

Focused Leadership Influencing the Development, Effectiveness and Sustainability of Professional Learning Communities: Evidence from TVET Institutions in Cambodia

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Abstract

Although Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) have been widely touted as a way to enhance student learning and instructional practice, many PLCs have failed to attain sustained effectiveness because of inconsistent or distracted leadership. This concurrent mixed-methods study looked at how focused, purpose-driven leadership affected the sustainability and efficacy of PLCs in Cambodian TVET Institutions. The study examined how leadership behaviors pertaining to clarity, cooperation, structural support, and trust affected PLC practices and educational efficacy under the guidance of transformational leadership theory. A researcher-developed Likert-scale survey measuring leadership behaviors, PLC effectiveness, collective efficacy, and organizational conditions was used to gather quantitative data from 150 teachers. In order to investigate lived experiences with leadership behaviors in PLC contexts, semi-structured interviews with eighteen educators—including teachers, instructional coaches, PLC leads, department chairs, and administrators—were used to collect qualitative data. Strong positive correlations between focused leadership behaviors and PLC effectiveness were found through quantitative analyses, especially in the areas of goal clarity, accountability, trust-building, and structural support. Four themes emerged from the qualitative analysis: (1) clarity and direction are established by focused leadership; (2) collaboration quality is directly impacted by leadership activities; (3) PLC sustainability is shaped by time and structural support; and (4) effective PLCs require a foundation of relational trust. Relational trust emerged as a crucial mechanism promoting long-term collaboration and collective efficacy, and integrated findings showed convergence around the significance of clarity, consistency, and intentional leadership behaviors. The results provide useful implications for school administrators looking to enhance collaborative practice and instructional coherence. They indicate that focused, transformational leadership enhances PLC functioning and professional learning outcomes. The results were meant to guide leadership development initiatives and provide school administrators with practical tactics for creating strong, well-functioning professional communities that promote the achievement of both teachers and students.

Keywords: Focused Leadership, Development, Effectiveness, Sustainability, Professional Learning Communities, TVET Institutions, Cambodia

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1. Introduction

Cultivating a shared sense of purpose among educators (i.e., coherence) that goes beyond surface-level agreement and represents a deep, unified understanding of the work's goals and value is one of the biggest obstacles in managing successful Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) (Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Sin & Ann, 2026; Sok, C. et al., 2026; Suon & Dy, 2020). According to Fullan and Quinn (2016), coherence is made up of a common understanding of the nature and goal of the work. Therefore, coherence refers to people's thoughts and behaviors, both individually and particularly collectively. Therefore, coherence arises when educators collectively commit to why the job matters, rather than through strict structures or compliance. Focused leadership, in which a leader's well-defined purpose—or why—directs decision-making, fosters teamwork, and fortifies professional culture, relies heavily on coherence. Additionally, Fullan and Quinn (2016) stressed that every move leaders take has an impact on their organizations, highlighting the ways in which leadership behaviors affect attitudes, behaviors, and results in school communities. This viewpoint

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emphasizes how leadership behaviors directly impact the growth of PLC coherence and the efficacy of professional cooperation by influencing educators' shared beliefs, collaborative norms, and instructional decision-making processes. The results of the studies of Fullan and Quinn (2016), Sin and Ann (2026) AND Sok, S. et al. (2025) demonstrated the critical role that purpose-driven, focused leadership plays in creating successful PLCs and the necessity of further investigation of the link.

Interestingly enough, PLCs are widely acknowledged as a potent strategy for enhancing teaching methods and student learning via shared professional responsibility and collaborative inquiry (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Hord, 2004b; Sok, C. et al., 2026; Suon & Dy, 2020). Many PLCs have failed to produce the desired results in reality, despite their promise. The lack of focused, cohesive leadership that unites teamwork with a compelling organizational mission is one of the contributing factors (Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Leithwood et al., 2020; Sok, C. et al., 2026). PLCs frequently operate as compliance-driven institutions rather than as genuine PLCs when leadership lacks clarity, consistency, or alignment. Fostering shared vision, relational trust, and long-term collaborative practices with institutions requires focused, purpose-driven leadership that is based on a clearly stated reason why (Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Sinek, 2017; Sin & Ann, 2026; Sok, C. et al., 2026). Nevertheless, a lot of school administrators find it difficult to convert goal-oriented ideas into regular behaviors and decision-making procedures that successfully direct PLC activity. Consequently, the influence of PLCs on student academic performance may be limited due to fragmented collaboration, low teacher morale, decreased instructional innovation, and weaker collective teacher efficacy (Suon & Dy, 2020; Sok, C. et al., 2026; Stoll et al., 2006).

Despite the fact that previous studies have highlighted the significance of leadership in maintaining successful PLCs (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Hord, 2004b; Leithwood et al., 2020), there is still much to learn about how targeted, purpose-driven leadership affects both quantifiable results and lived experiences in PLCs. In particular, there is little empirical data on how teachers perceive and experience leadership practices in PLC situations, as well as the relationship between purpose-driven leadership and teacher efficacy, cooperation quality, and student academic performance. Furthermore, little research has examined organizational factors such as shared purpose, expectations clarity, relational trust, coherence, and support system alignment that either facilitate or hinder PLC effectiveness (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Hord, 2004b; Suon & Dy, 2020; Sok, C. et al., 2026). The lack of a thorough, empirically supported understanding of how purpose-driven, focused leadership influenced PLCs' efficacy and sustainability was the issue the current study attempted to solve. Efforts to improve PLCs may remain disjointed and inadequate if quantitative measures of efficacy and student results are not integrated with qualitative insights into teacher perspectives, leadership actions, and organizational factors. For TVET institutions looking to create long-lasting, highly effective PLCs that improve teacher development, instructional quality, and student learning outcomes through knowledgeable leadership practices, closing the gap is crucial.

The canonical point of TVET environment is that there isn't much empirical evidence that explains how purpose-driven leadership appears in PLCs or how it affects teacher collaboration and TVET improvement outcomes. Furthermore, little is known about the organizational and relational barriers that affect PLC effectiveness and sustainability (e.g., lack of shared purpose, inconsistent expectations, limited trust) and enablers (e.g., coherence, clarity of direction, aligned support systems) (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Hord, 2004a; Sinek, 2017; Suon & Dy, 2020; Sok, C. et al., 2026). That is filling in the gaps is crucial to comprehending how leaders' motivations interact with the prerequisites for highly effective PLCs (Sok, C. et al., 2026).

Guided by these perspectives, this mixed-methods study set out to investigate the effects of focused leadership on the growth, efficacy, and sustainability of PLCs in Cambodian TVET Institutions. The ability of a leader to express and implement a compelling core purpose that inspires trust, directs decision-making, and cultivates group motivation is referred to as understanding the why (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Sinek, 2017; Suon & Dy, 2020; Sok, C. et al., 2026). It is evident from this piece that a PLC's culture of cooperation, shared accountability, and ongoing professional development is greatly influenced by its clear objective (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Hord, 2004b). According to research, TEVET educational leaders are better able to boost teacher efficacy, professional engagement, and ultimately student accomplishment when they lead with coherence and clarity of purpose (Fullan, 2014; Sinek, 2017). The current study used a set of guiding research questions: (1) When putting a PLC into place, what effective leadership characteristics do administrators use?; (2) What perceived obstacles and facilitators exist for the effective incorporation of focused leadership in learning settings with the goal of improving PLCs?; and (3) What observable patterns in the data indicate that administrative participation leads to better results when creating PLCs?

The current study was noteworthy because it tackled a crucial and little-studied aspect of educational leadership: how PLCs' efficacy and sustainability are shaped by focused, purpose-driven leadership based on a well-stated why (Sinek,

2017). A deeper comprehension of how leadership practices affect teacher well-being, professional efficacy, and student outcomes is becoming more and more crucial as schools across the country face enduring challenges such as teacher burnout, declining morale, and persistent achievement gaps (Leithwood et al., 2020). PLCs run the risk of operating as flimsy compliance structures rather than dynamic vehicles for significant organizational and instructional transformation in the absence of cogent, purpose-driven leadership (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Hord, 2004a; Sok, C. et al., 2026). Also, the study examined how purpose-driven leadership affected PLC formation, effectiveness, and long-term sustainability by looking at leadership behaviors in a localized educational setting. The contextual focus of the study made it possible to gain a deeper understanding of how leadership practices influenced TVET institute culture, collaboration, trust, and motivation—all of which are essential elements for promoting professional development, reflective practice, and better instructional outcomes (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Hord, 2004b; Sok, C. et al., 2026). Importantly, qualitative information gathered from interviews shed light on how leaders expressed and carried out their motivations in day-to-day operations, including how communication methods, relational tactics, and leadership choices affected motivation, trust, and school culture. A more thorough knowledge of the results of leadership strategies as well as the experiences of educators in PLCs was made possible by the study's integrated methodology.

2. Literature Review

A thorough analysis of the literature on PLCs and educational leadership is given in this section. With a focus on the importance of focused, purpose-driven leadership, the chapter explores theoretical viewpoints and empirical research on student outcomes, teacher cooperation, instructional efficacy, and leadership strategies. The literature review lays the groundwork for the theoretical framework and directs the conceptualization of how transformational and focused leadership behaviors affect the efficacy and sustainability of PLCs by pointing out research gaps and placing the study in a larger scholarly context. The research goals of the study and the justification for the mixed-methods strategy used to investigate leadership practices and PLC outcomes in high school settings are informed by this section's synthesis of current information.

