seen as lacking rigour, influenced by researchers’ preconceived notions, initial understandings and biases. To address these issues, trustworthiness criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) was used to ensure the rigour of the study. Trustworthiness points to the level of self-assurance in data, interpretations, and methods used to ensure the quality of a study (Pilot and Beck, 2014). It is about ensuring transparency and reliability throughout the research process. In each study, there is the need for researchers to establish the protocols and measures

required for a study to be considered worthy of consideration by readers (Amankwaa, 2016). Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified four elements of the trustworthiness criteria, which are credibility, dependability, transferrability and confirmability.

According to Anney (2014), credibility is defined as the confidence that can be placed in the truth of the research findings. Credibility establishes whether or not the research findings represent plausible information drawn from the participants' original data and is a correct interpretation of the participants' original views. A qualitative researcher establishes rigor of the inquiry by adopting the following credibility strategies: prolonged and varied field experience, time sampling, reflexivity (field journal), triangulation, member checking, peer examination, interview technique, establishing authority of researcher and structural coherence. To achieve credibility in this study, I spent two months on the field collecting data, engaging the participants in interviews, and observing both verbal and non-verbal responses.

Dependability involves researchers evaluating the findings and the interpretation and recommendations of the study to make sure that they are all supported by the data received from the informants of the study (Anney, 2014). By aligning findings, interpretations, and recommendations with the data received from informants, we enhance the trustworthiness and dependability of our research outcomes.

Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be related to other contexts with other interviewees. It is the interpretive equivalent of generalizability. The researcher facilitates the transferability judgment by a potential user through 'thick description' and purposeful sampling. This means that when the researcher provides a detailed description of the enquiry and participants were selected purposefully, it facilitates transferability of the inquiry (Travers, 2008). Thick description enables judgments about how well the research context fits other contexts, thick descriptive data, that is a rich and extensive set of details concerning methodology and context, should be included in the research report. According to Anney (2014), thick description involves the researcher elucidating all the research processes, from data collection, context of the study to production of the final report. Thick description helps other researchers to replicate the study with similar conditions in other settings.

According to Anney (2014), confirmability refers to the degree to which the results of an inquiry could be confirmed or corroborated by other researchers. Confirmability is concerned with establishing that data and interpretations of the findings are not figments of the inquirer's imagination, but are clearly derived from the data. We achieved these through an audit trail. In the view of Travers (2008), an audit trail involves an examination of the inquiry process and product to validate the data, whereby a researcher accounts for all the research decisions and activities to show how the data were collected, recorded and analyzed.

Positionality refers to the position a researcher has chosen to implement withing a given research study. It necessitates the researcher consciously examining their own identity to allow the reader to access the effect of their personal characteristics and perspectives in relation to the study population, the topic under study and the research process (Savin-Baden & Major 2013). There are types of positionality in research. One of them is the Insider researcher. According to Kusi (2012, page 96), “Insider researchers are the type of researchers who conduct their research in their professional context. Your positionality as an Insider researcher can be useful in several ways. In the first place, because you are a member of that organization, the participants are more likely to be receptive and cooperative. However, this depends on a number of factors including the sensitivity of the phenomenon under investigation, the relevance of your research to the organization and your professional relationship with the target participant and authorities.” Relatively, I am an Insider researcher, thus being a teacher / facilitator and researching on PLCs – one of the policies that came out with the new curriculum – which pertains to our profession.

### **Analysis and Discussion of Analysis**

The purpose of the study was to explore the challenges and support systems in the implementation of PLCs in Municipality . This purpose influenced the themes in this section of the work.

