

Professional Learning Community as a Predictable Factor of Teacher Leadership Competency Among SJKT Teachers, TS25

Punitha Nelligan @ Nelikan, Fanny Kho Chee Yuet

Faculty of Management and Economics Sultan Idris Education University

35900 Tanjung Malim, Perak, Malaysia

Email: nitha2113@gmail.com, fannykcy@fpe.upsi.edu.my

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Abstract

The Professional Learning Community (PLC) practice is to improve the quality of education to produce human capital that acquires the knowledge and skills of the 21st century. Teacher Leadership Competency (TLC) needs to be nurtured with the aim that teachers can improve their competence and professionalism in their field. Hence, this research identified teachers' PLC dimension value and vision, support, collective, personal, relationship, and structure as predictable factors of Teacher Leadership Competency. This correlation study employed Professional Learning Community and Teacher Leadership Competency Scale (TLCS) instruments to determine the relationship between variables. Note that this study involved 50 teachers as a sample from TS25 primary Tamil schools. Data were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 24. The results of the stepwise multiple linear regression model analysis indicate that PLC dimensions such as supportive condition (structure) and relationship, supportive and shared leadership as well as collective learning and application collectively accounted for 93.1% of the variance changes in TLC among TS25 primary Tamil schools.

To improve TLC, school management to consider professional learning focusing on supportive conditions (structure) and (relationship), supportive and shared leadership, and collective learning and application. This study is expected to be applied as a guide for administrators, teachers, communities, and stakeholders to improve the leadership competence of teachers in line with education policies in Malaysia.

Keywords: Teacher Leadership Competency Professional Learning Communities

Introduction

Over the past few decades, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) have been one of the hottest topics in education (Zhang, Yin, & Wang, 2020). It involves shared governance among the members of the community that will ultimately result in a positive contribution to the change process in school improvement (DuFour & Fullan, 2013). PLC is a learning culture that

requires the school community to learn to generate knowledge and share information to improve student excellence collaboratively (Tai & Omar, 2019).

In fact, at the early stages of the study, the PLC was heavily influenced by the concept of learning organization development introduced by Senge (1990). Meanwhile, Hord (1997) took the initiative to adapt the idea and form a new model that provides a clear picture to principals and teachers about changes in the culture of lifelong learning in schools. Other than that, studies related to PLCs are expanding widely in Western countries and are gaining attention in Asian countries, including Malaysia. Malaysia has cultivated the PLC for student achievement as a country actively transforming the education system.

Apart from student learning gains, professional communities benefit teachers, resulting in higher human, professional, and social capital. There are numerous benefits associated with PLCs, including reducing isolation among teachers, increasing commitment to the school's mission and goals, and sharing responsibility. As a result of participating in PLCs, teachers become well-informed, professionally renewed, and inspired to promote student excellence (Hord, 1997). Despite the added benefit of PLCs, this research examined how this community foster teachers' leadership skills and identified specific actions school teachers should take to empower their students and ensure that their schools continue to have effective PLCs.

Problem Statement

In Malaysia, the PLC program was implemented among teachers in schools in 2011 (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2014), and now its implementation has included all schools throughout Malaysia. As a sign of support for the implementation of the PLC, the Malaysian Ministry of Education has recognized the PLC in the Malaysian Education Development Plan (PPPM) 2013-2025 as an education reform to encourage collaboration among teachers to improve the quality of teaching and learning. To achieve the vision, the Malaysian Ministry of Education (2015) emphasized that the activities of the PLC were implemented, such as sharing knowledge, expertise, teamwork, and collaboration.

Many academic publications support the advantages of PLCs, although more research is needed to demonstrate how effective PLCs can be created and developed in school contexts (Liu, 2019). Hence, An et al (2022) suggest that researchers can study the PLC more widely to serve teachers' professional growth more effectively. There is a need to advance understanding of the concept of PLCs as they are employed and adopted in PLC. According to Ishak, Ismail, & Kamaruddin (2020), data was collected through searches on Google Scholar, Malaysian Citation Index (MyCite), and Scopus discovered that 35 empirical studies on PLCs had been identified based on criteria set through published journal articles and seminar papers.