2.1 Understanding Theory Framework Used in the Study

The current study was guided by transformational leadership theory, which offered a thorough framework for comprehending how focused leadership affected the growth and sustainability of PLCs (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005a). According to Bass and Riggio (2006) and Leithwood et al. (2020), focused leadership refers to leadership techniques that purposefully promote cooperation, group effectiveness, and ongoing development in PLCs through creativity, support, and a clear vision. Transformational leadership, which has its roots in Bass's seminal work (1985) and has been expanded upon by Leithwood and Jantzi (2005a), focuses on leaders that motivate, intellectually challenge, and personally assist their followers in achieving remarkable results and embracing change. By connecting particular leadership behaviors (such as vision setting, incentive, and individualized assistance) to improve cooperation, creativity, and collective efficacy in PLCs, the theoretical framework influenced design, data gathering, and analysis.

In order to enhance teaching methods and student learning results, PLCs are cooperative settings where educators participate in continuous, introspective discussion and group inquiry (Vescio et al., 2008). Building a culture of trust, cooperation, and shared accountability among instructors in PLCs requires effective leadership (Vescio et al., 2008). With its focus on vision, motivation, and supportive leadership behaviors (Bass, 1985; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005a), transformational leadership theory offered a strong theoretical framework for analyzing how leaders' purpose-driven actions affected teacher efficacy, collaborative practices, and PLCs' overall educational effectiveness. Four fundamental elements make up transformational leadership theory: (1) idealized influence; (2) inspiring motivation; (3) intellectual stimulation; and (4) individualized consideration (Bass, 1985; Bass & Riggio, 2006). The four elements collectively characterize leadership practices that foster professional development, shared purpose, and trust—conditions necessary for PLCs to operate effectively.

2.1.1 Perspectives on Idealized Influence

Leaders that serve as role models and exhibit dedication, honesty, and a distinct moral purpose are said to have idealized influence (Bass, 1985; Fullan, 2014). Establishing and maintaining a collaborative culture in PLCs requires leaders that inspire trust and respect. Transformational leaders inspire educators and unite them behind common objectives and shared accountability by articulating and exemplifying a compelling vision (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005a; Spillane, 2006). According to Bass (1985), transformational leaders foster pride, earn respect and trust, and act as role models

for moral behavior. In addition to encouraging professional dedication, role modeling creates an atmosphere that is conducive to cooperation, shared responsibility, and group effectiveness (Northouse, 2019).

2.1.2 Perspectives on Inspiring Motivation

High standards and a compelling vision for change are communicated by transformational leaders (Bass, 1985; Kotter, 1996). Transformational leaders inspire educators through intentional communication by creating a sense of purpose and common goals, which are essential for long-term PLC survival. According to Leithwood (2006), transformational leaders prioritize creating policies that support ongoing development and professional growth while coordinating them with the institution's overarching goals. Transformational leaders keep educators focused and enthusiastic by communicating proactively, reiterating the vision, and using data to make the priorities clear. This ensures that collective efforts in PLCs stay in line with student achievement and instructional improvement (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005a; Robinson et al., 2008).

2.1.3 Perspectives on Intellectual Stimulation

By pushing teachers to challenge presumptions and investigate novel methods of instruction and learning, transformational leaders promote creativity and critical thinking (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Intellectual stimulation fosters a culture of inquiry and ongoing development in PLCs, encouraging introspective discussion and cooperative problem solving (DuFour et al., 2010; Hord, 2004b). According to Bass and Riggio (2006), intellectual stimulation occurs when leaders push their followers to be creative and inventive, to challenge presumptions, and to reframe issues. According to Northouse (2019), intellectual stimulation promotes experimentation, group data analysis, and evidence-based instructional practice refinement. By encouraging intellectual stimulation, leaders enable PLCs to go beyond antiquated methods and seek creative, evidence-based answers to organizational and instructional problems.

2.1.4 Perspectives on Individualized Consideration

In professional learning communities (PLCs; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Hord, 2004b), leaders who offer tailored assistance and attention to their followers' growth needs are an example of individualized concern. Transformational leaders provide tools, coaching, and feedback that are specifically customized to each educator's strengths and areas for improvement in order to promote professional development (Leithwood, 2006; Northouse, 2019). By serving as a coach or mentor, transformational leaders pay particular attention to each person's needs for success and development, according to Bass (1985). According to DuFour et al. (2010), an individualized approach builds trust and creates a supportive environment where educators feel appreciated and inspired to make significant contributions to group objectives. Leaders foster relationships, ongoing professional development, and collaborative involvement by encouraging open communication and emotional support.

2.2 Understanding the Transformational Leadership

A well-known framework for comprehending how leaders affect organizational change and promote professional development in educational contexts is transformational leadership (Northouse, 2019). According to Northouse (2019), transformational leadership is the process of fostering commitment to the organization's goals and creating significant shifts in the attitudes and presumptions of its members. Beyond task management, transformational leadership encourages people to match company objectives with their own beliefs and career goals, which promotes engagement, dedication, and creativity. According to Bass and Riggio (2006), transformational leaders inspire their people to be creative, take initiative, take calculated risks, and make significant contributions in both stable and difficult situations. Transformational leaders foster critical thinking, offer customized support and mentorship, articulate a compelling vision, and set an example of moral and intentional behavior through the interconnected elements of intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Northouse, 2019). When combined, the aforementioned leadership traits foster cooperation, trust, and ongoing professional development.

Leithwood (2006) highlighted the significance of transformational leadership by pointing out that leaders use data to guide decisions and enhance instructional strategies, which increases student achievement. Data-informed leadership supports goal-setting, targeted interventions, and continuous teaching technique improvement—processes critical to PLC sustainability and efficacy. Additionally, by carefully allocating resources like professional development opportunities, protected collaborative time, and instructional supports, PLCs can act as frameworks that promote teacher development and improve student learning outcomes (Leithwood, 2006). A strong theoretical framework for analyzing focused, purpose-driven leadership in PLCs was offered by transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1985; Bass &

Riggio, 2006; Burns, 1978). Collaboration, cultures based on reflective practice, and continuous improvement are fostered by transformational leaders through shared vision, intellectual stimulation, individualized support, ethical role modeling, and data-driven decision making. By providing precise constructs for analyzing how leadership behaviors affected collaborative practices, instructional innovation, and collective teacher efficacy in educational settings, the theoretical framework guided the research questions and methodology of the study (Fullan, 2014; Leithwood et al., 2020).

2.3 Understanding the PLC Transformational Leaders: Promoting Collaborative Excellence and Teacher Commitment

In order to create dynamic PLCs that increase teacher commitment and promote student performance, transformational leadership is essential (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Leithwood et al., 2020). The fundamental ideas of transformational leadership and its capacity to uplift and encourage people in a variety of corporate contexts were described by Cherry (2023). A culture that fosters innovation, reflection, and productive collaboration among educators is largely dependent on the leadership elements of intellectual stimulation, customized consideration, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence (Cherry, 2023).

According to Cherry (2023), intellectual stimulation fosters creativity, critical thinking, and innovation. Stakeholders are urged to think creatively, try new approaches, and not accept subpar outcomes. In this aspect of transformational leadership, educators are urged to challenge their presumptions and make thoughtful, problem-solving judgments that foster the exchange and acceptance of novel ideas. Teachers are also expected to keep an open mind, regularly evaluate their strengths and areas for improvement, and collaborate with others to sustain motivation and desire in order to see favorable student outcomes (Cherry, 2023). Transformational leaders take the time to understand each person's requirements as well as their distinct capabilities and opportunities for development. A leader can give the right support, such as professional development opportunities and mentoring, by acknowledging the unique requirements of educators. According to Cherry (2023), transformational leaders maintain open channels of communication to allow followers to freely exchange ideas and to promptly acknowledge the distinctive contributions of each follower.

A leader can inspire people to strive toward common objectives by articulating and communicating a clear and cohesive vision for student success (Cherry, 2023). Leaders have the ability to engage others and ignite passion for a common goal. Leadership collaborates closely with educators, listens intently, and gives their followers a sense of belonging to something bigger and more significant than themselves. It is about working together, being inclusive, and consistently acknowledging and celebrating little victories. Lastly, the transformative leader acts as an example for followers in idealized influence (Cherry, 2023). They are able to enthusiastically and passionately convey their vision. A common goal is inspired by leaders who are present, vivid, clear, and inspirational in their delivery.

According to Kareem et al. (2023), transformational leaders can greatly improve educators' connection to the professional roles and responsibilities of the schoolwide mission and vision by exhibiting traits like effective communication, motivational skills, and individualized support. Improved levels of buy-in, cooperation, and support are fostered by alignment, leading to improved success outcomes. According to Cherry (2023), transformational leadership inspires followers to realize their greatest potential through clear communication, deliberate planning, fostering inclusivity, and disseminating information in a manner that others can follow. In the end, these transformational leadership techniques—such as effective communication, tailored support, shared vision-building, and deliberate collaboration—showcase how transformational leadership strengthens the basis for collaboration, fosters a sense of shared purpose, and gives educators the chance to grow resilient, broaden their knowledge, and promote PLC implementation (Cherry, 2023; Kareem et al., 2023). According to Gilmour and Sandilos (2023), administrators play a crucial role in helping teachers succeed by giving them the tools, resources, training, and direction they need to overcome challenging situations. Support can be given in a variety of ways, according to Gilmour and Sandilos, who also noted that each person's strengths are distinct and individual. As a result, realizing that not all administrators have all the abilities needed to foster strong collaboration allows for introspection and the support of others in their areas of improvement (e.g., instructional coaches, academic counselors, teachers on special assignments, district personnel, or community stakeholders). All stakeholders, especially those in leadership positions, must be vulnerable (Leithwood, Louis, et al., 2008; Spillane, 2006).

