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Principal Leadership in the Development of Professional Learning Communities in Public High Schools Kampar Regency

Resi Yenita*, Dwi Esti Andriani
Educational Management, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Yogyakarta 55281, Indonesia

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* *Corresponding author:*

E-mail: resiyenita.2024@student.uny.ac.id

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A B S T R A C T

School quality improvement increasingly depends on teacher collaboration and continuous professional development, making Professional Learning Communities (PLCs/KBP) a strategic mechanism in strengthening learning culture in schools. This study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of principals' leadership in developing PLCs at public high schools in Kampar Regency, focusing on principals' views of PLC urgency, implementation challenges, and leadership practices in planning, managing, and evaluating PLC activities. The research employed a qualitative approach with a basic qualitative design. Informants were selected using maximum variation sampling, involving principals, vice principals, PLC coordinators, and teachers from six public high schools. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and documentation, then analyzed using thematic analysis through initial coding, categorization, and theme development. Trustworthiness was ensured through source and technique triangulation, member checking, and audit trails. Findings show that principals perceive PLCs as collective learning spaces for sharing good practices and collaboratively solving instructional problems, rather than administrative routines. Key challenges include limited time, perceptions of PLCs as additional burdens, digital competence gaps, inconsistent attendance, and shallow reflection. Principals addressed these through participatory, instructional, and distributive leadership, enabling flexible scheduling, data-based evaluation, structured reflection, and reinforcement. Overall, effective principal leadership strengthens collaborative culture and enhances teacher professionalism.

1. Introduction

Twenty-first century learning requires a fundamental shift in the educational paradigm, in which teachers are no longer positioned as the sole source of knowledge, but as facilitators who guide students to think critically, creatively, and collaboratively. This transformation demands continuous strengthening of teachers'

professional competencies through systematic and sustainable development mechanisms. At the global level, improving educational quality has become an unavoidable imperative, and teachers are positioned as the frontline actors who directly determine the effectiveness of learning processes (Anwar et al., 2020; Istiqomah, 2022). Consequently, the development of teacher professionalism is no longer optional but constitutes a strategic necessity for achieving superior educational standards.

Along with the increasing complexity of educational challenges, the demand for continuous professional development has also intensified. The traditional view of teachers as individual workers is gradually shifting toward a collaborative professional culture, where teachers collectively construct knowledge, share experiences, and reflect on instructional practices. Within this context, the Professional Learning Community (PLC), or Komunitas Belajar Profesional (KBP), functions as a crucial vehicle for sustained professional growth. Qiao et al., (2018) emphasize that collaborative professional communities enable teachers to exchange insights, discuss classroom problems, and disseminate best practices in a structured manner. Empirical evidence supports this view.

From a juridical perspective, the development of teacher learning communities in Indonesia is strongly supported by national education policies. The Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 15 of 2018 on Teachers' Workload explicitly mandates teachers to participate in Continuous Professional Development (CPD), including through learning communities. Furthermore, Regulation No. 16 of 2022 on Process Standards requires schools to organize collective teacher activities to improve instructional quality. These policies reaffirm that PLCs are not merely voluntary initiatives but institutional obligations within the national framework for educational quality assurance.

Conceptually, DuFour et al., (2006) define the Professional Learning Community as a collaborative approach to school improvement that emphasizes collective responsibility for student learning. PLCs are built upon three core principles: a consistent focus on student learning outcomes, collaborative problem-solving among teachers, and the systematic use of data for continuous improvement. When implemented effectively, PLCs are proven to enhance instructional quality and teacher performance. Meanwhile, Hord (2004) identifies five essential dimensions of PLCs: supportive leadership, shared vision and values, collective learning, collaborative work, and results-oriented action. Both frameworks underline that sustainable educational improvement depends on structured collaboration rather than isolated individual efforts.

Field observations conducted at one public senior high school in Kampar Regency indicate that the school has formally established four Professional Learning Communities as part of its strategy to improve instructional quality and teacher professionalism. These communities serve as collaborative forums where teachers discuss instructional challenges, exchange teaching experiences, and jointly seek solutions to classroom problems. The main functions of these PLCs include: providing structured discussion spaces for problem-solving in teaching and

educational services; facilitating professional learning through the sharing of knowledge, instructional methods, and learning media; strengthening professional interaction and collaboration among teachers; enhancing individual competence through collective reflection; and integrating real classroom experiences into systematic professional discourse. Ideally, the presence of PLCs should foster an active, collaborative, and sustainable learning culture within the school.

