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Professional learning community and self-efficacy among teachers in Iraq

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Abstract

The physical education program in schools is an important subject for students' total development. However, many schools were not seriously implementing it and due to that the performance of PE teachers has been deteriorated. The teachers did not perform well because teacher's self-efficacy in conducting physical education was at low level. In response to the decline of teacher's performance, Iraq Ministry of Education has introduced the concept professional learning community (PLC) as a knowledge sharing platform to enhance teachers' and performance and hence, increase self-efficacy. This study aims to examine the level of self-efficacy and professional learning community (PLC) and the relationship between professional learning community and self-efficacy among physical education teachers in Iraq. Data was collected using survey questionnaires from 254 physical education teachers from four different provinces in Iraq. The descriptive and Pearson product moment correlation analysis was conducted to achieve the aims of the study. The findings reveal that majority of teachers' possessed passive perception regarding PLC implementations and their efficacy. Secondly there was negative correlation between professional learning community and self-efficacy. This study suggested that in order to elevate PE teacher's self-efficacy, the policy-makers need to consider the needs of PE teachers in implementing PLC.

Keywords: Professional learning community, Self-efficacy, Physical education.

1. Introduction

The National Association for Sport and Physical Education urged that physical education (PE) is an important aspect for total development of students, and it is the responsibility of the teachers to carry out the matter for the benefit of the students (Dean, Athony, Philip & Wayne, 2011) ^[19]. In order to develop the quality PE programs, the teachers must choose appropriately the contents, the length of the unit and the mode of instructions. Apart from that, to achieve their goals, PE programs must be incorporate with sports programs and monitored by the authorities. However, according to the International Council of Sport Science and Physical Education (1999), there is a serious decline in executing PE and school sports all over the world. Although many opportunities are available for students to participate in PE activities, however, these opportunities were not taken by the students in Iraq (Global School-Based Survey of Students, GSHS, 2012). Faak, Hassan and Qussay (2012) ^[22] revealed that the students were not participate in PE activities because PE teachers were weak in carry out PE classes. Hence, the question arisen, why the PE teachers did not function properly?

In response to the decline of the performance of teachers in Iraq, several programs were suggested by the Iraqi Ministry of Education. In 2003, Iraqi Ministry of Education introduced professional learning community (PLC) concept to be implemented at school level for developing teachers' skills (Baddea & Mohammad, 2009) ^[11]. PLC encourages teachers to work as one team in discussing important cases and issues to promote understanding and developing teaching skills among them. Apart from that, this corporative learning through PLC creates cohesiveness of the staff as a special group in knowledge sharing in order to enhance teachers' performance and self-efficacy.

PLC is an avenue for teachers to have meeting, discussing and doing work collectively. This setting provides opportunities for teachers to critically reflect their works, find solutions, and develop the skills and knowledge related to teaching and learning.

Asaad and Hammady (2014) ^[19] urged that using PLC will help teachers to accumulate knowledge and prepare them with the new environment of trust and confidence, and in consequence assist teachers in elevating their self-efficacy. However, the implementation of PLC in Iraq is far from satisfied.

Self-efficacy is important for teachers in coping with the different level of students' abilities and attitudes (Klassen *et al.*, 2008) ^[34]. Studies have found a relationship between the level of self-efficacy and achievement in organization (Goddard & Hoy, 2000) ^[25]. Self-efficacy plays an important role in individual's habit of selecting difficulties connected with new task. Teacher with high self-efficacy successfully handles difficulties. Self-efficacy is not an ability possessed by the teacher, but it is his will to do which encourage teachers to overcome challenges (Bandura, 2007) ^[14]. According to Atilgan (2014) ^[10], individual with high self-efficacy will be willing to encounter new task than individuals with low self-efficacy. Although teachers self-efficacy is important for teachers to teach students with different level of abilities and attitudes, but the level of PE teachers self-efficacy in Iraq is at low level. According to self-efficacy theory, training, experience, and support from peers will increase teacher's self-efficacy. Since PLC in Iraq is not favourable, another question arisen; is there any relationship between PLC and PE teacher's self-efficacy in Iraq? Specifically the objectives of the study are to; 1) determine the level of professional learning community (PLC) and PE teachers self-efficacy in Iraq, and 2) determine the relationship between professional learning community and teachers' self-efficacy.

2. Literature Review

The concept of professional learning community indicates a strong social relationship among teachers as professional teams. This concept focuses on shared values and purpose that encompass shared beliefs in teaching special subject; collective focus on liability for student learning and well-being; cooperative and consistent endeavours to enhance student learning; practices that support teachers to learning by involving in social activity such as observation, problem solving, mutual advice and support for each other; and collective decision about practice, curriculum and school policy.