Gilmour and Sandilos (2023) talked about how crucial it is for administrators to communicate clearly, set clear expectations, and regularly evaluate the process of achieving goals. Administrators need to have a sense of direction, empathy, and respect when leading and managing. A potent instrument that acknowledges the needs of all stakeholders is inclusion. Gilmour and Sandilos both emphasized the necessity of managing and leading; when combined, they are potent tools for bringing about change and growth. Teachers can take risks and feel comfortable overcoming obstacles in an environment of confidence created by administrators who offer continuous feedback and support. Furthermore,

Gilmour and Sandilos (2023) stressed that when there is mutual respect, administrators who promote a culture of cooperation and ongoing learning enable teachers to freely exchange teaching techniques so that colleagues can learn from one another. A setting like this promotes modest dialogue and helpful criticism, which leads to better teaching methods, teamwork, and a shared vision and objectives. Gilmour and Sandilos (2023) added that administrators have the power to influence a variety of aspects of the workplace, such as offering essential assistance for teaching methods, professional development, and creating a welcoming and encouraging school culture that prioritizes cooperation, teamwork, and professional advancement.

2.4 Understanding the Research Gaps in the PLC Literature

There are still a number of significant gaps and restrictions in the rising amount of research that supports PLCs as effective instruments for promoting teacher collaboration, instructional improvement, and student achievement. The limitations highlight the need for a more context-specific and nuanced knowledge of how PLCs operate in a variety of TVET educational environments. First, there is little research on opposing or critical viewpoints, despite the fact that a large portion of the literature emphasizes the benefits of PLCs (Servage, 2008; Stoll et al., 2006). PLCs may not always result in significant improvements in instruction, according to some academics and practitioners (Servage, 2008; Stoll et al., 2006). This is especially true when PLCs are implemented without fidelity or in settings without the required structures and leadership support. According to Stoll et al. (2006), PLCs run the potential of becoming performative rather than transformative when they are implemented as top-down mandates or compliance procedures rather than naturally occurring collaborative cultures. Furthermore, DuFour and Fullan (2013) recognized that PLCs might turn into traditional meetings with little effect on teaching and learning if there is no clear direction, common vision, and responsibility.

Few studies have looked at early-stage PLC implementation in diverse or under-resourced settings, or in contexts where schools face systemic constraints, limited capacity, and conflicting reform demands (Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Gilmour & Sandilos, 2023; Hord, 2004b). There is a noticeable overrepresentation of research focused on high-functioning, well-resourced PLCs. Understanding how school leaders initiate, support, and maintain PLC development under difficult circumstances—such as conflicting institutional demands, a lack of staff buy-in, or unequal access to resources—is severely hampered by the imbalance in earlier research (Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Gilmour & Sandilos, 2023). The characteristics of effective PLCs have been well documented, but the mechanisms by which they develop—particularly in settings with systemic limitations or high staff and leadership turnover—have received far less study (Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Hord, 2004b).

The paucity of comprehensive studies on the precise ways in which transformational leadership affects the establishment and long-term viability of PLCs in their early phases of development is another drawback. Despite the fact that leadership has frequently been cited in the literature as a crucial component of PLC success (Cherry, 2023; Hord, 2009), there is a lack of information regarding the specific leadership behaviors or circumstances that are most successful in promoting trust, creating a shared purpose, and enabling teacher agency at the start of the PLC journey. For instance, there isn't much talk about how leaders may help teachers move from solitary practice to collaborative inquiry or deal with early resistance to change, particularly in schools that serve high-needs or underrepresented populations. Furthermore, there is a dearth of research focusing on fairness, diversity, and inclusion in PLC objectives and structure. These issues are yet underdeveloped in mainstream literature, despite the fact that some academics have argued for PLCs as vehicles for social justice and equity-based change (e.g., Servage, 2008). There aren't many studies that specifically look at how PLCs can be used to promote culturally sensitive practices, confront structural injustices, or enable teachers to meet the varied requirements of their student populations.

Although PLCs have been broadly accepted in theory, gaps in the literature together indicate that further study is required to comprehend their practical growth in real-world scenarios. Future research should examine the prerequisites for successful PLC formation in a variety of educational settings, the part leadership plays in establishing a collaborative culture early on, and how equity-driven strategies can be incorporated into PLC frameworks right away. The results and research studied on PLCs are crucial elements that discuss the worth and significance of teacher cooperation, professional development, and striving for a long-term culture of positive change. PLCs' efforts to foster a culture of ongoing learning and development, shared responsibility, group efficacy, and solid foundational work to improve academic outcomes are strongly supported by research (DuFour et al., 2010; Hattie, 2015b; Vescio et al., 2008).

3. Research Method and Materials

3.1 Research Design

Because mixed-method approaches are well known for their capacity to capture both quantifiable outcomes and contextualized experiences in complex educational settings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010), a mixed-method research design was employed in the study. The study was able to capture the intricacy of leadership behaviours and their influence on collaborative professional culture by utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods. The scope of the investigation would have been constrained by a single-method design; while qualitative data alone would not have offered enough breadth to identify trends across participants or school sites, quantitative data alone would not have revealed the contextual and relational aspects of PLC implementation.

From this perspective, key indicators of PLC effectiveness, such as educator collaboration, shared decision making, collective problem solving, perceived collective efficacy, and the shared belief in the group's ability to influence student learning outcomes, were examined in the quantitative portion of the current study (Bandura, 1997; Goddard et al., 2004). To find connections between targeted leadership behaviours and quantifiable PLC results, surveys and statistical analyses were employed. The qualitative component examined how TVET leaders—including teachers—described, comprehended, and implemented their why in ways that affected their PLCs' collaborative practices, culture, and overall operation. In order to investigate how leadership behaviours, relationship-building, and value alignment led to successful, trust-rich professional communities, data were gathered through interviews and document analysis (Hord, 2004a; Sinek, 2017). The current study sought to provide a thorough knowledge of how purpose-driven, focused leadership influenced collaborative practices, TVET culture, and educational efficacy in PLCs by fusing qualitative insights with quantitative data. The results were meant to guide leadership development initiatives and provide school administrators with practical tactics for creating strong, well-functioning professional communities that promote the achievement of both teachers and students.

3.2 Context Setting and Research Participants

The present investigation was carried out at many public TVET Vocational Training Centers throughout Cambodia. The extent to which each TVET Center used a formal PLC process differed, despite the fact that all of them mentioned or participated in some kind of collaborative activity. While some locations operated with partial, developing, or inconsistent PLC practices, others had well-established, structured PLC systems backed by clear leadership objectives. Examining how focused leadership affected teamwork, instructional decision-making, and the general operation of PLCs in various organizational contexts was made easier by the variety of implementation levels. Students from a variety of ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds were among the various student populations serviced by the TVET Centers in the current study. A more thorough knowledge of how leadership practices fostered equity-focused cooperation and instructional development was made possible by the diversity of the student body.

Research participants comprised teachers and school staff who were directly involved in PLC-related tasks and collaborative planning. There were 150 participants in total, representing site administrators, department chairs, instructional coaches, teachers, and teacher leaders. A wide range of experiences and viewpoints about leadership, PLC implementation, and professional collaboration were captured by the data thanks to the inclusion of participants in a variety of jobs. To guarantee that the quantitative sample fairly represented the larger educator population throughout TVET Vocational Training Centers, a stratified random sampling technique was used for the quantitative phase.

In order to choose individuals with first-hand knowledge and understanding of PLC leadership, cooperation, and implementation, the qualitative phase used a purposive sampling technique. According to Patton (2015), purposive sampling enables researchers to find cases with a wealth of information that can help them better comprehend the topic they are studying. According to qualitative research guidelines, which prioritize depth, complexity, and saturation, the final interview sample comprised eighteen participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Site administrators supervising or assisting PLC work, instructional coaches or curriculum specialists, PLC team leads or facilitators, and general education teachers actively involved in PLCs were among the eligible participants. An opt-in question in the quantitative survey was used to first recruit participants, allowing them to express interest in a follow-up interview. Administrators and PLC leads provided additional recommendations by identifying people with pertinent PLC leadership or cooperation expertise.

The study's rigor was enhanced by the combination of deliberate sampling for the qualitative phase and stratified random sampling for the quantitative phase. Both comprehensive, context-rich insight into PLC leadership practices and wide representativeness across roles and sites were guaranteed by the dual method. By enabling meaningful

integration of data across both strands, the two sample procedures worked together to meet the objectives of the concurrent mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

3.3 Research Instruments Development and Measurement

3.3.1 Research Instrument for the Quantitative Phase

A Likert-scale survey created by the researcher was used to gather quantitative data on educators' opinions of focused leadership behaviours and how they affect PLC efficacy. Particularly in educational leadership research, Likert-scale instruments are well known for their dependability in measuring attitudes, perceptions, and organizational actions (Bryman, 2016; McMillan, 2016). The tool used a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) and had items measuring the perceived efficacy and frequency of leadership behaviours that are known to influence PLC functioning. Establishing and communicating clear PLC goals, guaranteeing safe and regular collaboration time, fostering a culture of relational trust, empowering teacher leaders and distributing leadership, using data to inform instructional decision making, and actively participating in PLC meetings and procedures are just a few of the constructs that were measured by items in the qualitative instrument.

