

INFLUENCE OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES ON EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS IN SELECTED LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS OF LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Early childhood education (ECE) quality is fundamentally shaped by teacher effectiveness. Yet in many developing contexts such as Nigeria, teachers often operate in isolation with limited access to sustained structured professional development. Although Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are globally recognised as a powerful mechanism for improving teaching quality, empirical evidence on their effectiveness within early childhood education in Sub-Saharan Africa remains limited, particularly in Lagos State. This study therefore examined the influence of PLC participation on teacher effectiveness in early childhood education using a multidimensional analytical framework. Guided by Social Constructivism and Collaborative Learning Theory, the study adopted a quantitative correlational design. A sample of 84 early childhood education teachers from four selected Local Government Areas in Lagos State (Ikeja, Alimosho, Surulere, and Ikorodu) participated in the study. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression analysis. Findings revealed high levels of PLC participation ($M = 3.84$) alongside strong teacher effectiveness across multiple dimensions. Significant positive relationships were identified between PLC participation and pedagogical competence ($r = .62$), instructional practices ($r = .58$), classroom management ($r = .54$), and professional growth ($r = .67$), all at $p < .01$. Regression results further indicated that PLC participation significantly predicts teacher effectiveness ($\beta = .64$, $p < .001$), explaining a substantial proportion of variance in outcomes. The study establishes PLCs as a critical driver of teacher effectiveness in early childhood education and contributes to the limited empirical literature within the Nigerian context. It recommends the institutionalisation of PLCs within teacher professional development frameworks, alongside strengthened school-based collaboration structures, to sustain continuous professional learning.

Keywords: collaborative learning; early childhood education; professional learning communities; teacher effectiveness; teacher professional development

Introduction

Early childhood education has increasingly been recognised as a critical foundation for human capital development because of its long-term influence on children's cognitive,

socioemotional, behavioural, and academic outcomes. Contemporary evidence from neuroscience and developmental psychology indicates that children's early experiences significantly shape brain development, learning

capacity, emotional regulation, and future educational attainment. Jack P. Shonkoff et al. (2019) argue that nurturing and responsive early learning experiences contribute substantially to healthy developmental trajectories, while UNICEF (2022) emphasises that expanding access to early childhood education without improving instructional quality is unlikely to produce meaningful developmental gains. As a result, international educational discourse has progressively shifted from concerns about access and enrolment towards improving teacher effectiveness as a major indicator of quality within early childhood education systems (UNESCO, 2021).

Despite this growing emphasis on quality improvement, teacher effectiveness continues to vary considerably across many educational systems, particularly in low- and middle-income countries where professional development opportunities are often inconsistent, fragmented, and weakly institutionalised. UNESCO (2021) reports that many teachers still lack sustained access to structured professional learning capable of supporting continuous instructional improvement. Similarly, Linda Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) criticised conventional professional development approaches for being overly workshop-driven, episodic, and disconnected from classroom realities, thereby limiting long-term pedagogical impact. In response to these concerns, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) have emerged as a collaborative and school-based model of professional learning that encourages shared inquiry, reflective dialogue, peer observation, collaborative problem-solving, and continuous instructional improvement (Stoll et al., 2006; Vescio et al., 2008). The conceptual foundations of PLCs are strongly rooted in sociocultural and adult learning traditions which view learning as socially mediated and practice-oriented. Drawing

on Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural perspective, PLCs promote collective learning through interaction and shared engagement; Etienne Wenger's Communities of Practice framework explains how professional knowledge is collaboratively constructed within learning communities; while David A. Kolb's experiential learning theory highlights reflective practice and continuous cycles of professional learning as essential mechanisms for teacher development.

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of PLCs is heavily influenced by contextual and institutional realities. International studies suggest that PLCs are more sustainable in educational environments characterised by supportive leadership, institutional trust, collaborative culture, and adequate instructional resources. However, such enabling conditions are often limited in many resource-constrained contexts. Reports of UNESCO (2021) and UNICEF (2022) indicate that teachers in several developing countries frequently operate under conditions of overcrowded classrooms, excessive workloads, inadequate learning materials, and limited opportunities for professional collaboration. Within the Nigerian context, these challenges remain particularly visible in early childhood education, where teacher effectiveness continues to be uneven and institutional support for continuous professional learning remains relatively weak. Evidence from the Federal Ministry of Education Nigeria (2022) and UNICEF Nigeria (2022) further reveals persistent concerns regarding instructional quality and pedagogical practice, with many early childhood classrooms struggling to consistently meet expected developmental and instructional standards.