PLC refers directly to promoting effective pupils' learning and indirectly to creating conditions to enable pupils to gain effective learning. DuFour (2005) ^[21] refers to PLC as important reform process from traditional methods which focuses on teachers or curriculum that centres on students learning. This concept focuses on three ideas, the member in PLC should secure student learning, reinforce a collaborative culture inside the school and coordinate between teachers and school goals while the third idea emphasizes on sharing values, responsibilities and commitment to enhance student learning. PLC represents a new education reform endeavour to great opportunity to develop student learning directly or indirectly. On the other hand, it also focuses on teachers' practice on how to contribute and develop teachers' skills and knowledge, thus transferring this knowledge to students in school for more over sharing value, responsibility, received feedback, observation and discussion in a trusted environment for success.

The implementation of PLC is aimed at fostering partnership among teachers which provides a better platform to get new experience in developing students' ability for an improved

achievement. This kind of social environment will makes teachers realize the support that likely to get succeed. Thus, improve the level of his self-efficacy, which affect teachers' performance (Larry *et al.*, 2014) ^[35].

Self-efficacy is strongly linked with individual capability to collect their motivation and cognitive abilities to prepare his behaviour to facing situational life (Wood & Bandura, 1989). It influences the amount of effort that is exerted from individuals to achieve their goals. The level of self-efficacy in people may change over a period of time through verbal persuasion and contextual factors, which play important role for novice teachers and also for veteran teachers (Tschannen-Moran, Woolf, & Hoy, 2007) ^[53]. Kalsen, Ming and Chiu (2010) ^[49] asserted that self-efficacy beliefs in the workplace are not stagnant but reflect a lifelong process of development that reflect the personal attributes and interpretation of environmental circumstances. However, the skills of the teacher, knowledge and his work efficiency may change over a period of time with a continuous PLC (Drake, 2002) ^[20].

The relationship between PLC and self-efficacy among teachers has been identified by previous studies (Anthony, 2011; Weathers, 2009; Beauchamp, Klassen, Parsons, Durksen, & Taylor, 2014) ^[35, 19]. The implementation of the PLC approach at schools brings about favourable results for teachers performance and student achievement, moreover the impact of PLC extends to the psychological aspect of teachers. The study of Anthony (2011) ^[19] on the effect of PLC on the teachers' self-efficacy, found that implementation of PLC in schools develops teachers 'sense of self-efficacy and as a result, he recommended that PLC be established to develop self-efficacy in schools.

In addition, identified the relation among PLC components and teachers' self- efficacy and confirmed that a strong correlation among PLC components and self-efficacy. Beauchamp *et al.* (2014) ^[14] also confirmed a strong positive correlation between PLC and collective self-efficacy variables among teachers. Physical education teachers faced indifference situation from policy maker that resulted in lack of self-efficacy sense. PLC programs assist physical education teachers to exit from isolation to collaborative work and rebuild modern curriculum and standards and moving them forward with favourable beliefs about own capabilities (Beddoes, Prusak, & Hall, 2014) ^[17].

Furthermore, Ross, Hogaboam, Gray and Gray (2003) illustrated that sense of self-efficacy is developed when school interest about student achievement, economic and social status in school and sharing practice increases. Hipp (1997) examined the effect of leadership style and teachers self-efficacy which produced a clear picture about the efficacious role of leaders to improve teachers' self-efficacy. The study recommended the adoption of transformation in leadership to improve teachers' self-efficacy which is an essential factor in PLC approach. Hord (1997) ^[27] urged that the establishment of ideal PLC environment should include sharing practice and responsibilities to notice and analyse student progress. Hence, this reveals that PLC environment will affect self-efficacy among teachers.

3. Methodology

This study employed a cross-sectional survey and correlation research design as the foundation to achieve the research aims. This design gives the means to identify the direction and strength of relationship between PLC and self-efficacy among teachers. The target population is the physical education teachers in the four provinces located in the

Southern Iraq, namely Bassra, Nasserite, Maysan, and Diwaniya. The choice of these provinces was due to these provinces having taken the initiative in implementing PLC project to improve teachers and students performance in Iraq (Al-Sudany, 2008).

Samples for this study were chosen using a cluster sampling technique due to the location of the study population in different geographical areas as suggested by Olsen and George (2004) [42]. Two hundred and seventy four PE teachers were randomly selected as respondents of the study. Hence, 86 teachers were selected from Bassra, 73 teachers from Nasserite, 63 teachers from Maysan and 52 teachers from Diwaniya.