The questionnaire consisted of 30 items divided into six dimensions of focused leadership practices: (1) establishing clear PLC goals, (2) providing protected collaboration time, (3) fostering relational trust, (4) empowering teacher leadership, (5) supporting data-informed instructional decision-making, and (6) active participation in PLC activities. Each dimension was measured using five items on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Prior to the main data collection, the instrument was reviewed by three experts in educational leadership to establish content validity. A pilot study involving 30 educators was conducted, and the reliability analysis yielded Cronbach's Alpha coefficients ranging from 0.82 to 0.91, indicating good internal consistency.

Perceived results of leadership involvement, such as effects on teacher cooperation, group efficacy, professional development, and instructional improvement, were evaluated by additional questions. The degree to which particular obstacles (such as limitations, ambiguous expectations, inadequate administrative support, and reluctance to change) and facilitators (such as purpose clarity, organized procedures, and professional development opportunities) impacted PLC success was also assessed by respondents.

Table 1. Questionnaire Dimensions

Construct	Indicators	Number of Items
Focused Leadership	Goal clarity	5
Focused Leadership	Protected collaboration time	5
Focused Leadership	Relational trust	5
Focused Leadership	Teacher empowerment	5
Focused Leadership	Data-informed decision making	5
PLC Effectiveness	Active participation	5

3.3.1 Research Instrument for the Qualitative Phase

Semi-structured interviews were used to gather qualitative data, allowing for a thorough examination of participants' opinions, interpretations, and lived experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). Appendix C contains the interview protocol, which was created using the concepts found in the leadership and PLC literature. Teachers, instructional coaches, teacher leaders, and administrators with first-hand knowledge of PLC procedures were among the interview subjects chosen through deliberate sampling. The protocol's main goal was to gather in-depth opinions regarding collaborative practices, PLC implementation, and leadership engagement.

The researchers were able to delve deeper into pertinent responses and themes thanks to semi-structured interviews, which offered freedom while preserving consistency among participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researchers took thorough notes both during and right after each interview; interview responses were not audio recorded. The interviewee was then given access to the notes to confirm their accuracy. In order to find trends and insights on leadership behaviours and PLC dynamics, the validated notes were finally subjected to a thematic analysis. By closely aligning the survey and interview tools with the study's conceptual framework—which placed an emphasis on distributed leadership, collaborative cultures, and PLC implementation—construct validity was achieved. Based on well-established research on educational leadership and PLCs, each item and interview prompt was mapped to components essential to the study topics (DuFour & Fullan, 2013; Hallinger, 2011).

Interpretive validity was improved via member verification. To verify representation fidelity and assure correctness, participants were given the chance to go over summaries of their interview responses (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The member screening procedure reduced deception and gave the emerging themes more legitimacy. Furthermore, data were cross-validated using quantitative results, enhancing the study's overall credibility and internal validity.

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

Concurrent mixed-methods data collection allowed for the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data in the same study phase. By combining quantifiable indicators with educators' lived experiences, the concurrent mixed-methods approach facilitated a thorough understanding of how focused leadership affected PLCs (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

3.4.1 Data Collection Procedures for the Quantitative Phase

An online survey using Google Forms was used to gather quantitative data. To guarantee widespread participation across several high schools, the survey link was disseminated via district communication channels (such as email), school administrators, and professional educational networks. A brief explanation of the study's objectives, a digitally informed consent form, and a secure link to the survey were all included in each recruitment email. The survey items could only be accessed by participants who gave their electronic authorization. The tool measured perceptions of leadership behaviour, PLC functionality, collaborative procedures, and perceived consequences for teacher practice and student learning using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). To assist stratified analyses and guarantee diversity representation, demographic items (such as role, years of experience, school assignment, and cultural background) were included. According to Fowler (2014), online administration improved accessibility, safeguarded participant confidentiality, and complied with suggested best practices for extensive data collecting in TVET educational contexts. Every quantitative response was safely retained after being automatically de-identified.

3.4.1 Data Collection Procedures for the Qualitative Phase

Semi-structured interviews with educators who expressed interest in participating were used to gather qualitative data, guaranteeing that participants had first-hand knowledge of PLC procedures and leadership involvement. Interviews were performed either in person or through secure virtual platforms like Google Meet at times that worked for the participants. With targeted questions in line with the study's objectives, each interview lasted roughly ten to fifteen minutes. While allowing the researcher to investigate and clarify responses as needed, a structured interview technique guaranteed uniformity between participants. Instead of recording interview responses on audio, the researcher took thorough notes both during and right after each interview. The interviews were then given access to the notes so they could check and confirm their accuracy. Anonymized notes were kept in password-protected files. In line with methodological recommendations for qualitative inquiry in educational leadership research, semi-structured interviews made it possible to gather rich, contextualized insights into leadership behaviours, perceptions of PLC effectiveness, and the organizational conditions influencing collaborative work (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015).

3.5 Data Analysis Techniques

3.5.1 Data Analysis Techniques for the Quantitative Phase

Quantitative data were analysed using Microsoft Excel and IBM SPSS Statistics version 29. Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation) were first computed to summarise participants' responses. Subsequently, Pearson's product-moment correlation analysis was employed to examine the relationships between focused leadership practices and PLC effectiveness. Statistical significance was determined at the 0.05 level ($p < .05$), allowing the researchers to identify both the strength and significance of the observed relationships.

3.5.2 Data Analysis Techniques for the Qualitative Phase

Summative note-taking techniques and researcher-generated field notes were used to manage and analyse qualitative data from semi-structured interviews. In order to record participant responses, key phrases, and illustrative examples pertaining to leadership characteristics and PLC procedures, thorough notes were recorded during each interview. In accordance with member checking techniques used to increase credibility in qualitative research, notes were examined, arranged, and distributed to participants after each interview to verify accuracy and guarantee that their viewpoints were accurately portrayed (Saldaña, 2016).

Three-phase thematic coding strategy based on qualitative research methodology was used in the analysis (Saldaña, 2016). Initial notions and recurrent themes in the interview notes were identified using open coding. After that, axial coding was used to group codes into more comprehensive conceptual categories and investigate the relationships

between them. Lastly, categories were combined into overarching themes via selective coding, which shed light on PLC efficacy, leadership influence, and collaborative dynamics (Saldaña, 2016). Throughout the iterative, manual coding process, interview notes were reviewed repeatedly, participant comparisons were made continuously, and emerging themes were refined analytically. The coding technique maintained methodological rigor and reliability while enabling a detailed investigation of participants' lived experiences in spite of the lack of audio recordings or qualitative analysis tools.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The current study complied with strict ethical guidelines, and before any data was collected, the PSBU authorized all protocols. Before taking part in the survey and interview stages, participants were given a thorough digital informed consent form that included information about the study's goals, methods, and their rights. The freedom to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or consequence, the assurance of confidentiality, including protection of their name and data, and voluntary participation free from coercion or undue influence were all specifically guaranteed to participants during the consent procedure.

Every piece of information gathered was kept private. To protect participant identity, identifiable information was either eliminated or substituted with pseudonyms throughout transcribing and data reporting. Only the email address of those who expressed interest in participating in the interview process was gathered, and survey results were kept private. In accordance with best practices for data security and privacy protection, all electronic records, transcripts, and files were safely kept on password-protected devices and backed up using encrypted cloud storage.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

4.1.1 Administrators Use Effective Leadership Practices when Putting PLCs in Place

The targeted research participants indicated their level of agreement with statements concerning leadership behaviours that promote PLC adoption. Items were evaluated using a 5-point Likert scale, with responses from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were utilised to evaluate general trends in educators' assessments of leadership support and involvement.

Table 2. Results of Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (S.D.) for Leadership Endorsement of PLCs

No.	Item Statement	M	S.D.
1.	Proactive involvement by educational leaders enhances PLCs.	4.16	1.15
2.	Support from administrators has a favourable impact on teamwork.	4.18	1.25
3.	Leadership support improves instructional outcomes.	4.35	0.81
4.	PLC success depends on the leadership's constant support.	4.65	0.88

Based on the Table 2, with mean scores ranging from 4.16 to 4.65, participants expressed strong levels of agreement on all leadership-related issues. The highest mean score was seen for the item indicating constant leadership support was needed for PLC success ($M = 4.65$, $S.D. = 0.88$), which revealed respondents saw sustained administrative participation as a vital leadership behaviour in effective PLC implementation. Standard deviations ranged from 0.88-1.25, which suggested substantial heterogeneity in participant answers.

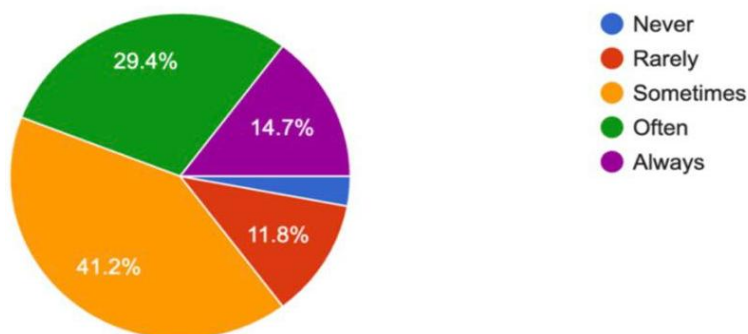


Figure 1. Leadership Establishes Explicit and Quantifiable PLC Objectives

In order to assess educators' perceptions of effective leadership behaviours related to PLC implementation, additional survey items assessed the frequency of execution of particular administrative procedures. Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often, and Always were the response options. Responses indicated that administrators' leadership behaviour in setting clear, measurable PLC goals was somewhat to strongly accepted, suggesting that this strategy was widely accepted but adopted unevenly across respondents.