Lagos State presents a particularly important context for examining these issues because of its combination of educational advancement and persistent intra-state disparities.

Although the state government has introduced several reforms and teacher development initiatives aimed at improving educational quality, disparities across Local Government Areas continue to influence teachers' access to professional learning opportunities, institutional support, and collaborative practices. Existing studies have also shown that educational experiences and teacher support structures differ considerably between urban and peri-urban communities within the state (Aina & Bipath, 2022; Yusuf & Alabi, 2021). In addition, a major limitation within current literature is the fragmented treatment of teacher effectiveness on account of the independent examination of dimensions such as pedagogical competence, instructional delivery, classroom management, and professional growth rather than as interconnected dimensions of teacher performance (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; OECD, 2020). Furthermore, there remains limited empirical evidence on the extent to which Professional Learning Communities influence multidimensional teacher effectiveness within early childhood education in Lagos State, particularly through quantitative approaches that account for contextual variations across Local Government Areas. This study therefore investigates the influence of Professional Learning Communities on teacher effectiveness in early childhood education across selected Local Government Areas in Lagos State using a multidimensional analytical framework that captures the interconnected nature of teacher effectiveness.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the global recognition of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) as an effective strategy for improving teacher quality and instructional practice, their implementation and impact remain uneven, particularly in low- and

middle-income countries. In many of these contexts, teacher professional development continues to rely heavily on fragmented workshop-based programmes that are episodic, externally driven, and weakly connected to classroom realities. UNESCO (2021) reports that over 60% of teachers in low-income countries lack access to continuous, structured, school-based professional learning opportunities, highlighting a persistent gap in sustainable professional development systems.

In Nigeria, these challenges are more pronounced within early childhood education where teachers often professionally work in isolation with limited opportunities for collaboration, peer learning, and reflective practice. This situation reinforces teacher-centred instructional approaches and constrains the adoption of developmentally appropriate pedagogies, thereby contributing to inconsistencies in instructional quality. Evidence from UNICEF Nigeria (2022) further indicates that many early childhood classrooms do not meet minimum standards of teacher preparedness and learner-centred instruction, which negatively affects foundational learning outcomes.

Although Lagos State has made relative progress in educational investment and teacher development initiatives, significant disparities persist across Local Government Areas. While some schools benefit from stronger institutional support structures, others experience limited access to structured professional collaboration. Consequently, PLC implementation in the state remains largely informal, uneven, and insufficiently institutionalised.

Furthermore, empirical studies examining PLCs in Nigeria have tended to focus on general teacher development without adequately capturing teacher effectiveness as a multidimensional construct that encompasses pedagogical competence, instructional practices,

classroom management, and professional growth. In addition, limited attention has been given to how variations across Local Government Areas influence the relationship between PLC participation and teacher effectiveness in early childhood education. This creates the critical empirical and contextual gap which this study seeks to address.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the level of participation in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) among early childhood education teachers in selected Local Government Areas of Lagos State?
2. What is the level of teacher effectiveness among early childhood education teachers in terms of pedagogical competence, instructional practices, classroom management, professional growth, and collaborative practice?
3. What relationship exists between PLC participation and pedagogical competence among early childhood education teachers?
4. What relationship exists between PLC participation and instructional practices among early childhood education teachers?
5. What relationship exists between PLC participation and classroom management skills among early childhood education teachers?
6. What relationship exists between PLC participation and professional growth among early childhood education teachers?
7. To what extent does PLC participation predict overall teacher effectiveness

among early childhood education teachers?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

H01: There is no significant relationship between PLC participation and pedagogical competence among early childhood education teachers in Lagos State.

H02: There is no significant relationship between PLC participation and instructional practices among early childhood education teachers in Lagos State.

H03: There is no significant relationship between PLC participation and classroom management skills among early childhood education teachers in Lagos State.