### **Challenges with the implementation of PLCs**

The interview data highlighted challenges associated with the implementation of PLC in the municipality. The reported challenges included time constraints, the value/lack of in-depth knowledge of PLCs, inappropriate duration of the meetings, and facilitators’ lack of commitment to PLCs and their inadequate knowledge about the concept. With regards to the time involved in PLCs implementation, the participants expressed concerns about the PLC activities interfering with time allocated for extracurricular activities, causing logistical problems:

*‘Undoubtedly, time constraints with PLCs is a challenge. The scheduling of PLC during school hours affects the available time for students. While the ideal solution may involve organizing PLC after school hours, logistical and incentive-related challenges persist.’*

[PMH-6]

*“Challenges include teachers having to pause their work for PLC, especially during marking. Also, the frequency of weekly meetings PLCs logistical challenges”.* [PFH=7]

Additionally, the headteacher participants reported perceived challenge relating to value and lack of in-depth knowledge on the part of the teachers, which negatively affected effective implementation of PLCs. The headteachers believed these challenges made the teachers feel reluctant to attend the PLCs meetings organised, as the following comments show:

*“The main challenge is that, sometimes the teachers do not see the value of PLCs so they do not want to attend such meetings. We educate them, so they get an in-depth understanding of PLC implementation. That is the obstacle we have.”* [PFH- 4]

*“The main challenge is that sometimes the teachers, they do not see the value of it. They do not see the value. So, left to them alone, we should not go for it, and other things! So, we give them time for something else other than PLC. But we also educate them so they get an understanding of what we are talking about. That is the obstacle we have!”* [PHF-2]

Thus, the data suggested that the perceived lack of value and knowledge of PLC implementation negatively affected the attitude of teachers towards the programmes. A participant headteacher shared this concern, highlighting the need to structure and plan the programmes to avoid interference with other activities organised in the schools.

*“Presently, PLC meetings occur weekly, typically on Wednesdays, teachers seem to be reluctant towards the programmes we organise. However, challenges arise due to the tight syllabus, making it difficult to allocate more time without affecting students negatively. The need for a predetermined timetable and government-provided topics for PLC sessions has been identified.”* [PFH-5]

Without adequate planning in terms of time-tabling and content of the programmes, there is the tendency for the PLCs activities to be dis-organised as headteachers in Ghana, in most cases have

to attend to emergency issues. This agrees with Earley and Bubb (2013)'s view that headteachers faced difficulties in creating time and space for reflective activities, including PLCs.

Another challenge which emerged from the data was related to the duration of the PLCs meetings. The participants expressed concern about the inability of the meetings to start on time, making them close late in the evenings, in most cases, as the following comments suggest:

*“Sometimes, we will be ready for the meetings, but you have to wait and wait for colleagues before we start. Sometimes, we have to wait for the facilitator of the programmes and this makes us close late in the evenings. This attitude is not good for the implementation of the PLC activities!”* [PMH-4]

*“The impact is that we are sometimes unable to get the one hour needed for the organization of PLCs. Because we are not able to start on time. So, at times, it might extend beyond the one hour.”* [PFH-5]

The ability of the PLC meetings to start on time affected the duration. It appears the headteachers, together with their teachers, who also had numerous home and other responsibilities had to close from PLC meetings very late, which could affect their attitudes towards the programmes in the schools. Kusi (2017) also identified the duration of the continuous professional development programmes organised for headteachers in Ghana to be a major challenge to the effectiveness of the programmes implementation. He, however, argued that the duration of the programmes were too short for contents to be completed.

The data further suggested that absenteeism and inadequate preparation on the part of facilitators was a challenge to the headteachers in the effective implementation of the PLCs.

*“It will be very difficult to make it effective, because there was a time we were expecting somebody to facilitate, but the person did not come. It now became the duty of the CPD committee to handle it, and none of them had knowledge. And because the curriculum lead has been taken out, it was difficult for them to contact the curriculum lead. And where a school has no curriculum lead at all, another challenge presents itself.”*  
[Participant 6, AD II, FD]

*One challenge I see with the PLC in my school and nearby ones is that sometimes, the lead facilitators and the facilitating teams give excuses. Sometimes, they come in [the meetings] late and, in some cases they do not show up. Those who avail themselves may not know more about the topics to be delivered. This is my challenge!*

These comments suggest that the facilitators either lacked commitment to the PLCs responsibilities assigned them or had inadequate knowledge about the contents that they were supposed to deliver at the meetings. These findings agrees with that of Kusi (2017), when he argued that headteachers were reluctant to attend some continuous professional development programmes organised in Ghana because facilitators lacked adequate knowledge of the topics they delivered. Thus, the perceived lack of commitment to and adequate knowledge of the content and PLC concept could affect the attitude of the participants, affecting effective implementation of the programmes.

