

## Boosting English Teaching Skills and Techniques for Primary Teachers through Professional Learning Communities (PLC) Training Program

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### Abstract

The purpose of this research was to study the satisfaction level of the administrators as well as the teachers with the professional learning communities training on English teaching practice for element teachers in Nakhonpathom, Thailand. This pilot study is considered as a quantitative research using the questionnaire. The sample of the study was the administrators and non-English major teachers in the primary schools of Nakhonpathom province, Thailand, who participated in the Professional Learning Communities training. Statistical methods included a percentage, mean, and standard deviation. The reliability of the questionnaire is .85.

The research findings indicated that the overall satisfaction on the training program management as well as other concerns were at the high and highest levels. The results of the study were ordered ranging from the highest to the least level: 1) the participants' personal details, 2) the knowledge and information about the Professional Learning Communities (PLC), 3) the problem and solution on English teaching in primary schools, 4) the knowledge of English teaching techniques, 5) the overall management of the program. The study suggests that there should be continuous training programs for the administrators and teachers through different English teaching methods and approaches for both English major teachers and non-English major teachers.

**Keywords:** Professional Training Program, Professional Learning Communities (PLC), English Teaching Training Program, Professional Development for Teachers.

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## Introduction

Over the past decades the issues of English learning and teaching development have been discussed for the most efficient pedagogy for all teachers (Ardichivili, Page and Wentling 2003)(Zhao 2013). However, not many of the learning and teaching methods are considerably precise and suitable for every class as a result of several components like student diversity, class condition, and teacher's style that count for the diversity. Actually in the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning, the most interesting question doesn't aim to the only one greatest teaching way, but it focuses on the most effective learning condition for particular classes. This will help students overcome their learning difficulty and increase their positive learning outcomes. Therefore, it is necessary for teachers to get ready to improve their own class effectually.

According to the above mention, to promote the sustainable learning and teaching knowledge for English teachers in this era, it is supposed to direct to the teaching professional development. The concepts of Professional Learning Communities (PLC) have therefore been introduced to teaching and learning contexts recently and variously in different contexts around the world including Thailand. Especially for non-English major teachers who rather have limited English teaching skills, they should be assisted about English learning and teaching skills and techniques (Noom-ura 2013:pp.139-147). This is the same line as Methitham and Chamcharatsri (2011:pp.57-67) who argued that the suitable teachers' training should be promoted and be tied up with the social aspects of language learning. The communities learning communities signifies the teacher sharing, collaborating, and practicing to improve learners outcomes (Toole and Karen Louis 2002). Hence, a desirable training course should gain trainees more ideas of language learning and teaching as well as sharing practices about how to solve instruction problems in various situations.

There is a significant shift regarding to the professional development for teachers and it has been contributed and strongly drives teachers to the acquisition knowledge and skills for teaching (Vescio et al 2007). The outstanding characteristic of professional learning communities (PLC) is based on the capacity of organization to learn (Vescio et al 2007). This can be explained by Newmann et al. (1996) who suggested that the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) development should

firstly concern on the participants' sharing value and norm concededly on the issues of students' learning ability and school priorities. And this also included the consideration of appropriate roles of parents, instructors and administrators involved to the PLC (Newmann et al. 1996)(Timperley 2011). Furthermore, Vescio et al. (2007) discussed that the collective data of processional learning communities (PLC) process should reflect the teaching cultures on collaboration that genuinely aim to learner outcomes and continuous development. It also pointed out the teacher authority and responsible on students' benefits that could be seen on the improved scores consequently (Vescio et al, 2007). This is also discussed by Puyutto (2012: pp. 59-61) that the truth knowledge was to understand the nature of all things and this erudition effectively conducted through ones' listening, thinking and practicing. And this knowledge will be fostered on the process of processional learning communities (PLC); critical thinking, lesson plan designing, problem solving and teaching material innovating.

The overview of the relevant studies that expresses interesting factors of professional development about Thai teacher's professional development revealed that English teachers in Thailand was facing to the teaching problems. Examples of this phenomenon are lacking of teaching English skills, no enough skills of using effective teaching materials and teaching qualification (Noom-ura, 2013). In addition, the promotion of English professional development considerably becomes very meaningful for graduates especially for non-English major teachers who take responsible on English teaching in the primary level. As a result that a number of Professional Learning Communities (PLC) are broaden, Prombuasri et al (2017:p.62) suggested that PLC which included the techniques of coaching, power questions, and reflection were very effective means of working improvement conditions. Additionally, PLC tightly served to sustainable development and integrated education society that also suitable for school different conditions for instance; culture, environment, and social identity (UNESCO 2014-2021 and Cynthia, 2015).