Note that the PLCs strategy has not been studied much by local researchers even though it has been widely used in Western countries to improve teaching and learning activities (Gunasegaran, Duari, & Phing, 2022). This statement aligns with (Victor, Abdullah, & Kenayathulla, 2021), stating that there is increasing empirical evidence from the practice of PLCs, mostly from Western countries. The results of the current PLCs study in Malaysia are still at the exploratory stage on factors (Abdullah, 2020; Hassan, Ahmad, & Boon, 2019; Hamzah & Jamil, 2019; Zakaria & Ismail, 2020), structure (Yaakob, Hasbulah, Yunus, & Yusuf, 2017), development (Ismail, Abdullah & Othman, 2020) and the level of PLCs practice (Kin, Kareem, & Musa, 2019) only. However, at the grassroots level of PLC implementation, several issues can hinder the PLC culture in schools.

Additionally, most previous studies related to this PLC also involve secondary schools (Pun & Mansor, 2022; Khan, Razak, & Kenayathulla, 2021; Chua, Thien, Lim, Tan, & Guan, 2020; Shuib, 2022; Gunasegaran, Duari, & Phing, 2022). In addition, Kin, Kareem, and Musa (2019), in a study on PLCs, discovered that the level of implementation of PLCs in Chinese national primary schools (SJKC) was quite good in all dimensions. According to Kin et al (2019), this can be linked to the less effective professional development program related to the PLC offered by the Malaysian Ministry of Education. Therefore, the researcher would like to study the level of PLCs practiced to observe the practice of PLCs in primary schools, especially in Tamil primary schools that implement the TS25 program in the Seremban district.

Responsibility as an educator is not an easy thing nowadays. Compared to a teacher's duties 10 or 20 years ago, it is much different as teachers in this era focus not only on teaching but also on leadership duties in school progress. Thus, this study was formed after examining several previous studies about the leadership competencies required in teachers to change the way of leadership in an educational organization that only prioritizes the head teacher's leadership. Hence, the headmaster needs to be able to prepare a line of teachers who meet the competence of strong teacher leadership with the aim that the school can maintain the school's legacy of excellence.

Through analysis and observation of the literature that has been discussed, the researcher observed that research related to TLC, its relationship, and its influence among teachers at the global level has been done a lot and is getting more and more attention. The term TLC is still foreign and less used in schools, even though its role has not been fully understood (Saiful Adli Ab Rahim, Muhammad Faizal A. Ghani, Hamid, Norhanida Samsudin, & Zawawi Ismail. 2021). Moreover, debates and studies about educational leadership in this country are still focused on the leadership of head teachers and teachers. To fill the void of empirical studies related to TLC, researchers would like to study the level of TLC.

Research Objectives

This research aimed towards achieving the following objectives:

- a. To determine teachers' Professional Learning Community (PLC) dimension of supportive leadership, sharing values and vision, collective sharing and applications, sharing personal practices, and supporting as predictable factors of Teacher Leadership Competency.

Research Questions

- b. Is there a teachers' Professional Learning Community (PLC) dimension supportive leadership, sharing values and vision, collective sharing and applications, sharing personal practices, and supporting predict the Teachers' Leadership Competency?

Hypothesis

H₀₁: Teachers' Professional Learning Community (PLC) dimension of supportive leadership, sharing values and vision, collective sharing and applications, sharing personal practices, and supporting does not predict the Teachers' Leadership Competency.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study comprises the dependent and independent variables. This study's dependent variable is TLC, and the independent variable is the PLC. Subsequently, each variable is divided into several dimensions. Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual

framework. TLC includes four dimensions: fostering a collaborative culture, facilitating improvement and establishing standards, modeling leadership, attributes and skills, as well as performing as a referral leader. On the other hand, the dependent variable in this study is the level of the PLC. This is based on supportive and shared leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, supportive condition (structure), and (relationship).

