
**Teacher Learning Communities and the Development of PAUD Teachers'
Professionalism: A Qualitative Study**

Maimunah^{1*} and Ahmad Suriansyah²

¹. Department of Early Childhood Teacher Education, Universitas Lambung Mangkurat,
Indonesia

². Department Of Educational Administration, Universitas Lambung Mangkurat, Indonesia

*maimunah@ulm.ac.id

Received
11/06/2026

Accepted
25/08/2026

Published
11/10/2026

DOI
[10.59329/gawi.v6i2.365](https://doi.org/10.59329/gawi.v6i2.365)

ABSTRACT

The Teacher Learning Community (TLC) is one of the strategies for teacher professional development that can support improvements in instructional quality through collaboration, reflection, and continuous improvement of instructional practices. This study aimed to analyze Teacher Learning Community practices in the professional development of Early Childhood Education (ECE) teachers in North Banjarmasin District, Banjarmasin City. The study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive design. The research informants consisted of the head of the Learning Community (KKG), school principals, and teachers as members of the learning community, totaling 19 informants (1 head of PKG/TLC, 3 school principals, and 15 teachers). Data were collected through observations, interviews, and document analysis. Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, involving data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data trustworthiness was established through source and method triangulation, as well as member checking. The findings showed that Teacher Learning Community practices were manifested through three main aspects: (1) a collaborative work culture, demonstrated through experience sharing, instructional discussions, and collaborative lesson planning; (2) action research as a habit of inquiry, through problem identification, action planning, implementation, observation, and reflection; and (3) professional reflection in instruction, through the evaluation of instructional practices and the formulation of improvements for subsequent activities. These three aspects were interconnected in fostering a professional learning culture that supported the enhancement of teachers' competencies and the continuous improvement of instructional quality. This study contributes to demonstrating that, within the ECE context, the Teacher Learning Community functions not merely as a forum for sharing experiences but also as a professional development strategy that integrates collaboration, inquiry, and reflection to support the continuous improvement of instructional practices.

Keywords: *action research, teacher learning community, teacher professionalism, work culture*

How to cite:

Maimunah & Suriansyah, A. (2026). Teacher learning communities and the development of PAUD teachers' professionalism: a qualitative study. *Gawi: Journal of Action Research*, 6(2), 432-446



INTRODUCTION

Enhancing the quality of education is one of the strategic issues in efforts to achieve a high-quality and sustainable education (OECD, 2021). The quality of instruction has not only been determined by educational policies, the availability of facilities, and the curriculum, but has also depended heavily on teachers' professional capacity to design, implement, and evaluate the learning process (Sallis, 2012). Teachers have played a central role as facilitators, motivators, and agents of change in creating meaningful learning experiences for students (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Therefore, efforts to improve the quality of instruction have been closely associated with strengthening teachers' competencies and professionalism (Fullan, 2007).

One approach that has been increasingly developed to support teachers' professional development is the Professional Learning Community (PLC) or learning community. DuFour (2004) demonstrated that schools that have consistently implemented the principles of Professional Learning Communities have exhibited higher levels of teacher collaboration, enhanced professional capacity, and improved student learning outcomes. Vescio et al., (2008) also demonstrated that professional learning communities have been able to improve teachers' instructional practices and have had a positive impact on student performance. In line with these findings, Stoll et al., (2006) emphasized that collective learning within professional communities can serve as an effective means of building school organizational capacity while simultaneously improving the quality of teaching. From a quality management perspective, such practices have been aligned with the concept of continuous improvement, which refers to ongoing efforts to improve organizational processes through the involvement of organizational members, reflection on practices, and decision-making based on experiences and evidence obtained (Deming, 1986; Sallis, 2012).

In educational practice, professional development through learning communities has become increasingly important because teachers may still work within predominantly individualistic patterns. Limited opportunities to discuss, share experiences, and reflect on instructional practices with colleagues can constrain knowledge exchange and the development of instructional innovations. Conversely, learning communities provide teachers with opportunities to learn from one another, address instructional challenges, and collectively develop their practices. Haslan & Mahamod (2024) emphasized that quality instruction requires a culture of collaboration and professional reflection as integral components of a continuous improvement process. Thus, the Teacher Learning Community (TLC) should not merely be understood as a forum for teacher meetings but rather as a professional learning space that enables teachers to develop their capacities based on authentic challenges and experiences encountered in the instructional process.