### Objective of the study

The genuine purpose of the research was to specify the participants' satisfaction with the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) program based on English teaching for non-English major teachers in primary schools, Nakhonpathom province.

### Methods

This research was mainly conducted by a survey method. The population of the study was divided into the administrators and the non-English major teachers; about 98 participants. The convenient sampling design was conducted for this research and the frame was specific on both groups of administrators and non-English major teachers. The sample was divided into 9 administrators and 89 primary teachers enrolled in the program.

The data collection was presented from a five-point Likert-type scales questionnaire. The questions included the participants' attitudes toward different characteristics to study the trainees' satisfaction with the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) training program based on English teaching for primary teachers which was conducted by the Nakhonpathom Primary Educational Service Area Office (PEASO) in 2017. The first section was the personal information of the participants both the administrators as well as primary teachers in this professional program. The second sector was the overall satisfaction with the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) training program based on English teaching for primary teachers on five characteristics as the following details: 1) the participants' personal details, 2) the knowledge and information about the Professional Learning Communities (PLC), 3) the problem and solution on English teaching in primary schools, 4) the knowledge of English teaching techniques, 5) the overall management of the program. The third section was the suggestions from the participants in this program. The instruments validity and reliability was conducted and examined by experts of the research to determine the questionnaire information. In addition, the survey was tried out with the focus group so that it could be analyzed for the reliability. Then it was reviewed by the researchers before using with the subject of the study. The participants were

asked to take part in the process of the study. The researcher introduced the administrators as well as the non-English teachers the questionnaire and asked them to complete them with the necessary information. All participants were emphasized to finish the survey by themselves without talking to others. And they were free to return them to the research at any time during the program. And the research subject was told that their questionnaire results would be kept unanimous and confidential.

After all data collection was produced, the researchers employed the statistic of percentage, mean and standard deviation to analyze the data. The results were presented in the nature of the questionnaire on the research consequently. The data analysis was produced by SPSS Version 10.0 to address the research questions. The following was the statistic description which was illustrated by form of percentages, mean and standard deviations.

### Results and discussion

In this study, the researchers presented the overall results of the analysis as follows;

#### 1. The administrators' background information about the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) training program

The result of administrators' background information about the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) training program is presented in the Table 1.

Table 1

The administrators' background information about the professional learning communities (PLC) training program

|                         |                          |                          |                             |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Genders              | Male<br>(55.6%)          |                          | Female<br>(44.4%)           |
| 2. Age                  | 31-40 years old<br>11/1% | 41-50 years old<br>44.4% | 51-60 years old<br>44.4%    |
| 3. Education Background | Bachelor Degree<br>33.3% |                          | Master Degree<br>66.7%      |
| 4. Working years        | 1-5 years<br>11.1%       |                          | More than 10 years<br>88.9% |
| 5. Place of work        | PEASO no.1<br>55.6%      | PEASO no.2<br>33.3%      | PEASO no.3<br>11.1%         |

The administrators' overall information of background information about the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) training program is firstly about the gender; male administrators are 5 persons and female administrators are 4 persons. The second topic is age; there is one administrator who is the age between 31-40 years old, 4 persons are the age between 41-50 years old, and 4 persons who are the age between 51-60 years old. The third topic is the educational background; there are 3 administrators who gained bachelor and 6 persons who gained master. The forth topic is the working years; there is 1 administrator who has been on the position 1 year and there are 8 persons who become administrators for 8 years. And the last topic is the working area; there are 5 administrators from the Nakhonpathom Primary Educational Service Area Office (PEASO) no.1, there are 3 persons from the Nakhonpathom Primary Educational Service Area Office (PEASO) no.2, and there is 1 person from the Office of the Private Education Commission (OPEC).

**2. The primary teachers' background information about the professional learning communities (PLC) training program**

The result of primary teachers' background information about the professional learning communities (PLC) training program is presented in the Table 2.