However, despite their formal establishment, the implementation of PLCs continues to face serious challenges. At the national level, PLCs are often constrained by heavy teacher workloads, ranging from classroom instruction and administrative duties to interactions with students and parents. These demands consume most of teachers' time and energy, creating a substantial gap between the need for continuous professional learning and the realities of daily school routines. As a result, PLCs MacBeath (2010) are frequently perceived not as strategic tools for professional growth, but as additional burdens that compete with teachers' primary responsibilities.

This condition is clearly reflected in public senior high schools in Kampar Regency. Interview findings reveal that teachers' active participation in PLC activities remains relatively low. Routine meetings are difficult to conduct consistently due to densely packed schedules and individual workload pressures. Limited school facilities, including inadequate meeting spaces and restricted access to instructional technology, further narrow opportunities for collaboration. Moreover, a number of teachers have not yet fully understood the long-term benefits of PLCs for improving instructional quality, which weakens their motivation to engage actively.

In addressing these challenges, the role of the school principal becomes critically important. As the highest authority within the school organization, the principal holds a strategic position in mobilizing teachers to participate in PLC activities. Effective principals are expected to foster a collaborative climate, provide adequate resources, and ensure that the necessary facilities and time allocations support PLC implementation. asserts that principals should function not merely as administrative managers but as learning leaders who actively promote collaboration, reflection, and collective inquiry among teachers. This leadership orientation is further reinforced by the Ministerial Regulation No. 6 of 2018 on the Assignment of Teachers as Principals, which mandates principals to lead instructional improvement, develop school culture, and facilitate teacher professional growth through learning communities.

As instructional leaders, principals are responsible for designing and implementing school policies that ensure the sustainability of PLCs. Beyond administrative control, principals must act as facilitators who cultivate inclusive and collaborative professional cultures. Effective leadership ensures that teachers feel valued, supported, and encouraged to participate actively in PLC activities. Structural and emotional support from principals is therefore a decisive factor in transforming PLCs from formal structures into living communities of professional practice.

Previous studies have consistently highlighted the importance of principal leadership in the development of PLCs. Susanto (2016) found that participatory and supportive leadership significantly increases teachers' engagement in learning communities. Rachmawati (2017) concluded that PLC success is strongly influenced by principals' commitment to fostering collaborative school cultures. Sutrisno (2018) demonstrated that transformational leadership plays a central role in strengthening teachers' collective learning motivation. Lestari (2019) emphasized the principal's role as a learning leader in designing and sustaining PLC programs, while Wulandari (2020) identified structural and emotional support as key determinants of PLC effectiveness.

Despite these contributions, previous research tends to focus primarily on leadership styles and structural support from a conceptual or normative perspective. There remains a paucity of in-depth analysis regarding the actual contribution of PLCs to the improvement of teachers' professional competence and instructional quality, particularly within specific local contexts. Moreover, many earlier studies rely predominantly on quantitative or descriptive approaches, leaving teachers' lived experiences, perceptions, and leadership strategies largely unexplored through qualitative inquiry. The application of MacBeath's leadership framework as an analytical lens for PLC development is also still relatively limited in existing studies.

This research is conducted to address these gaps by examining teacher participation, the role of the principal in facilitating PLC sustainability, and the contribution of PLC implementation to the enhancement of teacher professional competence and instructional quality in public senior high schools in Kampar Regency. By employing a qualitative approach, this study seeks to uncover in depth the leadership strategies, institutional challenges, and practical dynamics of PLC implementation in a regional school context. Practically, the findings are expected to inform the design of an effective leadership model for strengthening educational quality through the optimization of Professional Learning Communities.