H04: There is no significant relationship between PLC participation and professional growth among early childhood education teachers in Lagos State.

H05: PLC participation does not significantly predict overall teacher effectiveness among early childhood education teachers in Lagos State.

Literature Review

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is widely recognised as a foundational stage for human capital development, with global scholarship increasingly shifting from concerns about access expansion towards quality improvement. Developmental research consistently demonstrates that early learning experiences significantly influence children's cognitive, socioemotional, and long-term educational outcomes, thereby positioning teacher effectiveness as one of the most critical school-

based determinants of educational quality (UNESCO, 2021; UNICEF, 2022). Furthermore, studies on educational reform indicate that curriculum reforms alone often yield limited outcomes in the absence of sustained teacher professional development and continuous instructional support, thus placing professional learning systems at the centre of contemporary educational improvement discourse (Linda Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; OECD, 2020).

Teacher effectiveness is now conceptualised as a multidimensional construct encompassing pedagogical competence, instructional practices, classroom management, professional growth, and collaboration. Rather than being a fixed attribute, it is understood as a dynamic and evolving process shaped through continuous learning, reflection, and professional interaction (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). This multidimensional perspective is particularly important in ECE, where teachers are required to respond to diverse developmental needs through adaptive and learner-centred pedagogies. However, in many low- and middle-income contexts, these dimensions remain unevenly developed due to fragmented professional development systems and limited access to sustained practice-based learning opportunities.

Within this context, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) have emerged as a significant model for enhancing teacher development. PLCs are conceptualised as collaborative school-embedded structures that promote continuous inquiry, reflective dialogue, and collective responsibility for instructional improvement (DuFour & Fullan, 2013). Empirical evidence indicates that sustained participation in PLCs enhances teacher efficacy, instructional quality, and professional identity development (Vescio et al., 2008; Hord, 2004). However, the literature also emphasises that PLC effectiveness is highly context-dependent. While

well-structured and institutionalised in high-income education systems, PLCs in many Sub-Saharan African contexts remain informal, inconsistently implemented, and constrained by workload pressures, limited time, and weak institutional support (UNESCO, 2021).

In Nigeria, these challenges are particularly evident within early childhood education, where teacher isolation, heavy workload demands, and inadequate professional support systems persist. Evidence from UNICEF Nigeria (2022) shows that many early childhood classrooms fail to meet minimum quality standards, particularly in pedagogical practice and learner-centred instruction. Although policy frameworks increasingly promote collaborative professional development, PLC implementation remains uneven and often lacks the institutional structure required for sustained impact.

A critical gap in the literature is its fragmentation. Many studies examine either teacher effectiveness or PLC implementation independently, with limited integration of both constructs within a multidimensional framework. Furthermore, insufficient attention has been given to contextual variability across Local Government Areas, where differences in leadership capacity, resource availability, and socio-economic conditions significantly influence both PLC functioning and teacher outcomes. In Lagos State, these disparities are particularly evident despite overall educational progress, with significant variation in early childhood classroom quality across districts. This highlights the need for a more integrated and context-responsive analysis of how PLC participation influences teacher effectiveness; it is this need that this study meets using a multidimensional framework.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

In this study, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are understood as school-based spaces where teachers engage in ongoing collaborative professional learning through shared enquiry, reflective dialogue, peer observation, and joint planning. Unlike traditional professional development models that are often one-off and externally driven, PLCs are embedded in everyday school practice that supports continuous improvement. They therefore represent not only a structural approach to teacher development but also a cultural shift towards collective responsibility and sustained professional growth.

Teacher effectiveness is viewed as a multidimensional construct that comprises pedagogical competence, instructional practice, classroom management, professional growth, and collaboration. These dimensions are treated as interconnected rather than separate, recognising the complexity of teaching in early childhood settings. Growth in one area is likely to reinforce others; for instance, stronger collaboration within PLCs can enhance pedagogical understanding, which in turn improves classroom practice and management.

The framework draws on key theoretical perspectives, including: Social Constructivism (Vygotsky), Communities of Practice (Wenger), Collaborative Learning Theory (Johnson and Johnson), and Adult Learning Theory (Knowles). Together, these perspectives explain teacher learning as socially shaped, experience-based, and sustained through interaction. They highlight how professional knowledge develops through shared practice, guided support, and reflective engagement within collaborative environments.