Thus, the headteacher participants of the study identified many challenges in the implementation of PLCs in the municipality and these were related to teachers not valuing PLCs because of lack of understanding, time constraints, inappropriate duration and demonstration of lack of commitment to PLCs implementation and their lack of knowledge about the model.

### **Support System for the Implementation of PLCs Programmes**

The interview data highlighted the support systems that the headteachers believed should be put in place for effective implementation of the PLCs in the municipality. The included regular training of headteachers on PLC concept and its implementation, helping with identification of topics for training; making funds for refreshment and regular visitation by education officers in the municipality. The data suggested that these support systems, when put in place, could affect the implementation of the PLCs positively.

The headteachers expressed concern that some colleagues in-depth knowledge about the PLC concept and how it is implemented, suggesting the need for the education authorities in the municipality to organise regular training on the concepts for the headteachers, so as to generate and sustain their interest in the implementation.

*We are working in our individual schools, but we [the headteachers] occasionally meet formally and informally to talk about PLCs and how we are implementing them. In such situations you realize that some of our colleagues have no professional knowledge about*

*PLCs at all. In fact, it is important that regular training is organised by our Education Officers for we the headteachers if we will have high level interest to implement such programmes {PMH-7}*

*Most of us did not have adequate knowledge about the PLCs model before we were asked to implement them. Perhaps, this accounts for the lack of interest in the programme. Therefore, we need regular training in PLCs for effective implementation [PFH-3]*

These responses suggest that some of the headteachers were not knowledgeable about the PLC concept and how it was implemented. This situation could affect the level of interest the heads have in the implementation of the concept. The headteachers lacking ‘professional credibility’ about the PLCs could negatively affect the teachers attitude towards the programmes. The need for continuous professional development programmes that have the capacity to broaden and deepen the headteachers’ knowledge about the concept is therefore imperative. One of the participant headteachers specifically suggested the use of experts to deliver any planned continuous professional development programmes arguing that some of the facilitators of training programmes organised for them are often not ‘on top of issues discussed.’

This PLC is a new concept and therefore not everyone knows a lot about it. We need people who have a broad knowledge about it [the PLCs] so that they can confidently deliver the programmes. Some of those who lead the programmes sometimes do not understand things themselves [PFH-6]

This comment suggests that some of the facilitators of training programmes lacked an in-depth knowledge about the content they deliver. Similarly, Kusi (2008; 2017) expressed concern about the facilitators of continuous professional development programmes organised for headteachers in the Sunyani municipality, arguing that they were often incompetent and ineffective, lacking professional knowledge about the topics they handled. The facilitators’ professional knowledge has the tendency to affect the level of interest the headteachers and teachers might have in the PLCs and, therefore, it is imperative that ‘trainers; programmes’ programmes are organised for the facilitators to equip them with relevant knowledge, skills and competencies for their mandate.

Moreover, the data suggested that headteachers often found it difficult to identify topic which could form the basis of discussions during PLCs meetings. This could be attributed to their unfamiliarity with the concept and its implementation.