As revealing in Figure 1, it illustrates that 44.1% of respondents claimed that leadership frequently or consistently established clear and measurable PLC goals, whereas 41.2% reported that this occurred occasionally. A minority of respondents (14.7%) indicated that administrators seldom or never established clear and quantifiable PLC goals. The findings indicated that while goal setting was widely seen as an element of PLC leadership, it was not uniformly experienced across all participants.

It is interesting to note that percentages indicated the distribution of responses over the Likert-type scale ($n = 150$). According to this criteria, heightened variability was seen in the designated, unbroken period allotted for PLC collaboration.

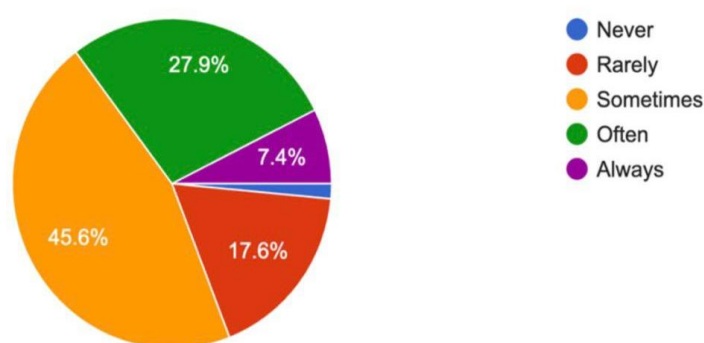


Figure 2. Designated, Unbroken period Allotted for PLC Collaboration

Figure 2 illustrates that 35.3% of respondents indicated that protected PLC time was usually or routinely provided, whereas 45.6% reported it occurred infrequently. Approximately 19.1% of respondents reported that protected PLC time was rarely or never scheduled. The response distribution revealed an inconsistency in the structural support provided by leadership to sustain PLC participation.

A more divisive pattern emerged from responses about TVET leaders' active participation in PLC meetings.

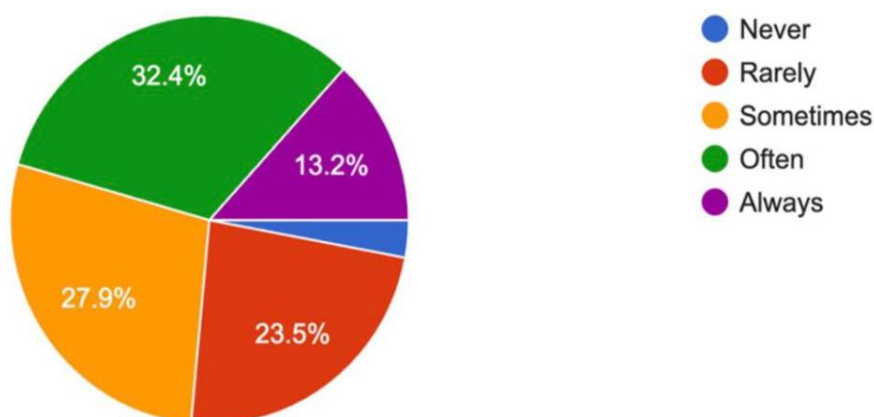


Figure 3. TVET Leaders' Active Participation in PLC Meetings

Figure 3 illustrates that 45.6% of respondents claimed that school leaders frequently or consistently engaged in PLC sessions, while 27.9% reported that participation occurred occasionally. Significantly, 26.4% of respondents reported that leadership participation infrequently or never transpired, indicating diversity in the visibility and engagement of administrators in PLC meetings.

As noted, responses regarding professional development programs indicate a limited alignment between the offerings for professional learning and the priorities of the PLC.

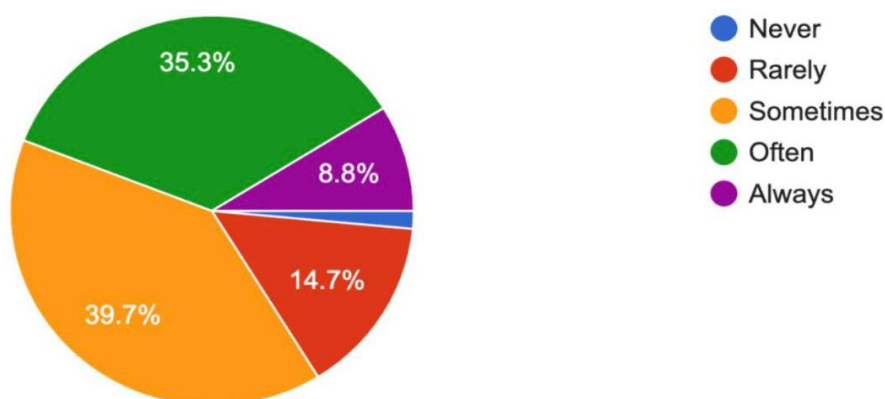


Figure 4. Offerings for Professional Development Comply with PLC Objectives and Requirements

As indicated in Figure 4, the result demonstrates that 44.1% of respondents reported that professional development was either frequently (35.3%) or regularly (8.8%) matched with PLC objectives and standards. A larger proportion of respondents (39.7%) indicated that alignment occurred occasionally, whilst 14.7% stated that alignment was infrequent. The remaining respondents stated that professional development was consistently incongruent with PLC aims. The data revealed that although several teachers acknowledged a connection between professional development and PLC objectives, this alignment was not consistently observed across all participants.

In summary, the data collectively suggested that educators predominantly recognised leadership behaviours associated with goal formulation and active participation throughout PLC implementation, but inconsistently across different contexts. Structural supports, especially safeguarded and continuous collaboration time, exhibited poorer consistency, indicating variability in the implementation of leadership techniques to sustain PLCs.

4.1.2 Functions of Teacher Leaders and Administrators in Creating Robust PLCs

Participants were asked to assess the importance of specific leadership roles in cultivating effective, results-driven PLCs. The survey topics focused on leadership responsibilities pertaining to both administrators and teacher leaders, including instructional support, collaboration, goal establishment, and consistency in the execution of PLCs. The response possibilities included: Very Important, Somewhat Important, Somewhat Unimportant, and Not Important at All. This sub-section presents descriptive data and frequency distributions for survey items regarding the perceived importance of administrative and teacher leader roles in the efficacy of PLCs. Results are offered to clarify patterns in educators' views regarding the influence of leadership on successful PLC outcomes. Participants overwhelmingly believed having a clear vision for PLCs was a vital leadership responsibility. The distribution of participant responses was given by percentages ($n = 150$).

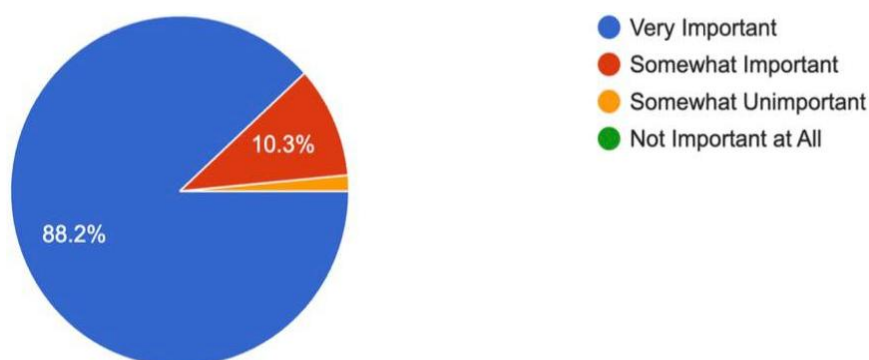


Figure 5. The Value of Having a Clear Vision for PLCs

Referring to Figure 5, the result shows that 88.2% of respondents considered having a clear vision to be highly important, whilst 10.3% of respondents thought it was somewhat vital. Setting a clear vision was considered very unimportant by the remaining respondents, although none of them said it was not significant at all. The results showed

that instructors placed a high value on the role that administrators, in particular, played in guiding PLC work and fostering exceptional results.

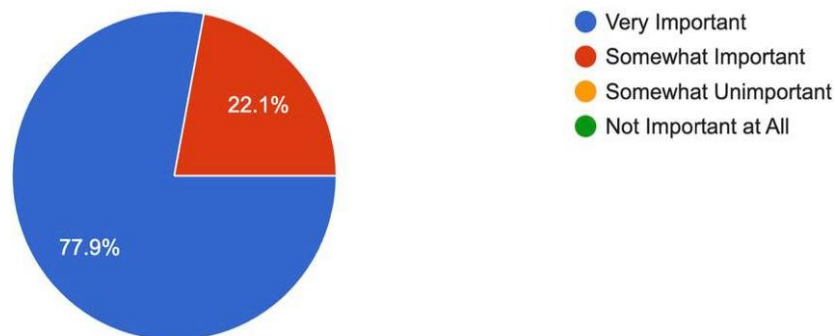


Figure 6. Significance of Modelling Collaborative Leadership Methodologies

The targeted research participants emphatically supported the demonstration of collaborative leadership approaches as a crucial leadership function in fostering effective PLCs. Figure 6 above illustrates that 77.9% of respondents deemed modelling collaborative leadership approaches as highly important, while 22.1% considered it moderately important. No respondents assessed collaborative leadership techniques as either moderately unimportant or not important at all. The findings indicated that educators highly valued leaders who exemplified collaboration to enhance the efficacy of PLCs.