Taken together, this integrated framework positions PLCs as dynamic mechanisms through which teacher effectiveness is developed and strengthened over time. It offers a coherent lens for understanding how collaborative professional

environments influence teaching practice, particularly within resource-constrained contexts such as Lagos State, Nigeria.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative correlational research design to examine the relationship between Professional Learning Community (PLC) participation and teacher effectiveness in early childhood education. The study is situated within a positivist paradigm and it integrates descriptive, correlational, and predictive analytical approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of relationships among variables. Descriptive statistics was used to summarise patterns of PLC participation and teacher effectiveness, while Pearson correlation analysis examined the strength and direction of relationships between variables. Multiple regression analysis was employed to determine the predictive influence of PLC participation on teacher effectiveness. This non-experimental design was considered appropriate because the variables occur naturally and cannot be ethically or practically manipulated.

Study Context and Population

The study was conducted in Lagos State, Nigeria, a highly diverse urban educational environment characterised by variation in socio-economic conditions and access to educational resources. Four Local Government Areas (LGAs)—Ikeja, Lagos Mainland, Alimosho, and Ikorodu—were purposively selected to reflect both urban and peri-urban schooling contexts. The target population comprised approximately 9,075 early childhood education teachers in public pre-primary schools. The focus on public schools ensured relative consistency in curriculum implementation, administrative structure, and policy exposure.

Sampling Procedure

A multi-stage stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure representativeness and analytical rigour. The selected LGAs served as the primary strata, followed by proportional allocation of respondents and simple random sampling within each stratum. A total of 84 teachers were selected, with 21 teachers drawn from each LGA. This approach enhanced comparability across contexts and reduced selection bias, thereby strengthening the internal validity of the study.

Instrumentation

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled the Professional Learning Community Questionnaire (PLCQ). The instrument was designed to measure PLC participation and teacher effectiveness. PLC participation was assessed through indicators such as collaborative instructional planning, peer interaction, shared reflection, and joint problem-solving. Teacher effectiveness was operationalised across five dimensions: pedagogical competence, instructional practices, classroom management, professional growth, and collaboration. All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Validity and Reliability

Content validity of the instrument was established through expert review to ensure alignment between items and the study constructs. Reliability was determined using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, with values ranging from 0.79 to 0.84 across the subscales, indicating acceptable internal consistency. These results confirm that the instrument was both conceptually valid and statistically reliable for the study.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection was carried out following ethical procedures, including informed consent, voluntary participation, and assurance of confidentiality. Completed questionnaires were coded and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were used to summarise PLC participation and teacher effectiveness. Pearson correlation analysis was employed to examine relationships between PLC participation and teacher effectiveness dimensions. Multiple regression analysis was used to determine the extent to which PLC participation predicts teacher effectiveness. Interpretation of results was guided by a multivariate perspective to capture the interconnected nature of teacher effectiveness within a collaborative professional learning context.

Analyses and Results

Respondent Profile

The sample comprised 84 early childhood education teachers from four Local Government Areas in Lagos State. The majority were female respondents (78.6%), with most respondents aged between 31–40 years (40.5%), indicating a mature and professionally active workforce. In terms of experience, 35.7% had 6–10 years of teaching experience, reflecting a mid-career teaching population. Regarding qualifications, 50.0% held Bachelor's degrees while 33.3% held the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE). Overall, the respondents represent a reasonably experienced and professionally qualified group suitable for examining PLC participation and teacher effectiveness.

PLC Participation and Teacher Effectiveness Outcomes

PLC Participation

Overall PLC participation was high ($M = 3.84$), suggesting a moderate level of institutionalisation of collaborative practices. Engagement was strongest in task-oriented activities such as instructional material sharing ($M = 4.01$) and joint lesson planning ($M = 3.92$). However, reflective practices such as peer observation ($M = 3.68$) and structured problem-solving ($M = 3.74$) were relatively weaker, indicating that PLCs are more operational than inquiry-driven.