**Table 2**

The primary teachers' background information about the professional learning communities (PLC) training program

|                         |                          |                          |                             |                          |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Genders              | Male<br>(12.4%)          |                          | Female<br>(87.6%)           |                          |
| 2. Age                  | 21-30 years old<br>31/5% | 31-40 years old<br>32.6% | 41-50 years old<br>15.7%    | 51-60 years old<br>20.2% |
| 3. Education Background | Bachelor Degree<br>77.5% | Master Degree<br>21.3%   | not identify<br>1.2%        |                          |
| 4. Working years        | 1-5 years<br>38.2%       | 5-10 years<br>22.5%      | More than 10 years<br>39.3% |                          |
| 5. Place of work        | PEASO no.1<br>31.5%      | PEASO no.2<br>40.4%      | PEASO no.3<br>19.1%         | Municipal schools<br>9%  |

The primary teachers' overall information of background information about the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) training program is firstly about the gender; male teachers are 11 persons and female teachers are 78 persons. The second topic is age; there are 28 teachers who are the age between 21-30 years old, 29 persons are the age between 31-40 years old, 14 persons are the age between 41-50 years old, and 18 persons are the age between 51-60 years old. The third topic is the educational background; there are 69 administrators who gained the bachelor degree, 19 persons who had the master degree, not 1 person who did not identify the educational information. The forth topic is the working years; there are 34 administrator who has been teachers for 1-5 years, there are 20 persons who have worked for 5-10 years, and there are 35 persons who have worked for more than 10 years. And the last topic is the working area; there are 28 administrators from the Nakhonpathom Primary Educational Service Area Office (PEASO) no.1, there are 36 persons from the Nakhonpathom Primary Educational Service Area Office (PEASO) no.2, there are 17 persons from the Office of the Private Education Commission (OPEC), and the last, there are 8 persons from the municipal schools.

**3. The administrators' overall information of the satisfaction with the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) training program based on English teaching for primary teachers.**

The result of administrators' overall information of the participants' satisfaction with the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) training program based on English teaching for primary teachers is presented in the Table 3.

**Table 3**

The administrators' overall information of the satisfaction with the professional learning communities (PLC) training program based on English teaching for primary teachers

| Topics  | $\bar{X}$ | S.D. |
|---|-----------|------|
| 1.The knowledge and information about the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) | 4.19      | 0.43 |
| 2.The problem and solution on English teaching in primary schools                 | 4.18      | 0.30 |
| 3.The knowledge of English teaching techniques                                    | 4.53      | 0.53 |
| 4. The management of the program  | 4.70      | 0.57 |
| Overall   | 3.65      | 0.47 |

The administrators' overall information of the satisfaction with the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) training program based on English teaching for primary teachers on the average is 3.65 (S.D. is 0.47). The highest satisfaction is on the topic of management of the program, the average is 4.70 (S.D. is 0.57). The second topic is the knowledge of English teaching techniques, the average is 4.53 (S.D. is 0.53). The third topic is the knowledge and information about the Professional Learning Communities (PLC), the average is 4.19 (S.D. is 0.43). And the least satisfaction is on the topic of the problem and solution on English teaching in primary schools, the average is 4.18 (S.D. is 0.30).

**4. The primary teachers' overall information of the satisfaction with the professional learning communities (PLC) training program based on English teaching for primary teachers.**

The result of primary teachers' overall information of the participants' satisfaction with the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) training program based on English teaching for primary teachers is presented in the Table 4.

**Table 4**

The primary teachers' overall information of the satisfaction with the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) training program based on English teaching for primary teachers.

| Topics   | $\bar{X}$   | S.D.        |
|--|-------------|-------------|
| 1. The knowledge and information about the professional learning communities (PLC) | 3.90        | 0.74        |
| 2. The problem and solution on English teaching in primary schools                 | 4.18        | 0.85        |
| 3. The knowledge of English teaching techniques                                    | 4.36        | 0.77        |
| 4. The management of the program   | 4.57        | 0.54        |
| <b>Overall</b>   | <b>4.25</b> | <b>0.72</b> |

The primary teachers' overall information of the satisfaction with the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) training program based on English teaching for primary teachers on the average is 4.25 (S.D. is 0.72). The highest satisfaction is on the topic of management of the program, the average is 4.57 (S.D. is 0.54). The second topic is the knowledge of English teaching techniques, the average is 4.36 (S.D. is 0.77).

The third topic is the problem and solution on English teaching in primary schools, the average is 4.18 (S.D. is 0.85). And the least satisfaction is on the topic of the knowledge and information about the professional learning communities (PLC), the average is 3.90 (S.D. is 0.74).

### Conclusions and recommendations

The participants' satisfaction investigating for both administrators and primary teachers had enrolled in this program is discussed in the following details.

From the above collective data, the management of the program could be considered as the highest average topic of the overall satisfactions for both administrators and teachers. They pointed at the same level of satisfaction as a result of the well-organization of the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) process. They explicitly exchanged experiences and opinions for the problem solutions. This valuable sharing showed brightly direction for both teachers and administrators to work together effectively. And the administrators expected teachers to increase teaching collaboration that all teachers in the same area could meet and share which was in the same view of Toole and Louis (2002) who discussed that teacher time was the key of school architecture interaction for success.