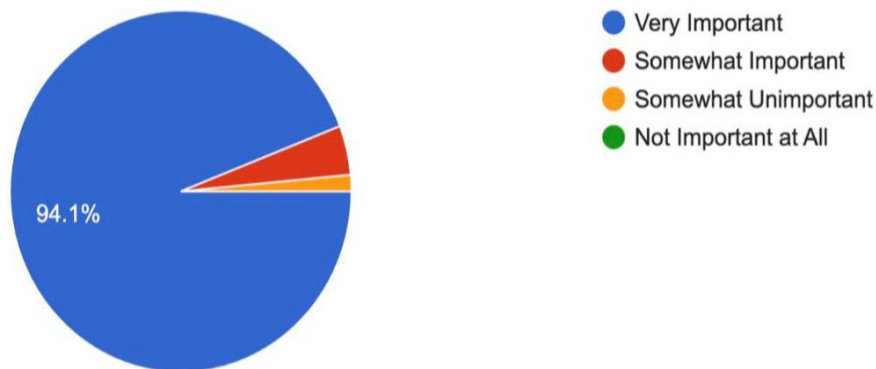


Figure 7. Significance of Fostering a Culture of Trust and Collective Accountability

The majority of participants stated that fostering a culture of trust and shared accountability is a crucial leadership function in assisting successful PLCs. As illustrated in Figure 7, 94.1% of respondents evaluated fostering a culture of trust and shared responsibility as very important. No respondent said that fostering a culture of trust and shared responsibility was not significant at all, while the remaining respondents assessed it as either somewhat important or relatively unimportant. The findings revealed instructors significantly regarded leadership strategies that built trust and shared responsibility as basic to successful PLC implementation.

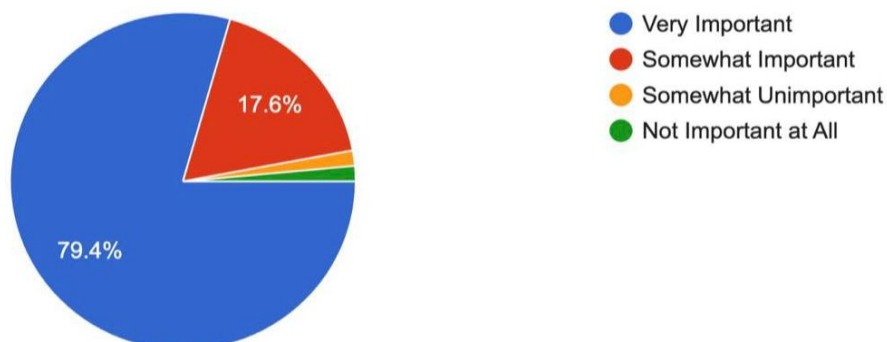


Figure 8. Encouraging Accountability and Goal-Setting

Facilitating goal-setting and accountability was highly recommended by participants as a crucial leadership function in assisting successful PLCs. Figure 8 above illustrates that while 17.6% of respondents thought it was somewhat essential, 79.4% of respondents thought it was extremely important to facilitate goal setting and accountability. Facilitating goal-setting and responsibility was evaluated as either moderately unimportant or not significant at all by the remaining respondents. The results indicated that instructors valued leadership techniques that supported explicit objectives and accountability frameworks in PLC.

4.1.3 Results of Identified Obstacles and Facilitators to the Effective Incorporation of Targeted Leadership in PLCs

Participants evaluated the extent to which particular components facilitated or hindered the application of targeted leadership in PLCs. Strong Barrier, Somewhat a Barrier, Somewhat an Enabler, and Strong Enabler were the possible responses. The distribution of responses for each factor is shown in this sub-section. The distribution of participant responses was given by percentages (n = 150).

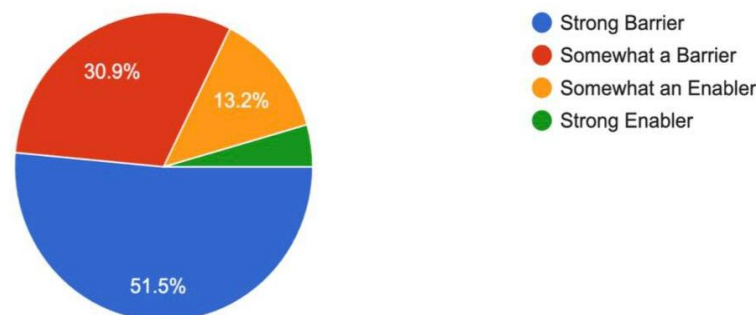


Figure 9. Identified Barrier or Enabler: Inadequate Time Allocated for PLC Collaboration

Referring to Figure 9, it illustrates that 51.5% of respondents saw restricted time as a significant barrier, while 30.9% regarded it as a moderate barrier. In contrast, 13.2% of respondents regarded limited time as a moderate enabler, while the remaining respondents considered it a significant enabler. The findings indicated that inadequate time for PLC collaboration was largely regarded as a major obstacle to executing targeted leadership; yet, a minority of participants noted that restricted time could serve as a facilitator in certain settings. It means that participants indicated that the restricted time designated for PLC collaboration was primarily viewed as an obstacle.

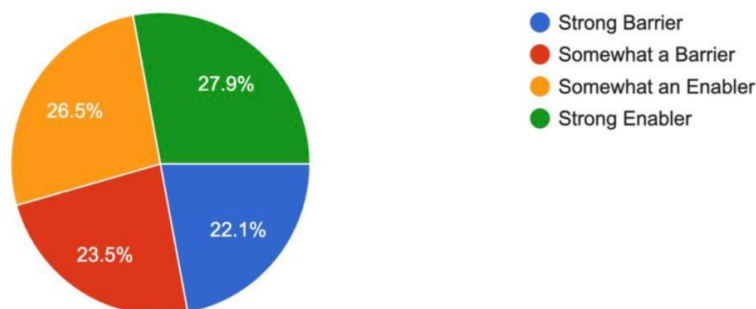


Figure 10. Degree of Administrative Assistance

As demonstrated in Figure 10, it indicates that 22.1% of respondents recognised administrative support as a significant barrier, whereas 23.5% regarded it as a moderate impediment. Conversely, 26.5% of respondents viewed administrative assistance as a moderate facilitator, whilst 27.9% considered it a significant facilitator. The findings revealed that views of administrative help varied significantly across participants, suggesting that administrative influence could either obstruct or enhance focused leadership, contingent upon context and execution conditions. This finding illustrates that participants expressed diverse perspectives regarding the extent to which administrative support serves as either an obstacle or a facilitator of effective leadership within PLCs.

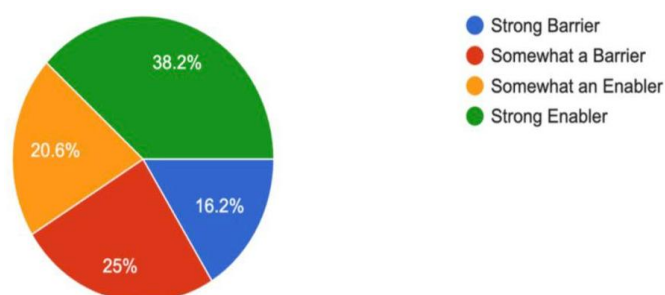


Figure 11. Obtaining Relevant Professional

Figure 11 shows that 16.2% of respondents saw access to pertinent professional development as a significant barrier, while 25.0% considered it a moderate barrier. Conversely, 20.6% of respondents saw access to professional development as a moderate enabler, while 38.2% considered it a significant enabler. The findings indicated that access to pertinent professional development was predominantly regarded as a facilitator for executing targeted leadership; yet, a significant fraction of participants still considered it a hindrance. It indicates that participants expressed diverse views on whether access to pertinent professional development serves as a barrier or facilitator to the implementation of targeted leadership in PLCs.

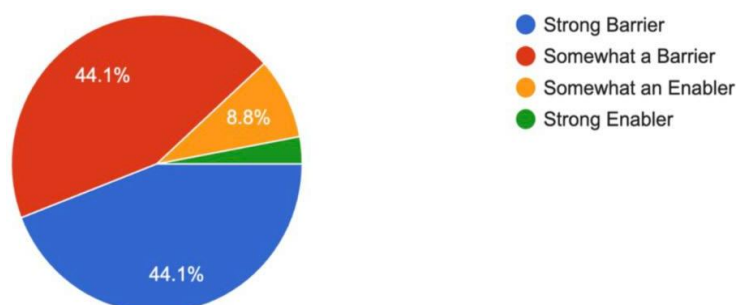


Figure 12. Resistance to Change by TVET Staff

Figure 12 demonstrates that 44.1% of respondents identified staff opposition to change as a substantial obstacle, while an equal 44.1% perceived it as a moderate impediment. In contrast, 8.8% of respondents viewed staff opposition as a moderate facilitator, but the remaining participants deemed it a substantial facilitator. The findings revealed that staff resistance to change was predominantly viewed as a significant barrier to the adoption of focused leadership, with just a minority of participants proposing that opposition may act as a facilitator. Participants identified staff resistance to change as a primary impediment to the implementation of focused leadership in PLCs.