2. Methodology

This study employs a basic qualitative research approach to understand the meanings constructed by individuals regarding their experiences in developing KBP at public high schools in Kampar Regency, emphasizing interpretation and explanation of social phenomena from participants' perspectives rather than statistical generalization. The research was conducted from July to November in six schools, namely SMAN 1 Kampar Timur, SMAN 2 Kampar Timur, SMAN 1 Tambang, SMAN 1 Kampar, SMAN 1 Bangkinang Kota, and SMAN 2 Bangkinang Kota, selected for their relevance to the research focus and variation in school characteristics as well as their implementation of KBP within learning quality improvement programs. Data were obtained from primary sources through in-depth semi-structured interviews with principals as key informants, supported by vice principals, KBP coordinators, and teachers, and from secondary sources comprising official documents such as school vision and mission statements, work programs,

KBP meeting minutes, activity reports, internal policies, and relevant literature on leadership and KBP. Informants were selected using maximum variation sampling to capture diverse experiences across different school contexts. Data collection relied on semi-structured interviews and documentation to allow flexible yet focused exploration and to corroborate interview findings; observation was not conducted due to the study's emphasis on subjective experiences and constraints in time and access. The interview guidelines were developed based on PLC theory (DuFour), Leadership for Learning (MacBeath), PLC effectiveness theory (Hord), and Permendikbud No. 16 of 2022 concerning collective teacher activities, and were structured around three research foci, namely principals' views on KBP, leadership challenges in developing KBP, and principals' leadership practices in planning, managing, and evaluating KBP, as presented in table 1.

Table 1. Research Questions and Interview Questions on PLC Development

Research Questions	Interview Questions
1. Principals' views on Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)	The principal's understanding of the PLC concept. The principal's views on the benefits of KBP for teachers and schools. The principal's expectations for the development of KBP.
2. School principals' leadership practices in developing KBP	1. The role of principals in planning KBP programs. 2. Principal's strategies to encourage teacher involvement in KBP. 3. Principal actions in monitoring, evaluating, and supporting facilities for KBP
3. The principal's challenges in developing KBP	Internal challenges: teacher participation, time constraints, and teacher competence. External obstacles: policy support, school environment, and external resources. The principal's strategies in overcoming these obstacles.

In this study, data validity was ensured by emphasizing credibility through source triangulation involving principals, vice principals, KBP coordinators, and teachers, as well as technique triangulation by comparing evidence from interviews and documentation. Credibility was further strengthened through member checking, namely confirming the summaries of interview findings with informants to ensure the accuracy of meaning and interpretation, and through audit trails by systematically documenting each stage of data collection and analysis so the research process could be tracked transparently. In addition, data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, beginning with verbatim transcription of interview recordings, followed by repeated reading to build a comprehensive understanding of the data. The researcher then carried out initial (open) coding by identifying units of meaning relevant to the research focus, grouped the codes into categories to form provisional themes, and finally reviewed and refined these themes into major themes that represent patterns and explanations of principals' leadership in developing KBP.

3. Results and Discussion

Research Results

The research was conducted in six public senior high schools (SMA Negeri) in Kampar Regency, Riau Province, Indonesia, representing varied institutional histories, accreditation levels, and local contexts that shape the dynamics of KBP/PLC development. The selected schools include SMAN 1 Kampar Timur (NPSN 10400367), located on Jl. Negara KM.40 Pekanbaru–Bangkinang in Desa Pulau Rambai, Kecamatan Kampa, which has been established since 1981, holds Accreditation A, and is led by Principal Yus Yetti, with a school vision emphasizing excellence in academic and non-academic achievement grounded in strong moral character. SMAN 2 Kampar Timur (NPSN 10496886), situated on Jl. Cempaka in Desa Pulau Birandang, Kampar Timur, was founded in 2009, is led by Principal Gindo Mandalasa, holds Accreditation B, and has adopted the Kurikulum Merdeka, reflecting a relatively newer institutional trajectory compared to other schools in this study. In addition, the study included SMAN 1 Tambang (NPSN 10400371), located on Jl. Pekanbaru–Bangkinang Km. 29 in Desa Sungai Pinang, Kecamatan Tambang, led by Principal Khairullah, accredited A, and widely recognized for both academic and non-academic achievement, with the Kurikulum Merdeka implemented to support comprehensive student development.