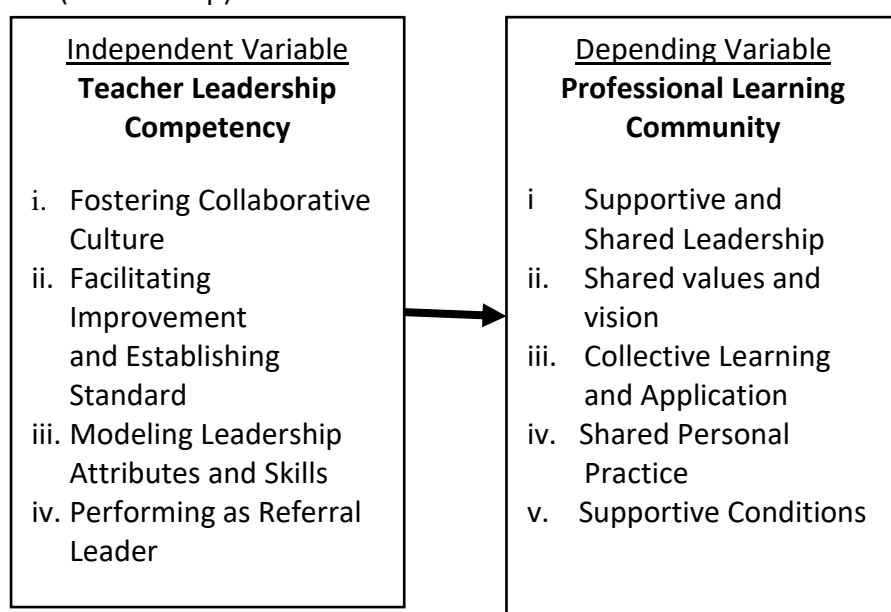


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

Literature Review

Professional Learning Communities Model by Hord (1997)

Hord (1997) has collected empirical data with the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) for over nine years. Through the analysis of empirical data have identified five criteria of PLC which are supportive and shared leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and application, shared personal practice supportive condition (structure), and (relationship).

To ensure the effectiveness of the PLC, all members of the community involved must be active. The teacher's role is not to be an instructor but more than that. Teachers should increase their knowledge and skills by continuously seeking knowledge formally or informally. In this regard, two main goals are highlighted in professional learning: to help teachers become effective and efficient teachers and improve self and student achievement. Many studies involving PLCs have been able to demonstrate positive effects. Furthermore, the study conducted at the school discovered that the implementation of the PLC contributed positively to the students and the school (Razak & Kenayathulla, 2020; Strand & Emstad, 2020; Salleh & Ibrahim, 2020). This model is also the most utilized model according to the local context in previous local studies (Victor, Abdullah, & Kenayathulla, 2021).

The study conducted by (Victor, Abdullah, & Kenayathulla, 2021) provides a comprehensive review of the development of the empirical study of the PLC in Malaysia from 2010 to June 2020. Consequently, the literature review of the PLC in Malaysia is crucial since it will contribute to the current study of the PLC in Malaysia. Research findings in Malaysia were obtained from 46 sources, consisting of 35 articles and three theses. Therefore, it can

be concluded that empirical studies on the influence of PLCs in schools are still lacking compared to the knowledge about the factors, structure, and process of PLCs in Malaysia.

A study by (Hassan, Musa, Hashim, & Habidin, 2020) comprised 419 school teachers randomly selected among teachers in Malaysia. Note that the research study aims to identify the level of implementation of the PLC among teachers in Malaysia. The findings of the authors' research suggest that overall, the PLC among teachers in Malaysia is still at a moderate level.

Meanwhile, the findings of the study (Azura Pun & Mansoor, 2022) conducted differently from the findings of (Hassan, Musa, Hashim, & Habidin, 2020) due to the level of PLCs suggests that the practice of PLCs by teachers in national secondary schools in Malaysia is high. The study's results (Khan, Razak, & Kenayathulla, 2020) are also parallel, in which many teachers perceive that the level of implementation of PLCs and domains of PLCs in secondary schools in Peninsular Malaysia is high.

In addition, Ismail, Yakob, Mustapai, and Mat (2021) identified the level of PLC practice and the level of teacher motivation in Jeli District daily high schools also support that PLC practice and teacher motivation are implemented at a high level. The results revealed that the school's PLC practice variable is at a high level ($M = 4.059$, $SP = .470$). This indicates that the teachers in Jeli District daily secondary schools have implemented PLC practices excellently.

Educational studies in Western countries have focused on the practice of PLCs for a long time. However, the practice of PLCs in Malaysia is still being explored. The study results indicate an increase in empirical evidence from the practice of PLCs, but most are from Western countries. Hence, this statement is further proven through the results of a survey of PLCs while Malaysia is still in the exploration stage (Abdullah, 2020; Hassan, Ahmad, & Boon, 2019; Mohd Izham Mohd Hamzah & Mohd Fadzil Jamil, 2019; Zalina Zakaria & Siti Noor Ismail, 2020), on development factors (Siti Nafsiah Ismail, Zuraidah Abdullah, & Abdul Jalil Othman, 2020) and the level of PLCs (Kin, Kareem & Musa, 2020). Therefore, the influence of PLCs on the professional development of Asian teachers needs a deeper study (An, Bao Guo, Wang, & Nina, 2022).