In order to collect data, two standardized questionnaires were used in this study, namely Professional Learning Community Assessment – Revised (PLCA-R), and Physical Education Teachers Physical Activity Self-Efficacy Scale (PETPAS). PLCA-R was developed by Olivier, Antoine, Cormier, Lewis, Mincler and Stadalis (2009) and consists of five dimensions: 1) shared value and vision, 2) collective learning and application, 3) shared personal practice, 4) collective learning and application, and 5) relationship and structure. Fifty two (52) items was established on a 5-point Liker scale ranging between 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. PETPAS was developed by Martin and Kulinna (2003) [37] and consists

of four dimensions; its student, space, time and institution. Each dimension have four items, also use a 5-point Liker scale ranging between 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree as scale for respondent choices.

Prior to data collection, a pilot test was conducted using 30 respondents to check the internal consistency of the questionnaires. The result of the pilot test showed a Cronbach’s alpha value of 0.96 for PLC and 0.90 for self-efficacy, indicating a reliable measure for PLC and self-efficacy. Hence, the questionnaires were utilized to collect actual data.

4. Findings

Prior to data analysis, 20 questionnaires were discarded due to outlier data. Only 254 questionnaires were analysed. The study employed both the descriptive analysis such as mean and standard deviation to describe the level of teachers’ perception on PLC and teacher’s self-efficacy. Inferential statistics such as Pearson product moment correlation was used to determine the strength and magnitude of the relationship between PLC and self-efficacy among teachers in Iraq. Due to the use of five points Likert scale, categories of mean in Table 1 was utilized to identify the level of PLC and self-efficacy.

Table 1: Category of Mean to Identify the Level of PLC and Self-Efficacy

description	Very low level	Low level	Moderate level	High level	Very high level
Category of Mean	1.00 – 1.80	1.81 – 2.60	2.61 – 3.40	3.41 – 4.20	4.21 – 5.00

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics that explains the level of PLC and teacher’s self-efficacy among teachers in

Iraq secondary schools after removing outliers’ value.

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation for PLC and Self-Efficacy

Dimensions of PLC	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Dev.
PLC Overall	254	1.75	3.24	2.54	.33
Overall Self-Efficacy	254	2.38	4.13	3.4	.25

The result in Table 2 shows that the mean of PLC is 2.54, and self-efficacy is 3.4. However PLC mean fall in low level between 1.81 – 2.60. That indicates that physical education teachers bear negative perception regard PLC, since the mean illustrate the most respondent’s choices on questionnaire fall in disagree area. Whilst self-efficacy mean indicate most responses fall between disagree and mid-point (don’t know).

It means the PE teachers’ self-efficacy is between below to moderate level.

In order to answer the question: is there any relationship between PLC and PE teachers’ self-efficacy in Iraq; this study conducted a Pearson product moment correlation. Table 3 presents the result of the correlation analysis.

Table 3: Relationship between Professional Learning Community and Teachers’ Self-Efficacy

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable: Teachers’ Self-Efficacy
Professional Learning Community (PLC)	-.241**
Sig. (p) (2tails)	.01
N	254

The result in Table 3 shows that there was a negative correlation between PLC and teaches’ self-efficacy ($r(254) = -.241, p < .01$). Since the significant level ($p = .01$) is smaller than .05, then the relationship between PLC and teachers’ self-efficacy is significant.

5. Discussions

Result shows that the practicing PLC in Iraq as perceived by physical education teachers is still at low level. Its mean that teachers still preferred isolation culture which it pervasive in Iraq’s schools (Tama, 2011) [52].

In theory, PLC implementation is to develop teacher’s

knowledge and skills through an ongoing process, collaboration among teacher in assessing students’ progress, curriculums, teaching strategies and analysis data of student to find common ground to tackle school and student issue and garner teachers opportunities to acquire knowledge, in contrast with old professional development which rooted isolation and encourage routine in teachers’ behaviours (Hord, 1997) [27].

Collaboration among professional survive in developing teachers knowledge and performance, stay away from collaboration among professional connote to loss precious source of information, and this hold passive effect on teachers

performance (Strahan, 2003) ^[42]. Collaboration activities through PLC is beneficial to PE teachers to solve their problems because physical activity (PA) teachers always facing a groups of students with different abilities and attitudes (Hanger & Chatzisaranti, 2005; Paul & Robert, 2006) ^[25], and without collaboration, it may contribute to low performance of physical education teachers' performance in Iraq. However the PLC implementation in Iraq schools is weak. Mohammad (2013) ^[38] pointed out that the failure of PLC due to schools did not provide teachers with essential need such schedule, time, plan and physical climate to conduct PLC activities, this in turn make PLC as extra onus bring about unfavourable feeling from teachers.