Two further research sites represent long-established public schools with strong reputations and strategic positions within Kampar Regency. SMAN 1 Kampar (NPSN 10400343), located in Air Tiris on the Pekanbaru–Bangkinang main route, is one of the prominent senior high schools in the area, with a long institutional history since 1977, Accreditation A, and the Kurikulum Merdeka as its current curriculum orientation, indicating strong organizational capacity and relatively stable governance traditions. SMAN 1 Bangkinang Kota (NPSN 10400365), located on Jl. Jend. Sudirman No. 65, Kelurahan Langgini, occupies a strategic location in the regency capital and is widely regarded as a flagship school; it holds Accreditation A and offers both science and social science tracks (IPA and IPS). Historically, this school evolved from a private high school established in 1963 into a public school, demonstrating institutional adaptability and sustained community demand for quality secondary education. Meanwhile, SMAN 2 Bangkinang Kota (NPSN 10400358), located on Jl. Dr. A. Rahman Saleh No. 55, is also an accredited A public high school implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka and is recognized as a key educational institution in Bangkinang, supported by formal organizational structures and accessible communication channels (school email and official website).

Overall, these six schools were chosen not merely for administrative convenience, but to capture variations in school maturity, accreditation status, leadership contexts, and curricular implementation that are likely to influence how KBP/PLCs are understood, organized, and sustained in everyday practice. The diversity of settings enables the study to examine KBP development across different organizational realities, including differences in teacher workload patterns, institutional routines, and the availability of structures that support collaboration

and reflection. By situating the findings within this multi-site context, the results section can be interpreted more critically, particularly when explaining why certain enabling factors (such as leadership support, role distribution, and structured reflection routines) work effectively in some schools, while persistent barriers (such as administrative overload, inconsistent participation, and varying conceptual understanding of PLCs) remain more dominant in others.

Principals' Views on Professional Learning Communities

Across the six public high schools in Kampar Regency, principals consistently positioned Professional Learning Communities (PLCs/KBP) as a core strategy for improving instructional quality through collaboration, reflection, and shared learning, rather than as an administrative routine. Principals described KBP as a collective learning space where teachers can exchange practices, test ideas, and learn from classroom realities, which reflects an orientation toward continuous improvement instead of episodic training. This view implies that the principal does not treat teacher development as something external that only happens through workshops, but as a daily professional process built inside the school. Several principals emphasized that the most important output of KBP is not the meeting minutes, but changes in teacher practice such as improved lesson design, more meaningful assessment, and more deliberate reflection on student learning evidence. In this framing, KBP becomes a cultural instrument to shift work patterns from isolated teaching to collaborative professionalism, where teaching is no longer a private activity but a shared responsibility. Principals also highlighted the urgency of KBP in responding to complex classroom challenges, including diverse student needs, changes in curriculum demands, and pressure for learning outcomes, which cannot be solved effectively by teachers working individually. Overall, principals' views indicate that KBP is understood as a vehicle for building the school as a learning organization, where teachers are positioned as lifelong learners and professional partners in school improvement.

Principals further linked KBP to teacher empowerment and professional agency, suggesting that teachers should not remain "technical implementers" of policy but become co-constructors of instructional improvement agendas. In practice, this perspective appears in how principals encouraged teachers to identify real classroom problems, select improvement themes, and develop solutions collaboratively, rather than merely receiving directives from leadership. This approach reflects a shift from compliance-based professionalism to inquiry-based professionalism, where teachers are expected to generate knowledge from their own practice through reflection, evidence use, and peer dialogue. Principals believed that when KBP is implemented properly, it strengthens professional identity because teachers experience recognition of expertise, a sense of ownership, and shared accountability for learning quality. However, principals also acknowledged that the empowerment ideal is not automatically achieved, because it depends on whether teachers share a common understanding of PLC concepts, whether the school environment supports openness and psychological safety, and whether teachers see direct instructional benefits. Therefore, principals' views carry an implicit requirement: KBP must be designed as a disciplined learning process with

clear routines, evidence-based discussion, and consistent follow-up, otherwise it risks becoming another meeting that fails to transform teaching practice. This indicates that principals perceive KBP as a strategic instrument whose effectiveness is contingent on both cultural readiness and structural support inside the school.