Teachers Leadership Competency Model by Kho (2020)

Competence refers to the experience, skills, or competencies required to work more efficiently and effectively. Teachers Leadership Competency, published by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, clearly state that "*teacher leadership is no longer optional*" (School of Education Online, 2019). In this study, TLCs refer to a collaborative culture, facilitating improvement, setting standards, modeling leadership traits and skills, as well as acting as leaders (Fanny, 2020). Not only are head teachers leaders of schools, but teachers are also leaders to students, peers, colleagues, school support staff, and parents, to name a few. The practice of collaborative culture makes it easier for teachers to work together to analyze student performance, share pedagogic views, and improve teaching, learning, and student performance (DuFour, 2004). Thus, every teacher must master the first dimension, fostering a collaborative culture to highlight their abilities together to become high-caliber school leaders.

The next dimension is facilitating improvement and setting standards. The teachers' leadership should be an example and be a liked leader, a trustworthy leader who can guide with a personality that can be referred to as a good example. Here, the teacher's role as a leader in the classroom for students, school for peers, futuristic thinking, constantly

improving competence and skills, and ready to increase knowledge by addressing future challenges. Adopt a collaborative culture to bring about improvements in schools so that teachers can develop consistently and remain sustainable (Kullan, Mansor, & Isaac, 2021). In other words, these leaders should have superior characteristics that inspire employees to achieve their organization's goals. Therefore, characteristics such as a sense of community, responsiveness, honesty, creativity, confidence, or a positive attitude towards employees create a leadership model for influential leaders. In this dimension of modeling leadership qualities and skills, leaders can influence the people they lead as well as enhance good values to strengthen the organization's position. The last dimension is to act as a leader to refer to. Every leader who directs followers must prove that they are leaders who can be consulted to solve the problems faced in an organization.

Several studies have been conducted to examine the leadership competence of teachers in our country and abroad. This study was conducted in five secondary schools located in Kuala Kubu, Johor Bharu State, consisting of ten respondents per school (Singh & Singh, 2021), and a study which 100 in-service teachers were involving as respondents from four secondary schools in the Seberang Perai Tengah district (Kadri, Mansor & Nor, 2021). Meanwhile, an overseas study on respondents in Oman (Al-Omari, 2020) and a study conducted in Pakistan (Nazir, Sehrish Kashan, & Nadia Nazir, 2023) discovered that these four studies were conducted in different locations and categories of schools. The study's findings suggest that the level of TLC among teachers is high for respondents in these four studies. This proves that TLC can be practiced by all teachers in Malaysia and abroad regardless of the choice of category or school location. In conclusion, this study of TLC needs to be conducted in primary schools in Seremban district, Negeri Sembilan, since a quantitative study related to TLC in primary schools in Seremban district needs to be conducted to bridge the research gap.

Teacher leadership dignifies the teaching profession by raising high quality and contributing to the continuous improvement of schools and educational achievements (Katzenmeyer and Moller, 2009). Accordingly, the issue of teacher leadership is getting more attention due to the challenges of the education system not only abroad but also in Malaysia. The professional duties and teaching roles require skilled and clear teacher leadership to address challenging educational crisis changes. Other than that, the Preliminary Report of the Malaysian Education Development Plan 2013-2025 fourth shift also focuses on and gives way to teachers as leaders, i.e., peer leaders, experts in certain fields, and experts in teaching.

Although teacher leadership is focused, there are still limited studies on teacher leadership practices in Malaysia. The studies conducted by (Misdi, Sumintono, & Abdullah, 2019) in four Malay People's Trust Council Colleges (MARA) in Peninsular Malaysia demonstrated that teacher leadership among MARA College teachers was at a moderate level. MARA College teachers need to practice teacher leadership practices in their profession. However, the study's results were discovered to be different from those conducted by (Kullan, Mansor & Ishak, 2021). The leadership level among teachers serving in SK Asli, especially in Negeri Sembilan, suggests that the leadership of teachers in the schools under study is at a high level (mean = 4.46, SP = 0.42). Overall, by having leadership practices among teachers, teachers can address issues, improve education, deal with discipline problems, improve student outcomes by strengthening the quality of teaching, provide support to at-risk or disadvantaged students, and add to the school's leadership team. For efficient and effective leadership practices, teachers must fulfill their leadership competencies.