*We make efforts to implement the PLCs as they are of great benefit to all of us [headteachers and teachers], but we expect the education authorities at the national level to help us identify topics for discussion at the beginning of the academic year or every term. Sometimes, getting topics for discussion is very difficult for us [PMH-5]*

Thus the participant headteachers needed support in terms of identification of topics for discussion at PLCs meetings. However, the comments suggested that they expected this support to emanate from the national education authorities, without taking into consideration local contextual issues affecting education provision in their area of operation. Although national education issues could inform and influence discussions at PLCs meetings at local levels, it is important that local contextual issues are also considered in identifying the topics so as to ensure that those discussions are tailored to the particular requirements of schools in the district. Issues of diversity arising from different social and professional contexts have to be considered in the identification of topics for PLCs and other continuous professional development programmes (Bush & Jackson, 2003).

Adequate funding as a support system for the implementation of PLCs also emerged from the data. The participant headteachers complained about poor financial support from the national and local education authorities, which affected their ability to provide logistics and to refresh the participants at the PLCs meetings.

Currently, we do not receive enough funds from the national level to support the implementation of PLCs. This shouldn't be so! Because of this situation, it is difficult for us to provide logistical assistance and refreshment at the meetings we organise in our schools. We need adequate financial support if we will be able to implement the PLCs effectively![PMH-8]

‘Unfortunately, there is minimal financial and logistical support from external sources [national and local education authorities]. The support we receive is mostly self-generated, with headteachers allocating funds from the school's budget for refreshments during PLC sessions. This is inadequate![PFH-1]

Thus, raising funds for effective implementation of PLCs was considered a major challenge. Inadequate funding of continuous professional development programmes has remained a major challenge in the Ghanaian education system owing to the difficulty the government faces in



allocating adequate funds to support the education sector. Kusi (2017) indicated that getting funds to organise continuous development programmes for headteachers is a major problem in Ghana, arguing that the programmes are often initiated and funded by international agencies and non-governmental organisations operating in the country. However, some of these organisation do not often allocate sufficient funds to support the initiated education programmes. To be able to generate adequate funds to support the implementation of PLCs programmes, it is imperative that the headteachers consider alternative funding sources such as Parent Associations contributions and philanthropists in the field of education.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

PLCs in the municipality attracted low level of interest from the hedatecahers and teachers because they did not possess an in-depth understanding of the concept and how it is implemented. Therefore, we recommend that the education authorities in the municipality should organise regular continuous professional development programmes in the form of workshops to expose the headteachers and their staff to the PLCs concept, and to broaden and deepen their understanding about it so as to generate and sustain their interest in the meetings organised for them.

Moreover, poor planning of the PLCs meetings in terms of timing, absenteeism and incompetence on the part of some resource persons negatively affected the interest of teachers in the meetings organised. It is therefore recommended that the PLCs meetings should be organised after teaching contact hours to avoid any interference with teaching lessons. Also, the contents or issues discussed at the PLCs meetings must be carefully selected and relevant appropriate self-motivated resource persons, who are knowledgeable about the issues given responsibility to lead the discussions.

Inadequate financial support from education authorities at both national and local levels affected the headteachers ability to provide logistical support and refreshment for the teachers, affecting the effective implementation of the PLCs concept in the municipality. Inadequate funding of the PLCs meetings could be attributed to insufficient budgetary allocations to the education sector of Ghana (Kusi, 2017). We therefore recommend that efforts must be made by the headteachers to solicit funding support from relevant Non-governmental organizations in the education sector of the country, Parent Associations, and prominent old students to enable them provide logistical support and refreshments during the PLCs meetings.

### **Limitations of the study**

This study has some limitations. Firstly, the sample consisted of 15 headteachers selected from the Effutu Municipality. Therefore, generalising the findings to a wider context is scientifically inappropriate. However, if readers find similarities between their contexts and the context of this particular study, they can transfer the findings to the diverse contexts.

Also, a threat to confidentiality and anonymity of information provided was very high since the 15 headteachers were selected from a relatively small municipality in Ghana. We addressed this problem by ensuring that serial numbers were used to attribute comments to participants. The use of serial numbers makes it difficult for readers to link comments to individual headteacher participants, ensuring confidentiality of information and protecting their anonymity (Kusi, 2012).

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