Challenges in Developing KBP

Although KBP is widely perceived as strategic, its development in Kampar Regency public high schools faces interconnected barriers that operate at structural, cultural, and capacity levels, creating a systemic bottleneck for sustainable PLC practice. The most frequently reported obstacle is not simply "lack of time," but the way teacher work is structurally organized: teaching hours, lesson preparation, grading, student mentoring, extracurricular responsibilities, and administrative reporting compete with collaborative learning time without a protected schedule. When KBP is placed after teaching hours or inserted between routine tasks, teacher fatigue increases and participation becomes vulnerable to disruptions from other school programs, which weakens continuity and reduces the cumulative learning cycle expected in PLCs. Administrative workload functions as a powerful competing priority, because compliance tasks are treated as urgent and non-negotiable, while KBP is perceived as flexible and therefore easier to postpone or shorten. This imbalance produces fluctuating attendance and fragmented discussions, where issues identified in one meeting cannot be revisited systematically in subsequent meetings. As a result, KBP risks becoming episodic rather than iterative, which undermines the PLC principle of continuous improvement through repeated inquiry and action. In short, the structural design of work time and task distribution becomes a root cause that amplifies other barriers, including reduced motivation and shallow reflection.

Cultural barriers also emerged strongly, particularly in schools where teaching is historically individualistic and classroom practice is treated as private territory, which limits openness to peer feedback and reduces psychological safety for reflective dialogue. In such contexts, teachers may attend KBP but remain passive because genuine reflection requires admitting instructional weaknesses, sharing student learning problems, and accepting critique, all of which can be socially risky in environments that equate feedback with blame. This helps explain why "depth of reflection" is inconsistent: reflection is not merely a cognitive skill but a social practice that depends on trust, norms of mutual support, and a shared belief that critique is a professional process rather than a personal threat. When the dominant culture is "do your own job and avoid interference," KBP discussions tend to remain at the surface level, focusing on general ideas rather than evidence-based analysis of specific teaching episodes or student work. Furthermore, the study found that some teachers still misunderstand KBP as an additional program or an administrative obligation rather than a professional learning method embedded in daily instructional work. This misconception creates transactional participation, where teachers attend primarily to fulfill requirements, while the discussion shifts toward documentation, formalities, and announcements instead of collaborative inquiry. Consequently, motivation declines over time, especially during periods of

high workload, and KBP becomes vulnerable to being seen as a burden rather than a solution to instructional challenges.

Capacity-related obstacles, especially digital competence gaps and weak documentation habits, function as multipliers that reduce the sustainability and coherence of KBP processes. In schools attempting to use online platforms, shared documents, or digital evidence repositories, uneven digital skills create unequal participation patterns where a few teachers become technical operators while others disengage, weakening collective ownership. Documentation is essential in PLC because it preserves the learning cycle: problem identification, intervention planning, implementation, evidence review, and agreement on next steps, which enables the community to progress rather than repeat. When teachers are not accustomed to writing reflections, organizing shared files, or presenting classroom evidence systematically, KBP sessions become isolated events without a clear memory of what has been learned. This also worsens attendance problems because teachers who miss sessions cannot easily reconnect to the process if there are no accessible records or summaries that capture decisions and evidence. Therefore, digital competence is not a secondary issue, but directly affects the quality of reflective inquiry and the long-term accumulation of professional learning. Overall, these challenges demonstrate that KBP development is constrained by a combined loop of structural overload, cultural resistance, and capacity gaps, which must be addressed as an integrated system rather than as separate problems.

Principals' Leadership Practices in KBP Development

To respond to these complex barriers, principals implemented leadership practices that can be interpreted as a combination of participatory leadership, instructional or learning leadership, and distributive leadership, aiming to strengthen ownership while maintaining a focus on teaching and learning improvement. In the planning stage, principals involved vice principals, KBP coordinators, and teacher representatives to determine themes, formats, and schedules, which increased legitimacy because decisions were produced through collective agreement rather than top-down instruction. Participatory planning also allowed KBP agendas to align more closely with teachers' perceived needs and classroom challenges, which reduces resistance and increases the likelihood of meaningful participation. Principals used flexible scheduling strategies such as rotating meeting times, integrating KBP with existing professional routines, or adjusting frequency based on workload peaks, which reflects an attempt to redesign structure so KBP becomes feasible rather than aspirational. At the same time, principals emphasized that flexibility should not reduce seriousness; instead, it should protect KBP from being displaced by competing activities while maintaining a consistent rhythm of professional learning. By connecting KBP themes to real instructional problems, principals attempted to improve perceived relevance, because relevance is a key factor that transforms KBP from an "extra activity" into a tool for solving daily teaching challenges.