Methodology

This study is in the form of correlation to observe the relationship between variables. This study involves the dependent variable (TLC) and the independent variable (PLC). Apart from that, this study was conducted in two primary Tamil schools in urban areas and two more in rural areas in the Seremban district. The population for this study is primary school teachers, with a total of 50 teachers randomly selected from four schools according to stratified ratio who answered the questionnaire online.

The instrument TLC Scale (TLCS) developed by Fanny (2020) was employed to capture leadership competency. This questionnaire contains 21 items of four main dimensions: cultivating a collaborative culture, facilitating improvement and setting standards, modeling leadership traits and skills to act as a leader. The independent variable uses the PLCs instrument developed by Hord (1997a) in its early stages and later improved and refined by Huffman and Hipp (2003). Note that this questionnaire contains 45 items. The dimensions include supportive and shared leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning, application, shared personal practice, supportive condition. In total, both instruments have 66 items. The data for this study was collected online using a questionnaire from teachers as respondents from TS25 primary Tamil schools in the Seremban district. Consequently, a total of 50 data were analyzed to answer the hypothesis of this study. The data were analyzed using SPSS software version 24, and the findings were explained inferentially and descriptively.

The instrument of this study is divided into three main sections: respondents' demographics, TLC, and PLC. First, the demographics of the respondents are divided into gender, school location, and respondents' teaching experience. Here, the four-point Likert scale was used in the TLCS questionnaire. Using this scale, the level of agreement or disagreement about a statement can be identified by respondents according to the high and low response limits. Meanwhile, the five-point Likert scale was used in the PLC questionnaire. The instrument is designed to study the participant's perception of the statements built in the questionnaire. Subsequently, descriptive analysis was used to describe the demographic distribution to measure the TLC level.

Findings

The study's findings are divided into four sections: demographics, levels of TLC and PLC, as well as the form of correlation. This is to observe the relationship between variables of TLC among teachers of primary schools in the Seremban district and the level of PLC of teachers in TS25 primary schools.

Demographic Analysis

Table 1 provides the demographic analysis of the respondents ($n=50$) who participated in the study.

In sum, 50 teachers from TS25 primary Tamil schools in Seremban district were involved in the survey. Table 1 displays that in terms of gender, there were 42.0% male teachers and 58.0% female teachers. In terms of experience, a total of 14.0% of experienced teachers taught between 1 to 5 years, 20.0% had 6 and 10 years of experience, 22.0% had 11 to 15 years of experience, 18.0% had 16 to 20 years of experience, and 13.0% had 20 years of experience or more. Regarding location, 54.0% of teachers are from urban, and 46.0% are from rural areas.

Table 1

Demographics Analysis

Item	Category	Respondent	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	20	42.0
	Female	30	58.0
Teaching experience	1 - 5 Years	7	14.0
	6 - 10 Years	10	20.0
	11-15 Years	11	22.0
	16 - 20 Years	9	18.0
	20 years above	13	26.0
Location	Urban	27	54.0
	Rural	23	46.0
Total		50	100

Professional Learning Community Dimension as Predictable Factor of Teachers' Leadership Competency

Stepwise multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to deidentify the contribution of PLC dimensions of supportive and shared leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and application, shared personal practice supportive condition (structure) and (relationship) as predictable factors of Teachers' Leadership Competency among TS25 primary Tamil schools. Table 2 summarizes that the PLC dimension contributes 84.9% variance of Teachers' Leadership Competency among TS25 primary Tamil schools.

Table 2

Coefficients Value of Professional Learning Community Dimension

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R	Significant
1	.921 ^a	.849	.846	.000	
2	.949 ^b	.901	.897	.000	
3	.961 ^c	.924	.919	.001	
4	.965 ^d	.931	.925	.030	

a. Predictors: (Constant): Structure, Relationship, Support, Collective

b. Dependent Variable: Teachers Leadership Competency

Table 2 indicates that PLC dimension supportive condition (structure) and (relationship), supportive and shared leadership, as well as collective learning and application have a significant beta (β) value as predictable factors of Teacher Leadership Competency. This means that each variable significantly explained the variance in Teacher Leadership Competency after the influence of the other dimensions was statistically controlled through stepwise multiple linear regression analysis. Other than that, value, vision, and personal dimensions were not included in the regression model as these variables had β values that were too small and insignificant after the influence of other variables was controlled (Chua, 2009).