In the context of Early Childhood Education (ECE), learning communities have characteristics that differ from those at the primary and secondary education levels (Antinluoma et al., 2021). In Indonesia, ECE teacher learning communities have been connected to the Teacher Working Group (Kelompok Kerja Guru/KKG) and Teacher Activity Center (Pusat Kegiatan Guru/PKG) structures, which bring together teachers and ECE unit administrators to participate in collaborative learning activities. These structures have enabled cross-school interactions, allowing teachers to share experiences, discuss instructional challenges, and develop practices that are appropriate to the characteristics of young children. Conceptually, such practices have been closely related to the Professional Learning Community (PLC), which emphasizes a culture of collaborative learning, collective learning, reflective dialogue, and a focus on improving instructional practices (Ridha et al., 2026; Vescio et al., 2008).

A Teacher Learning Community (TLC) is a collaborative learning platform for teachers that is oriented toward improving the quality of instructional practices through collaboration, reflective dialogue, experience sharing, and collective problem-solving (Vescio et al., 2008). Through this community, teachers have not only served as implementers of instruction but have also acted as professional learners who continuously develop themselves based on authentic experiences in the classroom. The presence of TLCs has become increasingly relevant in the context of 21st-century education, which has required teachers to be adaptive, innovative, and responsive to students' learning needs (Nurhayati, 2022). Clark et al., (2023) found that professional learning communities

have been able to enhance teachers' capacity to develop innovative instructional practices while simultaneously strengthening their confidence in sharing knowledge across disciplines.

Banjarmasin City provides a relevant context for examining TLC practices at the ECE level because teacher learning communities have been organized into groups based on clusters across five districts: Banjarmasin Timur, Banjarmasin Utara, Banjarmasin Selatan, Banjarmasin Tengah, and Banjarmasin Barat. Based on the initial exploration conducted in this study, several learning communities have established work programs and good-practice activities aimed at improving instructional practices and developing teachers' professionalism through regular meetings. This condition indicates the existence of an institutional space for the development of collective professional learning. However, the existence of learning community forums alone does not necessarily explain how professional learning processes have taken place in practice, particularly how teachers have collaborated, conducted inquiries into instructional challenges, and used reflection to improve their instructional practices.

Several studies have shown that PLCs can serve as an effective means of professional development. Johannesson (2022) explained that effective professional learning occurs when teachers engage in inquiry cycles that begin with students' needs and are followed by reflection on instructional practices. Clark et al., (2023) demonstrated that professional learning communities can enhance teachers' capacity to develop innovative instructional practices while strengthening their confidence in sharing knowledge. However, most of these studies have examined PLCs within the broader educational context and have primarily focused on their influence on teachers' professional development or student learning outcomes. Studies that specifically explain how Teacher Learning Communities (TLCs) function as a mechanism for professional learning within the context of ECE in Indonesia remain limited.

This gap has become increasingly important because the ECE context has distinct instructional characteristics compared with other educational levels. ECE teachers have not only been required to possess pedagogical competencies but have also needed to design learning experiences appropriate to children's developmental stages, observe children's development, and adapt instructional strategies to individual needs. Under these conditions, learning communities have not been sufficient merely as spaces for sharing information; rather, they have needed to function as spaces where teachers examine instructional challenges, implement improvement actions, and reflect on the outcomes. Therefore, an empirical understanding of how TLC practices in ECE settings in Indonesia have been implemented and through what mechanisms these communities have supported continuous improvement in instruction is still needed.

Based on this gap, this study has focused on three aspects that constitute the primary mechanisms of Teacher Learning Community practices: (1) collaborative work culture, (2) action research as a habit of inquiry, and (3) professional reflection in instruction. These three aspects have been viewed as interconnected in shaping a sustainable professional learning process. A collaborative culture has provided teachers with opportunities to share experiences and solve problems collectively, while action research has encouraged teachers to identify problems and seek solutions based on authentic instructional practices. Meanwhile, professional reflection has enabled teachers to evaluate the outcomes of these actions and determine subsequent improvements in instruction.