Teacher Effectiveness

Teacher effectiveness was generally high across all dimensions. Pedagogical competence recorded a mean of 3.92, with strengths in lesson design ($M = 4.02$) and instructional adaptation ($M = 3.95$), although assessment practices were slightly lower ($M = 3.81$).

Instructional practices had a mean of 3.81, with strong learner-centred approaches ($M = 3.88$) and use of instructional materials ($M = 3.91$), while differentiation ($M = 3.69$) and play-based learning ($M = 3.76$) were comparatively moderate.

Classroom management was strong ($M = 3.91$), particularly in creating supportive learning environments ($M = 4.03$) and maintaining order ($M = 3.94$), though time management was relatively lower ($M = 3.78$).

Professional growth ($M = 3.97$) and collaboration ($M = 4.05$) recorded the highest means, indicating that PLCs strongly support collegial engagement and continuous professional development.

Correlational and Predictive Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis revealed significant positive relationships between PLC participation and all dimensions of teacher effectiveness. The

strongest relationship was observed with professional growth ($r = .67, p < .01$), followed by pedagogical competence ($r = .62, p < .01$), instructional practices ($r = .58, p < .01$), and classroom management ($r = .54, p < .01$).

Multiple regression analysis further showed that PLC participation significantly predicted teacher effectiveness ($\beta = .64, p < .001$), explaining a substantial proportion of variance in teacher effectiveness outcomes.

Summary of Key Findings

1. PLC participation among teachers is relatively high, but it is more operational than reflective.
2. PLCs positively influence pedagogical competence, especially lesson design and instructional adaptation.
3. Instructional practices improve moderately through PLC engagement.
4. Classroom management is strengthened through collaborative practices.
5. Professional growth and collaboration are the strongest outcomes of PLC participation.
6. PLC participation is significantly and positively related to all dimensions of teacher effectiveness.
7. PLC participation is a significant predictor of teacher effectiveness.

Discussion

The findings indicate that Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) play a significant role in shaping teacher effectiveness in early childhood education. Across all dimensions, teacher effectiveness is enhanced through collaborative learning processes, suggesting that professional growth is increasingly socially constructed rather than individually achieved. This aligns with social constructivist perspectives which

emphasise learning through interaction and shared meaning-making.

The results are consistent with Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) and Vescio et al. (2008), who argue that sustained collaboration improves instructional quality and teacher efficacy. In particular, PLCs appear to strengthen pedagogical competence and classroom management by enabling teachers to share strategies, reflect on practice, and solve instructional challenges collectively. Wenger's (1998) Communities of Practice theory is also supported, as teachers develop professionally through continuous participation in collaborative networks. Similarly, Hord (2004) emphasises that PLCs build collective responsibility for learning, which is evident in the strong collaboration outcomes observed in this study.

However, the findings also reveal that PLC effectiveness is uneven. While collaboration is relatively strong, deeper reflective practices such as peer observation and structured inquiry remain weak. This suggests that PLCs are still largely operational rather than fully inquiry-driven. Consistent with Fullan (2016), the effectiveness of PLCs depends heavily on enabling conditions such as leadership support, time allocation, and institutional structure.

Conclusion

The study concludes that Professional Learning Communities significantly enhance teacher effectiveness in early childhood education across multiple dimensions, including pedagogical competence, instructional practices, classroom management, professional growth, and collaboration. However, PLCs are not yet fully institutionalised as reflective professional learning systems. Instead, they function largely as operational structures with stronger emphasis on collaboration than deep inquiry. Overall, PLCs represent a high-potential strategy for improving

teacher quality in Lagos State, but their impact depends on stronger institutional support, leadership commitment, and sustained professional learning structures.

Recommendations

1. PLCs should be institutionalised as structured components of teacher professional development.
2. School leaders should be trained in instructional and distributed leadership practices.
3. PLC activities should shift from routine collaboration to reflective and inquiry-based practice.
4. Dedicated time for PLC engagement should be embedded in school timetables.
5. Digital platforms should be leveraged to support continuous professional collaboration.
6. PLCs should incorporate peer observation and data-driven reflection.
7. Targeted support should be provided to disadvantaged LGAs to reduce inequality in PLC implementation.

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