Table 3

Beta Values of Professional Learning Community Dimensions

Dimension	Beta	Sig.
Values and vision	$\beta = -.034$.753
Supportive and shared leadership	$\beta = .753^{**}$.001
Collective learning and application	$\beta = .836^*$.030
Shared personal practice	$\beta = .057$.626
Relationship	$\beta = .918^{**}$.000
Structure	$\beta = .921^{**}$.000

Note: Significant at level * $p < 0.05$

Table 4

Linear Regression Predictor of Teacher's Leadership Competency

Model	R	R ²	ΔR^2	df	F	Sig.
Structure	.921 ^a	.849	.846	1 48 49	269.636	.000
Structure Relationship	.949 ^b	.901	.897	2 47 49	24.952	.000
Structure Relationship Supportive	.961 ^c	.924	.919	3 46 49	13.410	.000
Structure Relationship Collective	.965 ^d	.931	.925	4 45 49	5.034	.000

Note: Significant level at $p < 0.05$

The stepwise multiple regression analysis results in Tables 3 and 4 suggest that the change in the four PLC dimension structures, relationship supportive and collective included in the regeneration model follows a significant β value. In model P1, dimension structure ($\beta = .921$, $p < 0.5$) significantly contributed as much as 84.9% ($R^2 = .849$) changes in variance [$F(1,48) = 269.636$, $p < 0.5$] of Teachers' Leadership Competency. The model P2, combination of dimension structure ($\beta = .502$, $p < 0.5$) and relationship ($\beta = .478$, $p < 0.5$) contributed 90.1% ($R^2 = .901$) changes in variance [$F(2,47) = 24.952$, $p < 0.5$] of TLC. On the other hand, the model P3, combination of dimension structure ($\beta = .676$, $p < 0.5$), relationship ($\beta = .578$, $p < 0.5$) and supportive ($\beta = -.305$, $p < 0.5$) contributed 92.4% ($R^2 = .924$) changes in variance [$F(3,46) = 13.410$, $p < 0.5$] of TLC. Finally, the model P4, combination of structure ($\beta = .584$, $p < 0.5$), relationship ($\beta = .563$, $p < 0.5$), supportive ($\beta = -.453$, $p < 0.5$) and collective ($\beta = .260$, $p < 0.5$) contributed 93.1% ($R^2 = .931$) changes in variance [$F(4,45) = 5.034$, $p < 0.5$] of TLC.

The regression equation is provided as follows: $Y = 1.239 + 0.946_1 + 0.615_2 - 1.082_3 + 0.263_4$

Table 5

Coefficient Values Professional Learning Community as Predictors

Model	Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t
P1	Constant	-1.936	.386		-5.021
	Structure	1.493	.091	.921	16.421
P2	Constant	-1.304	.339		-3.842
	Structure	.813	.155	.502	5.250
	Relationship	.522	.104	.478	4.995
P3	Constant	.181	.505		.357
	Structure	1.095	.158	.676	6.939
	Relationship	.631	.098	.578	6.467
	Supportive	-.728	.199	.305	-3.662
P4	Constant	1.239	.676		1.832
	Structure	.946	.165	.584	5.722
	Relationship	.615	.094	.563	6.558
	Supportive	-1.082	.248	.453	-4.373
	Collective	.263	.117	.260	2.244

Dependent Variable: Teachers Leadership Competency, P=Predictable Variable

The results of the stepwise multiple linear regression analysis of PLC dimension model P4 structure, relationship support, and collective as predictable factors of Teacher Leadership Competency among TS25 primary Tamil schools contributed to 93.1% ($R^2 = .931$) changes in variance [$F(4,45) = 5.034$, $p < 0.5$] of Teachers' Leadership Competency.

The influence dimension of structure ($\beta = .921$, $p < 0.5$) was highest, followed by relationship ($\beta = .918$, $p < 0.5$), supportive ($\beta = .753$, $p < 0.5$) and collective ($\beta = .836$, $p < 0.5$). This indicates that PLC dimensions of supportive, collective, relationship, and structure factors contribute to predicting Teacher Leadership Competency among TS25 primary Tamil schools.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study is critical in understanding the factors that influence PLC in TS25 primary Tamil schools in Malaysia. Moreover, Teacher Leadership Competency practices are becoming increasingly important in various sectors, and they must be applied in TS25 schools in Malaysia. The lack of research on Teachers Leadership Competency for TS25 primary Tamil schools in Malaysia indicates that more research is needed. This study is significant since it contributes to the field of study. The implications of this study are expected to be used as a guide and reference for administrators, teachers and stakeholders in order to learn more about the leadership competencies of teachers and professional learning communities in line with education policies in Malaysia.

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