The novelty of this study lies in its effort to understand the Teacher Learning Community (TLC) in the context of ECE in Indonesia not merely as a forum for teachers' professional development but as a professional learning mechanism that integrates collaboration, inquiry, and reflection into the process of improving instructional practices. This perspective provides a theoretical contribution by expanding the understanding of PLC practices within the ECE context, which has its own distinctive institutional and instructional characteristics. Practically, this study provides an overview of learning community practices that can serve as a reference for ECE administrators and Teacher Working Groups (*Kelompok Kerja Guru/KKG*) in fostering a professional culture that supports the continuous improvement of instructional practices.

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study aims to analyze Teacher Learning Community (TLC) practices among ECE teachers in Banjarmasin City, with a focus on collaborative culture,

action research as a habit of inquiry, and professional reflection in instruction. Specifically, this study examines how these three aspects have been manifested in learning community activities and how they have been interconnected with teachers' professional development and the continuous improvement of instructional practices.

METHOD

Research Design and Context

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of Teacher Learning Community (TLC) practices among Early Childhood Education (ECE) teachers. The study was conducted within a learning community/Teacher Activity Center (*Pusat Kegiatan Guru*/PKG) in North Banjarmasin District, Banjarmasin City. The learning community conducted its activities regularly once a month over a one-year period, resulting in three meetings during the research period. From these activities, the researcher directly observed three selected sessions to collect data on collaborative practices, action research as a habit of inquiry, and professional reflection in instruction.

Informants and Informant Selection Technique

The study involved 19 informants, consisting of one head of the PKG/Teacher Learning Community, three school principals, and 15 teachers who were members of the learning community (see [Table 1](#)). The informants were selected purposively based on their involvement in and experience with learning community activities. The head of the PKG was selected due to their role in coordinating community activities, while the school principals were selected because of their involvement in the development of and support for teachers' professional activities. The teachers were selected because they were directly involved in instructional practices and learning community activities.

Table 1. Research Informants

Informant Group	Number	Role in the Study
Head of PKG/TLC	1 person	Coordinated and provided information regarding the implementation of learning community activities
School Principals	3 people	Provided information regarding school support for and involvement in learning community activities
TLC Teacher Members	15 people	Provided information regarding their experiences participating in activities, collaboration, action research, and instructional reflection
Total	19 people	

Data Collection Techniques

Research data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted with 19 informants using an interview guide developed based on the research focus, namely collaborative work culture, action research as a habit of inquiry, and professional reflection in instruction. The interviews were conducted in person and lasted approximately 10–15 minutes for each informant. The interview results were transcribed to facilitate the data analysis and interpretation processes.

Observations were conducted directly during three learning community activities throughout the research period. The observations focused on teacher interactions, experience-sharing activities, discussions of instructional challenges, the development or discussion of instructional improvement plans, and reflection activities. Observation data were recorded through field notes documenting activities, interactions, and events relevant to the research focus.

Document analysis was conducted on documents related to the implementation of learning community activities and those that supported information obtained from interviews and observations. The documents were used as supplementary data sources to provide an overview of the implementation of activities, programs, and practices carried out within the learning community.

Data Analysis Procedure

Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model (see [Figure 1](#)), which comprises data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The analysis process was conducted systematically and iteratively from the initial stage of data collection until the research conclusions were established.

The transcribed interview data were read repeatedly to identify information relevant to the research focus. Relevant data were then grouped based on similarities in meaning and substance. The grouped data were compared with observation notes and documents to identify consistent patterns. Subsequently, the data were presented in thematic descriptions to provide an overview of Teacher Learning Community (TLC) practices. Based on this process, three main aspects were identified: collaborative work culture, action research as a habit of inquiry, and professional reflection in instruction. The conclusions were then verified by comparing data from different sources and data collection techniques.