The second highest point of view was that both administrators and teachers aimed to brush up their knowledge of English teaching techniques. Since the participants were non-English major teachers, they lacked of teaching methodology in English language learning. From this training, they gained a lot of techniques in English teaching such as English activities and lesson plans. Moreover, this professional development wasn't emphasized only for sharing English teaching problems, but also for enriching primary teachers various English teaching skills. This meant they were allowed to share their class experience to others' candidly through the process of professional learning community. It also established positive environment in English teaching at school which became school-wide culture of practice to improve students' outcome (Toole and Louis: 2002:pp.1-12).

As the result showed, the third point, the PLC training program helped the administrators reflect the knowledge of PLC activity. It served to the purpose of the

program while the teachers' focus was the knowledge and information about the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) after the training program. It is discussed that both strongly realized the process of the professional learning communities and its productiveness. And this was because of their trust and honestly of working and sharing in this particular group. According to their well-prepared of the process of PLC which took several days, all participants gained more comprehension about how it worked.

Similarly, the third highest point of satisfaction view was pointed to the overall PLC reflection activity for English teaching problems as well as the appropriateness of the participant roles for the PLC reflection for the English teaching problems. For both administrators and teachers, they were treated equally during the program. And this consideration affected on their feeling and participation consequence. Additionally, the teachers contemplated more effect of the appropriateness of features for the PLC reflection activity that was important. As the administrations and the teachers were separated, they felt more comfortable to take part in the sharing activity. As a result the teachers could express their ideas as well as school problems to others independently.

The result also showed that, the highest satisfaction of the English skills promoted through the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) training program were the appropriateness of professional coaches and advisors for the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) training program. According to the training preparation, the advisors had the main roles of the course design. They were accepted as the professional development of English teaching methods and techniques for writing, reading, listening, reading, vocabulary and grammar. Besides the above, the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) on this program was conducted productively by the Nakhonpathom Primary Educational Service Area Office (PEASO) of Nakhonpathom province. And they also had the collaboration of the universities in Nakhonpathom province area, which included Mahidol University, Kasetsart University and Nakhonpathom Rajabhat University, for the professional advisors of the program. They were responsible of the duration, feature of the PLC activities, English teaching methodology and teaching techniques emphasized on the course program.

In the same way of the advisors, the professional teaching coaches were also selected from the schools in Nakhonpathom province area. They were considered on English teaching major and experiences in foreign language teaching as the professional trainer qualifications. Furthermore, both professional advisors and coaches were with the trainees all the whole period of the program so they were alongside to one another. There were four main groups of the trainers and each pair of them would be a leader of about 20 primary teachers. They set a connection on the social media and kept in touch to one another freely. This also became very effective motivation for the primary teachers to participate and learn from others. They were not afraid to ask about English teaching preparation like how to do lesson plans and to make teaching aids. Above all of these, another training purpose was also focused on the PLC best practice award by the Nakhonpathom Primary Educational Service Area Office (PEASO). And all participants were able to receive the award if they had been improved and approved for the English teaching development through this PLC training program. By the end of the program, there were 17 schools and teachers were awarded as the best practice and the rest were certificated for the completion of the English teaching training program.

On the other hand, there also were several topics of the satisfaction gained the lowest. For the administrators and teachers, the first consideration was about the reflection activity on the PLC training program. This point of view was slightly lower than the gained knowledge of English learning and teaching through the program the reflection activity on the PLC training program. This was because all administrators taking part in the program still required more information how to use the PLC process at school. Some of the administrators, who weren't ready to support the teachers to the process of school best practice during the PLC program, realized that they lacked of samples on how to develop the learning communities at their school. Moreover many administrators considered that even though their teachers knew their teaching styles could be improved, they still needed more information and help for the development especially in the particular situations. Regarding this issue, Vescio et al, (2007) stated that the PLC training should provide teachers the skills and the knowledge of practice. And teachers also needed to tread the others' knowledge

and theory to improve something through their own schools and classrooms production (Vescio et al, 2007).