Taken together, participants indicated inadequate time for PLC engagement and staff resistance to change as the primary hurdles to executing focused leadership. In contrast, access to appropriate professional development, clarity and alignment of PLC objectives, the presence of a collaborative school culture, and the availability of teacher leadership opportunities were generally rated as facilitators. Perceptions of administrative support and access to timely data were divided more evenly across classifications of barriers and facilitators.

4.1.4 Results on Discernible Patterns in Data Indicating Administrative Engagement Enhances PLC Outcomes

This sub-section analyses descriptive trends in survey data to uncover connections connecting administrative engagement with perceived PLC outcomes. Descriptive results demonstrated robust concordance with factors pertaining to leadership support and PLC outcomes. Participants indicated strong consensus that regular leadership support is crucial for the development of PLCs ($M = 4.55$, $S.D. = 0.83$), and that instructional results are enhanced with such support ($M = 4.33$, $S.D. = 0.71$). Elevated mean scores indicated that participants regarded administrative engagement as strongly linked to favourable PLC results. Administrative participation in PLCs has been linked to improved collaboration, instructional coherence, and collective efficacy (DuFour & Fullan, 2013; Hallinger, 2011; Sok, C. et al., 2026).

Given its importance, research participants regarded leadership behaviours linked to PLC success as extremely significant. The leadership positions most highly supported were fostering a culture of trust and shared accountability (94.1%) and establishing a clear vision for PLCs (88.2%). In addition, participants underscored the need of designating

specific time for PLC meetings (86.8%) and promoting goal setting and responsibility (79.4%). The results revealed that educators saw administrative measures like vision, trust, structure, and responsibility as essential for the proper operation of PLCs.

It should be remembered that descriptive trends indicated that administrative engagement was regarded as a crucial aspect in facilitating PLC outcomes. Elevated levels of consensus and significance ratings demonstrated that educators linked leadership engagement, consistency, and institutional support to the effective implementation of PLCs. Participants underscored that administrative actions concerning trust cultivation, vision establishment, meeting time distribution, and goal accountability were crucial for the proper operation of PLCs. It means that the results corroborated prior evidence indicating that administrative engagement improves collaboration, instructional consistency, and collective efficacy in PLCs (DuFour & Fullan, 2013; Hallinger, 2011; Sok, S. et al., 2025).

4.1.5 Results of Emergent Themes of Qualitative Data

The study's qualitative component investigated teachers' actual encounters with PLC leadership techniques. Eighteen targeted research participants, including teachers, instructional coaches, PLC leads, department chairmen, and site administrators, participated in semi-structured interviews. Depending on their position, department, and program structure, teachers had different experiences with PLCs. Four themes emerged from the qualitative analysis: (1) clarity and direction are established by focused leadership; (2) collaboration quality is directly impacted by leadership activities; (3) PLC sustainability is shaped by time and structural support; and (4) effective PLCs require a foundation of relational trust.

(1) Theme of Clarity and Direction are Established by Focused Leadership

It is important to attest that effective PLCs, according to participants, started with a clear and consistent leadership direction. In schools where leaders expressed cohesive goals, teachers reported more alignment and teamwork. “Everything clicked when our principle explained exactly what the PLC goals were for the year,” said participant 5. Instead of speculating, we were collaborating to achieve a goal. Conversely, a lack of leadership clarity resulted in fractured collaboration. The results were consistent with earlier studies (DuFour & Fullan, 2013; Hord, 2009; Sok, C. et al., 2026) that recognised leadership in PLCs as having a clear purpose.

(2) Theme of Collaboration Quality is Directly Impacted by Leadership Activities

Rather than being a result of positional power, participants consistently characterised leadership as a collection of observable behaviours. The quality of collaborative work was found to be significantly influenced by leadership behaviours like modelling collaboration, attending PLC meetings, offering feedback, and supporting teacher-led projects. Evidently, the targeted research participants emphasised leadership attendance signified the significance placed on PLCs and contributed to teacher engagement and accountability. Participant 8 stated, “Administrator attends every PLC meeting not to exert control, but to provide assistance. It is significant because we recognise that they acknowledge and appreciate the effort.” It is significant because we recognise that they acknowledge and appreciate the effort. Conversely, participants reported reduced collaboration when leadership behaviours were inconsistent or lacking. Participant 2 remarked, “Teachers also lose motivation when leaders do not participate or keep their promises.” It becomes into a task of compliance. It means that throughout the interviews, participants frequently connected improved teamwork and long-term PLC involvement to leadership consistency, attendance, keeping promises, and coordinating actions with expectations. The findings were consistent with past researchers who recognised leadership follow-through as an important component of PLC sustainability (Provin, 2013; Sok, C. et al., 2026; Stoll et al., 2006).

(3) Theme of PLC Sustainability is Shaped by Time and Structural Support

It is strikingly to see that interview findings corroborated quantitative data, highlighting time and structural support as critical determinants of PLC sustainability. Participants underscored that designated collaboration time and deliberate scheduling are essential for the proper operation of PLCs. Educators said that in the absence of institutional alignment, PLCs faced challenges in sustaining consistency, depth, and continuity. Participant 19 remarked, “We are willing to collaborate; yet, we lack the time unless leadership incorporates it into the plan.” Participant 4 emphasised the significance of structural alignment, asserting, “Upon adjusting our schedules to ensure our team utilised the same conference slot, our PLC underwent a profound metamorphosis.” We ultimately had sufficient time to strategies. Importantly, the targeted research participants recognised structural supports that enabled efficient PLC operations, such as a coordinated master schedule, specified PLC meeting days, and established methods for continuous data analysis. The results corresponded with earlier studies that recognised scheduling and logistical frameworks as critical factors influencing PLC efficacy (Fullan, 2016; Owen, 2014; Sok, S. et al., 2025).

(4) Theme of Effective PLCs Require a Foundation of Relational Trust

It became clear that relational trust was a prerequisite for productive PLC collaboration. According to the participants, building confidence in PLCs requires leadership behaviours including open communication, consistency, empowerment, and transparency. It was stated that genuine participation, fruitful discussion, and taking risks in the classroom all depend on trust. Additionally, targeted research participant 14 stated, “*The atmosphere feels secure, which is why our PLC functions. They trust us, and we trust them; they do not micromanage.*” It is observed that leadership refrains from micromanagement; they place their trust in us, and we reciprocate that trust. Conversely, participants said that a deficiency of trust adversely impacted teamwork. Participant 18 remarked, “*When leadership exhibits favouritism or lacks integrity, the entire PLC deteriorates.*” Individuals cease to disseminate information. The results aligned with earlier studies that recognised relational trust as an essential element of effective collaboration and enduring school enhancement (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Hallinger, 2011; Sok, C. et al., 2026).

Taken together, the combined data showed that targeted leadership has a major impact on PLCs’ clarity, structure, and collaborative culture. Teachers consistently valued leadership behaviours that included clear guidance, follow-through, scheduled collaborative time, and the development of relational trust in both data streams. The inconsistency in leadership presence and conformity across school sites resulted in unequal efficacy of PLCs. By showing how quantifiable leadership behaviours—identified via quantitative analysis—interacted with educators’ lived experiences and perspectives—obtained through qualitative investigation—to affect PLC outcomes, the use of mixed methods strengthened the study’s conclusions.

4.2. Discussion

4.2.1. Discussion on Administrators Use Effective Leadership Practices when Putting PLCs in Place

The targeted research participants in both the quantitative and qualitative data consistently recognised three key behaviours that administrators used when adopting PLCs: explicit communication of purpose, preservation of collaborative time, and visible leadership participation. By creating a shared vision, demonstrating a dedication to collaborative learning, and encouraging reflective inquiry, these behaviours, when viewed through the prism of transformational leadership theory, reflect fundamental leadership characteristics that influence PLC effectiveness (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005a; Northouse, 2019). The results of the survey showed that PLC functioning was positively impacted by clear communication of purpose, protection of collaboration time, and visible leadership engagement. However, interviewees stressed that clarity and consistency were critical factors in determining whether PLCs transitioned from procedural compliance to authentic collaborative practice.

It is important to note that the leadership behaviours of clearly communicating PLC purpose, modelling commitment to collaborative practices, and encouraging reflective inquiry aligned closely with the transformational leadership components of inspirational motivation, idealised influence, and intellectual stimulation (Bass, 1985; Bass & Riggio, 2006). By establishing shared meaning and group commitment, leaders who established a clear PLC purpose and aligned cooperative activity with instructional goals adopted inspirational motivation. Visible leadership engagement and persistent follow-through exhibited idealised influence since leaders indicated the significance of PLC work through modelled behaviour rather than positional authority alone. Additionally, leaders who fostered inquiry, reflection, and data-informed conversation in PLCs exhibited intellectual stimulation by requiring educators to assess instructional practice and aim for improvement.

The results were consistent with earlier studies (DuFour & Fullan, 2013; Hord, 2009; Sok, C. et al., 2026) that highlighted the significance of cohesive leadership practices, systematic assistance, and a shared vision in successful PLC adoption. Educators saw leadership as most effective when it matched direction with empowerment, which supported Hallinger’s (2011) statement that instructional leadership must mix strategic guidance with distributed responsibility. Importantly, the findings revealed focused leadership operates as the operational expression of transformative leadership in PLC contexts, transforming vision, values, and influence into actual actions that sustain collaborative practice. When taken as a whole, the findings supported transformational leadership as the fundamental process by which targeted leadership behaviours integrate structure, vision, and teamwork to facilitate successful PLC implementation (Bass, 1985; Northouse, 2019; Sok, C. et al., 2026).