Also the majority of Iraq physical education teachers did not perceived their abilities well, since most of them chosen mid-point (don't know). It means that the self-efficacy of PE teachers is at low level. Bandura (1997) ^[36] argued that the individuals with low self-efficacy did not hold clear image regarding their abilities, and this sense make them reluctant to accomplish their job and avoid any challenges, hence no progress in their performance. Teacher with positive self-efficacy will reflect in his actions, such as high resilience, deliberate plans and perseverance in teaching operation (Bandura, 1994) ^[13]. explained that teachers with positive sense of self-efficacy are able to manage their class successfully, motivate students (even those with low motivation) to engage in class, and use different strategies to teach.

Regarding the relationships between of PLC and self-efficacy, this study reveals that there is negative correlation between them. Although Hord (1997) ^[27] and Olivier *et al.* (2000) argued that PLC generates a circle of continuous professional development for teachers, in knowledge, experiences and skills and in turn elevate their self-efficacy, but this study fail to support Hord (1997) ^[27] and Olivier *et al.* (2000) arguments. The findings of this study is different with studies conducted by Pirtle and Tobia (2014) ^[48], Cushman (1996) and Al-Ataaby (2008) ^[2]. However the current result is consistent with the findings of Al-Nwary study (2009) ^[4] on Iraq environment which manifested a negative correlation. This result is attributed to the weakness in collaboration culture and experiences in conducting PLC in Iraqi schools.

Explained that teachers' professional development come into being when teacher work collaboratively through knowledge sharing to specify mistakes and misapplications. Sharing knowledge take place between two persons in which one has knowledge and the second person need this knowledge. Transferring this knowledge take place in various types such as putting this knowledge in action, observe other to use this knowledge, interaction with experts through using specific knowledge and discuss with other who wanted knowledge. This represents an external phase to attain knowledge, internal phase also take different types such as reading book for deep understanding, applying this to acquire extra knowledge, then develop this knowledge and deliver to others. These two phases need a conducive physical environment, time, place; communications with specialist to accomplish attainment and delivered knowledge (Hendriks, 1999) ^[27]. placed emphasis on interaction among individuals in social environment that interaction will be a pathway to get vicarious experience, feedback and emotional support, which influence on one's self-efficacy and experience sufficiently. Therefore schools' administration is responsible for providing teachers with objective appraisal and feedback to enhance teacher's self-efficacy and collective efficacy (Pajares, 2002) ^[46]. Further

teachers when hold positive self-efficacy will devote great deal of time to take advantage from education sources in order to elevate his skills, knowledge and strategies. Most often teachers whom hold positive sense of efficacy reappraisal their performance and student progress, upon that identify theirs need, and after that use available resources to abridge gap in his performance (Pirtle & Tobia, 2014) ^[48]. For this role of social environment in promoting personal effectiveness, administrators have full responsibility to create collaborative culture, as well as responsible for providing teachers with place, time, schedule and communication means.

Hoy, Tarter and Wiskowskie (1992) ^[31] clarified that leadership and organizations' polices are necessary factor for creating social climate with full of trust, and to boost teachers' efficacy and performance. Overlooking the psychological needs for teachers will results in obstructing teacher's progress (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1990) ^[45]. The current study revealed that PLC environment in Iraqi country did not boost PE teachers' self-efficacy.

Although Iraq Education Ministry instructed schools to implement PLC, there is spark apathy in applying reform because of the fluctuations in education policies and actions that bring about misapplication which passively affect teacher's propensity to apply PLC project, and hence teachers did not obtain the desired benefit (Al-Bazziz, 2013) ^[3]. illustrated that Iraqi's schools are managed individually by manager who do not pay much attention to the psychological needs of teachers. Hence, ample time, place and fit schedule are not given to teachers.

6. Recommendations

Although this study found that there is a negative correlation between PLC and PE teachers' self-efficacy, but it does not mean the PLC should be ignored. Therefore this study suggested that in order to make PLC a success, a proper plan should be considered. Establishing environment for PLC implementation and a proper schedule is needed because in reality teachers are eager to gain new knowledge and techniques of teaching, and hence elevating their self-efficacy. Lee, Dedrick and Smith, (2014) argued that the support from principal and administrators, and recognition for teachers' jobs will enhance teaches sense of self-efficacy. Therefore, Iraq Education Ministry should conduct a study to determine the obstacles which obstruct that implementation of PLC (Al-Bazziz, 2013; Al-Rawy; 2015; Al-Nwary, 2009) ^[3]. Hord (1997) ^[27] illustrated that schools leaderships and administration are responsible in ensuring the success of PLC and drive teachers to active sharing knowledge and experiences among them. Prior to this, confirmed that positive social environment gives big boost to sense of self-efficacy. Therefore, school leadership and administrators have to play crucial role to ensure the success of implementing PLC at their schools. Apart from that, it is suggested for researchers to replicate this study in other population in Iraq using other method such as mix methods and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to confirm this finding.

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