In terms of learning leadership, principals encouraged KBP discussions to be grounded in evidence such as student achievement data, classroom observation

notes, assessment results, and teacher reflections, aiming to shift KBP from information exchange to inquiry-based analysis. This practice is critical because it increases the depth of reflection and reduces the tendency toward superficial discussions that do not lead to instructional change. Principals also facilitated reflective routines by asking guiding questions, supporting lesson study-like activities, and encouraging teachers to bring concrete examples of classroom dilemmas, which helps cultivate a culture where teachers can discuss problems without fear of judgment. Distributive leadership appeared through the appointment of KBP coordinators, session facilitators, and internal resource persons, enabling teachers with certain expertise to lead professional sharing and skill-building. This distribution can increase teacher agency and strengthen ownership, particularly when teachers experience recognition for expertise and feel responsible for the community's learning. However, principals also monitored quality by regularly reviewing KBP outcomes, gathering feedback, and adjusting program components, which shows an evaluative cycle consistent with continuous improvement. Overall, leadership practices in this study demonstrate that principals attempted to address structural, cultural, and capacity barriers simultaneously through collaborative planning, evidence-based learning routines, role distribution, and ongoing evaluation.

Discussion

Principal Leadership as a Driver of Learning Culture and Organizational Change

The finding that principals view KBP as a collective reflection and collaboration space reinforces the logic of Leadership for Learning which places learning processes, teacher capacity building, and instructional improvement at the center of school leadership priorities (MacBeath, 2010). Critically, the evidence in this study suggests that the principal's role is not merely managerial, such as scheduling KBP meetings or ensuring administrative compliance, but cultural and organizational, namely redefining what counts as "professional work" in the school. In schools where professionalism has historically been interpreted as individual classroom competence and compliance with administrative requirements, KBP functions as a cultural intervention that challenges the traditional privacy of teaching and replaces it with collective inquiry and shared responsibility for learning outcomes. This interpretation aligns with the PLC concept that emphasizes collaboration, shared norms, and reflective dialogue as mechanisms for continuous improvement, rather than one-time training events (Hord, 2004; DuFour, 2004). However, the persistence of inconsistent attendance and uneven reflection depth implies that cultural change cannot be achieved through policy statements alone; it requires sustained leadership that protects time, models inquiry, and strengthens psychological safety so that critique is experienced as professional support rather than personal threat. Therefore, principals act as culture builders who translate PLC ideals into daily routines, norms, and incentives, and this leadership function becomes a key determinant of whether KBP becomes an authentic learning community or remains a symbolic activity with limited instructional impact (MacBeath, 2010; DuFour, 2004).

Structural and Cultural Barriers as an Interacting System, Not Separate Problems

The challenges identified in this study, such as time constraints, administrative burdens, individualistic culture, misconceptions about PLC, and digital competence gaps, should not be interpreted as isolated obstacles, but as an interacting system that can trap KBP in formality. From a structural standpoint, heavy workload reduces the available time and energy for collaborative inquiry, which tends to push KBP into rushed sessions and shallow discussions, thereby lowering perceived benefits and reinforcing teacher beliefs that KBP is an "additional burden" rather than a solution. From a cultural standpoint, individualistic norms and low psychological safety weaken openness to peer critique, which is essential for deep reflection and shared learning, and this makes KBP drift toward safe, surface-level sharing rather than disciplined inquiry into classroom evidence. In PLC theory, the sustainability of collaborative learning depends on the presence of supportive conditions, shared vision, collective responsibility, and continuous reflective practice, meaning that without organizational restructuring and cultural reinforcement, PLCs often devolve into meetings that prioritize routines over learning (Hord, 2004; DuFour, 2004). The results of this study support that pattern: when KBP is not integrated into the core structure of teacher work and is not supported by shared conceptual understanding, participation becomes transactional and the PLC cycle cannot accumulate learning across time. Consequently, interventions that target only attendance or only scheduling will likely be insufficient unless they address the broader alignment between work structure, shared meaning, and professional capacity that makes PLC participation rational, valuable, and sustainable (Hord, 2004; DuFour, 2004).