Consequently, the next lowest satisfaction of both groups of participants was diverse. While the administrators agreed that the appropriateness of features and questions for the PLC reflection activity was lowest, the teachers considered that the appropriateness of period of time for the PLC reflection for the English teaching problems was. However, the satisfactions of all the topics mentioned above were in high level of satisfaction. This point of the satisfaction could be discussed that all teachers were very willing to be a part of the PLC program. And they realized that there were still some other topics of the problems in English teaching situations that they wanted to share and cover with. As the result, they inquired more time and questions to allow them to express themselves to other teachers from the same area of teaching. Turn to the administrators, the least appreciation was on the PLC style operating on the program and they also paid attention on the questions used during the problems discussion and reflection hours. This made the researchers felt more confident that both groups of the participants agreed that the PLC process could be done as the professional development. They became fully aware that English teaching situation needed to be improved. And they were not isolated since other schools and other teachers were facing the similar circumstance. The best thing was they were working together with groups to cover with it hopefully and productively. This was the assured collaborative environment. As Vescio et al (2007) discussed that through the PLC process teachers would be respected as experts who explored new ideas and current practice to increase students' learning. And the supreme goal of the PLC program was to enhance students' achievement in English learning and capacity as Hudson et al (2013:pp.1291-1300) Joseph et al (2015) Phuangsomjit (2017:p.36) discussed that PLC program paid potential role on both teachers and students' development.

Although the satisfaction of the English skills promoted through the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) training program for the administrators and the teachers were high, there were some topics of them required special attention focuses. For the administrators, the overall of English learning and teaching activities promoted

on the program needed to be more concerned whereas the teachers aimed to the appropriateness of teaching vocabulary, reading and writing activities promoted on the program. Seeing that there were two main points of this PLC program; 1) to solve English teaching problems to increase students' achievement, 2) to enrich non-English major teachers' ability of foreign language instruction, both groups of the participants stood in need of English teaching and techniques training later on. They were confident that this knowledge would become particularly benefit for them to improve their teaching and to assist their students' learning actually. Since collaborate working essentially extends professional practice or professional knowledge effectively (Williams: 2010:p.1). Again thanking for the well-organized preparation that served on this PLC program that helped all participants learn plenty of teaching pedagogy during the sections of English teaching. The first day of the teaching training, the advisors promoted them about English teaching games and activities for primary students so that they adapt these samples to their actual classes later. The next day, the teaching coaches were introduced and demonstrated more activities and tasks for English teaching. On the same day, they also learned to write a lesson plan for English classes effectively and to use active activities during teaching. The last day of the English training was emphasized on how to produce English teaching materials and use them appropriately in the classroom. Most of the participants realized on the reflection survey that they really appreciated with the program, and would like to participate in this particular training repeatedly. And all the best practice teachers awarded after the program, said the same thing that they didn't only learn how to teach English for primary students, they were also able to adapt the knowledge of the PLC training to enhance their teaching styles. This was very powerful equipment that enables them to improve and develop their students' achievement successfully.

On top of all, the researchers embraced that reasons for this view point were counted on teachers' trust and willingness. They were independent to participate to the program. They also spent their time in groups on reflecting their teaching situations as well as on engaging themselves to discover the solutions together. This was called "professional community", which was seen as communities of practice. All of them shared a concern and passion of career development to do things better as they interact regularly (Wenger 2015).

Nevertheless, for the future studies on promoting English teaching skills and techniques through the Professional Learning Community program, the researchers coincided for some concerns. The contemplation can be divided into two points; the training course rising and the research information gathering.

Initially, for the course itself, the time management of the program should be regarded. As the participants of the training course pointed that time management of the project was very vital, it is necessary to set very attentive schedule for the program. Although the course had been conducted for several days, the participants emphasized that the program should have been extended. Due to the fact that there were two main concerns during this PLC project; to encourage the English teaching skills and techniques and to discover the English teaching solutions for primary classes, the process of dealing with both topics at the same time seemed complicated. Some of the participants especially teachers would rather gain more English learning and teaching methodology than engage themselves to the teaching problems sharing, while the administrators paid attentions on the process of English teaching solution nonetheless. Therefore, the balancing of English Language Teaching (ELT) and Professional Learning Communities (PLC) in the program is very significant.

Moreover, for the training, each participant should also be equally concerned. As the result of a number of the trainees of the course, there might be some of them trended to be neglected during the discussion. They were unable to express their viewpoints or experiences to others. This might because of the time limitation during the training course.

Additionally, for the data collection, the researchers were agreed that the organizers' opinions and feedbacks on the overall course training should also be appraised. In this case, it referred to the Educational Office of Nakhonpathom Province and its staffs providing all supports for this training program. Seeing that the staffs' viewpoints would be interesting and necessary for the further training production, they shouldn't be included as the main population of the research. The staffs' perspective is not only indispensable for the program evaluation, but it also pays very massive role on the next training program production.

In conclusion, the researchers assertively drew the attention to the effective collaboration of the professional learning communities (PLC) training program. It is considered as the course's potential accomplishment that engages the teachers and educators to the identical goal; students' learning achievement. Therefore the cooperation during the PLC program is very meaningful for both teaching practice improvement as well as students' development.

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