4.2.2. Discussion on the Functions of Teacher Leaders and Administrators in Creating Robust PLCs

The study indicated administrators and teacher leaders performed unique yet complimentary roles in developing strong PLCs that achieved favourable results. Teacher leaders maintained collaborative norms, encouraged instructional dialogue, and directed daily PLC work while administrators created the organisational, cultural, and structural

circumstances required for cooperation. The results showed that shared leadership is not only advantageous but also necessary for PLCs to be effective, expanding on Spillane's (2006) research on distributed leadership. Participants reported heightened involvement and commitment when leadership roles were allocated, trust was cultivated, and role expectations were clearly defined. Conversely, inconsistent leadership and unclear responsibilities resulted in fragmented teamwork and diminished commitment (Sok, C. et al., 2026). The findings underscored focused leadership as a structural and relational activity requiring intentional collaboration between administration and teacher leadership.

4.2.3. Discussion on Identified Obstacles and Facilitators to the Effective Incorporation of Targeted Leadership in PLCs

Integrated results indicated time limitations, ambiguous expectations, and inconsistent leadership execution as the primary obstacles to the effective integration of targeted leadership in PLCs. The hurdles reflected other studies that recognised systemic challenges to PLC implementation (Owen, 2014; Provini, 2013; Sok, C. et al., 2026), indicating that these impediments are ingrained in organisational frameworks rather than confined to particular schools. Facilitators such as designated collaborative time, synchronised systems, focused professional development, and relational trust further emphasised the significance of cohesive leadership frameworks. The alignment of findings from both quantitative and qualitative data enhanced their validity and underscored the importance of deliberate leadership approaches to overcome obstacles and maintain collaborative efforts.

4.2.4. Discussion on Discernible Patterns in Data Indicating Administrative Engagement Enhances PLC Outcomes

Both quantitative and qualitative evaluations demonstrated discernible trends showing that administrative engagement enhanced PLC outcomes. When administrators were present, communicative, and aligned with teacher leaders, PLCs demonstrated enhanced inquiry, improved collaboration, and increased instructional coherence. The results corroborated Fullan's (2016) claim that significant instructional enhancement relies on leadership consistency throughout organisational tiers. Qualitative data also revealed that administrative engagement affected both the structure of PLCs and the school culture, specifically regarding trust, transparency, and collective accountability. Consequently, targeted leadership served as a catalyst for organisational alignment and ongoing professional development. Taken together, when considered comprehensively, the data indicated that the efficacy of PLCs was influenced not solely by their structure, but also by leadership behaviours that initiated and maintained collaborative practices (Sok, C. et al., 2026). When administrators and teacher leaders collaborated well within a transformational leadership framework, PLCs were more likely to serve as significant instruments for instructional enhancement rather than just compliance-driven organisational practices. The findings together indicated that transformational leadership served as the theoretical basis for the implementation of targeted leadership behaviours necessary to maintain effective PLCs (Bass, 1985; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005a; Northouse, 2019; Sok, C. et al., 2026).

5. Conclusions and Recommendations for Policy Practices and Further Research

5.1. Conclusion

This study investigated the influence of targeted leadership on the development, operation, and perceived efficacy of PLCs in Cambodian TVET institutions, employing a concurrent mixed-methods design, which is acknowledged for its capacity to amalgamate quantitative and qualitative data to yield a more nuanced comprehension of intricate TVET educational phenomena. The integration of quantitative survey data from 150 educators and qualitative insights from 18 semi-structured interviews provided a comprehensive understanding of the influence of focused leadership on Professional Learning Communities (PLC). Research findings demonstrated that focused leadership, marked by a clear purpose, consistent execution, visible involvement, and relational trust, directly impacted the quality of collaboration, instructional coherence, and collective efficacy. Distributed leadership has become crucial for the survival of PLCs, as administrators and teacher leaders collaboratively share responsibilities for vision, structure, and facilitation. Ongoing obstacles, such as inadequate time, fluctuating expectations, and variable leadership commitment, underscored the necessity for cohesive processes and deliberate leadership development. This study enhances the subject of educational leadership by elucidating the practical application of focused leadership in actual TVET environments and providing pragmatic recommendations for improving PLC implementation in TVET institutions.

In conclusion, the present study confirms that targeted leadership is the essential mechanism via which PLCs attain significant professional development and instructional enhancement. When leaders regularly articulate purpose, foster cooperation, and cultivate trust, PLCs evolve into sustainable frameworks that augment educator efficacy and positively impact student outcomes. This study offers practical insights and theoretical contributions to educational leadership, emphasizing the critical role of targeted leadership in enhancing the implementation and outcomes of PLCs in the Cambodian TVET Institutions.

5.2. Recommendations for Policy Practices

The results produced multiple implications for educational leaders aiming to enhance Professional Learning Communities and augment instructional coherence in secondary schools. Analyzed through the framework of transformational leadership, the findings revealed that the efficacy of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) is intricately linked to leadership behaviours that cultivate a shared vision, exemplify commitment, nurture trust, and enable educators to participate in collective inquiry, thereby underscoring the pivotal role of leadership in developing a collaborative culture and enhancing instructional quality (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005a; Northouse, 2019; Sok, C. et al., 2026). Given that leadership clarity, structural support, and relational trust consistently appeared in both quantitative and qualitative data, the implications focus on deliberate leadership actions that correspond with transformational leadership principles and ongoing commitment to a collaborative culture. A key result of the current study was the significance of a clearly defined and regularly communicated PLC vision. Participants indicated that when leaders articulated expectations clearly and aligned PLC activities with schoolwide instructional objectives, collaboration became more focused, meaningful, and results-oriented, reflecting the transformational leadership dimension of inspirational motivation that underscores the importance of conveying a compelling vision to unify collective efforts and foster a shared purpose. Practical actions include: (i) establishing a shared PLC purpose through collaborative discussions with staff; (ii) consistently communicating PLC objectives, procedures, and expectations across multiple platforms; and (iii) providing examples of effective PLC practices to ensure mutual understanding and coherence. The suggested solutions align with previous scholars who emphasized that transformational leaders provide clarity and coherence by integrating vision, expectations, and instructional priorities.

Taken together, both quantitative and qualitative research suggested that administration involvement, beyond simply compliance inspection, considerably boosted PLC effectiveness. The targeted research Participants regularly underlined that administrators who attended PLC sessions, displayed inquiry, and offered practical feedback strengthened the collaborative culture and instructional emphasis. As leaders displayed learning while attending to worker needs, administrators' actions showed idealized influence and personalized concern. Practical tasks include: (i) regularly attending PLC sessions to observe, listen, and participate in inquiry; (ii) providing feedback that is in line with PLC objectives and instructional priorities; and (iii) regularly keeping promises and providing assistance. The results coincide with past studies that suggest visible, involved leadership cultivates trust and bolsters the validity of PLC efforts (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Hord, 2009; Sok, C. et al., 2026).

In the end, the results showed that leadership behaviours that energize and maintain the structure are what determine PLC effectiveness rather than just the framework itself. PLCs are effective tools for professional development and instructional improvement when leaders practice transformational leadership—articulating vision, demonstrating dedication, empowering teacher leaders, and building trust. Schools must invest in leadership practices that combine targeted leadership actions with transformational leadership principles at all organizational levels if they want to improve instructional outcomes and foster collaboration (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005a; Northouse, 2019; Sok, C. et al., 2026).

5.3. Recommendations for Further Research

Multiple limits must be acknowledged when evaluating the findings of the present study. The mixed-methodologies strategy provided a comprehensive knowledge of leadership influences on PLCs, supported by research highlighting the effectiveness of integrating quantitative and qualitative methods to clarify complex educational phenomena. Nevertheless, particular methodological and contextual constraints may have influenced the scope, generalizability, and transferability of the results. Based on the findings, limits, and delimitations of the present study, numerous recommendations for future research are proposed to enhance the comprehension of targeted leadership in PLCs. Future study should broaden its scope across various educational levels and circumstances. Future research should investigate targeted leadership in elementary, middle, charter, and nonpublic school environments to evaluate the applicability of findings across diverse instructional and organizational contexts. Subsequent research ought to undertake longitudinal studies on leadership and PLC growth should be then conducted. Longitudinal research could examine the evolution of targeted leadership behaviours over time and the impact of sustained leadership coherence on PLC maturity and long-

term efficacy. And, subsequent research must to include data on student success and instructional outcomes. Incorporating student performance data would enhance the empirical connection among leadership approaches, PLC efficacy, and instructional results.

Using multilevel modelling, a statistical technique commonly used in educational research to handle nested data structures and distribute variance across organizational tiers, researchers can identify leadership effects at the classroom, team, and school levels while controlling within-group and between-group variability. Multilevel modelling would facilitate the investigation of the impact of schoolwide leadership behaviours on PLC functioning, as well as the interplay between team-level leadership practices and classroom-level instructional implementation in relation to collaborative outcomes. Multilevel modelling would improve causal inferences, improve estimate accuracy, and provide more insight into the impact of targeted leadership on PLC effectiveness across organizational tiers by clarifying nested relationships.

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