Distributed Leadership and Teacher Empowerment: Potential and Risks

The distributive leadership practices found in this study, such as appointing KBP coordinators, facilitators, and internal resource persons, are consistent with the argument that teacher leadership strengthens school improvement by expanding collective capacity and making professional learning less dependent on a single leader (York-Barr & Duke, 2008). In the PLC context, distributing leadership can increase ownership because teachers experience recognition, agency, and responsibility for the community's learning process, which can shift KBP from being perceived as a principal's program into a teacher-driven professional practice (DuFour, 2004). However, the study's evidence about uneven reflection depth also implies a critical risk: distribution may become mere delegation, where KBP becomes the coordinator's burden while other teachers remain passive participants. This risk is well known in leadership practices that distribute tasks without building shared norms and inquiry standards, because leadership distribution alone does not automatically produce high-quality collaborative learning. Therefore, distributive leadership in PLC development requires guardrails in the form of facilitation protocols, evidence-use routines, and reflective dialogue structures so that KBP does not drift into informal sharing that feels comfortable but fails to change classroom practice (York-Barr & Duke, 2008; Hord, 2004). In this sense, distributive leadership must be combined with learning leadership that keeps KBP

anchored to instructional problems, data, and follow-up actions, because PLC effectiveness depends on disciplined inquiry rather than the mere presence of teacher-led sessions (MacBeath, 2010; DuFour, 2004).

Implications for Teacher Professionalism and Instructional Improvement

The study indicates that KBP, when supported by participatory planning, evidence-based reflection, and distributive leadership, can strengthen teacher professionalism through sustained collaboration, shared problem-solving, and continuous learning. Teachers move from isolated practice toward professional dialogue that is grounded in classroom realities, which can improve pedagogical decision-making, assessment literacy, and reflective competence. Importantly, the study suggests that PLC impact is not automatic; it depends on whether KBP produces visible instructional improvements that teachers can experience directly, such as better lesson clarity, improved student engagement, or more effective differentiation strategies. When improvements become visible, the perception of KBP shifts from burden to benefit, and participation becomes internally motivated rather than compliance-driven. Conversely, if KBP remains superficial or disconnected from classroom needs, teachers will rationally prioritize other tasks, especially under heavy administrative workload. Therefore, PLC development should be evaluated not only by the number of meetings held, but by the quality of inquiry processes and the extent to which KBP outcomes influence classroom practice. This perspective reinforces the need for principals to ensure that KBP discussions are anchored in evidence, followed by action, and revisited for evaluation, so that professional learning becomes cumulative and results-oriented.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that principals in public high schools in Kampar Regency generally perceive Professional Learning Communities (PLCs/KBP) as a strategic and urgent instrument for improving learning quality by strengthening collaboration, reflection, and shared professional learning among teachers. Principals do not view KBP merely as an administrative forum, but as a collective space for exchanging good practices and collaboratively solving instructional problems, which positions teachers as lifelong learners and professional partners in school improvement. However, KBP development faces systemic barriers that are structural, cultural, and capacity-based, including overloaded teacher schedules and administrative burdens, individualistic school cultures with limited psychological safety for peer feedback, misconceptions that reduce KBP to an “additional activity,” and uneven digital and documentation competence that weakens cumulative reflective inquiry. In response, principals implement participatory leadership to build ownership in planning, learning leadership to anchor KBP in evidence and reflective routines, and distributive leadership to empower teachers as facilitators and internal resource persons, while sustaining improvement through continuous evaluation and program adjustment. Overall, the effectiveness and sustainability of KBP depend on the alignment of protected time structures, shared understanding of PLC principles, and strengthened teacher capacity for reflective

and data-informed collaboration. Therefore, principal leadership functions not only as program management but as cultural and organizational change leadership that determines whether KBP becomes a genuine learning culture or remains a formal activity with limited impact.

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