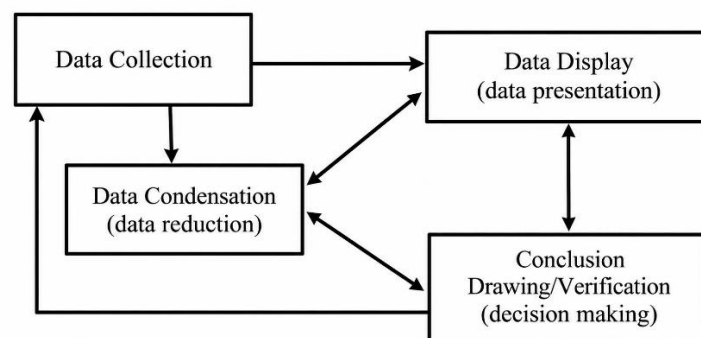


Figure 1. Miles and Huberman's data analysis technique (2014)

Data Trustworthiness

Data trustworthiness was established through source triangulation and method triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from the head of the PKG/TLC, school principals, and teacher members of the learning community. The comparison was conducted to assess the consistency of information regarding the implementation of activities, forms of collaboration, action research processes, and instructional reflection practices.

Method triangulation was conducted by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and document analysis. Information obtained through interviews was compared with findings from observations of learning community activities and the available documents. In this way, the findings were not based solely on informants' statements but were also verified through other data sources.

The credibility of the data was strengthened through the researcher's involvement in attending and observing learning community activities periodically over a one-year period, as well as through the comparison of data from various informants and data collection techniques. Transferability was maintained by providing an adequate description of the research context, characteristics of the learning community, informants, and implementation of activities, enabling readers to assess the applicability of the findings to similar contexts. Dependability was ensured by documenting each stage of the research process, including informant selection, data collection, transcription, analysis, and conclusion drawing. Confirmability was maintained by ensuring that the interpretations and conclusions of the study could be traced back to data obtained from interviews, observations, and document analysis.

Audit Trail and Research Ethics

The audit trail was maintained by documenting the research process through field notes, interview transcripts, activity-related documents, data categorization records, and analytical notes. These

records were used to ensure traceability between the field data, analytical process, and research findings.

The study adhered to research ethics principles by providing informants with an explanation of the research objectives, obtaining their informed consent to participate, and protecting their identities and the confidentiality of the information they provided. The data obtained were used solely for research purposes.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the interviews, observations of the learning community activities, and document analysis, the following research findings were obtained:

Collaborative Work Culture and Sharing of Good Practice Experiences

The research findings showed that the Teacher Learning Community (TLC) in the Strawberry Cluster functioned as a professional learning space that enabled teachers to engage in collective learning through experience sharing, instructional discussions, and collaborative problem-solving. TLC activities were conducted regularly each month and involved teachers from 19 ECE institutions that were members of the learning community. This regularity provided an important condition for sustained professional interaction among teachers, rather than limiting professional learning to one-time training activities.

The Head of the Learning Community explained:

“We hold regular teacher meetings every month. During these activities, teachers share their teaching experiences, discuss the challenges they encounter, and work together to find appropriate solutions to improve the quality of instruction.”

This statement indicates that TLC activities have not only been oriented toward the delivery of instructional materials but have also utilized teachers' experiences as a source of collective learning. Teachers have been provided with opportunities to share classroom challenges and obtain alternative solutions based on the experiences of their colleagues. One teacher also stated that the TLC has provided a space for collaborative learning, enabling teachers to gain new insights into instructional strategies that are appropriate for the needs of young children and developments in educational technology.

These findings are consistent with the view that teachers' professional learning occurs socially through interaction, experience sharing, and the collective construction of knowledge. Hendrickx et al., (2025) demonstrated that interaction patterns within Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) play an important role in facilitating the collaborative construction of teachers' knowledge. In other words, PLCs have not merely served as spaces for teachers to exchange information but have also functioned as environments in which professional knowledge has been constructed through interactions among teachers. This finding is relevant to the practices of the Strawberry Cluster TLC, where the instructional experiences of individual teachers have been brought into the community forum and utilized as sources of collective learning.

The interview findings were reinforced by the observation results. During the observed TLC activities, teachers actively discussed lesson planning, the use of instructional media, and the evaluation of previously implemented learning activities. The interactions took place openly, with each participant given an opportunity to share their opinions and classroom experiences. These practices demonstrated that professional learning had taken place through social interaction and the exchange of experiences, rather than solely through the transfer of knowledge from resource persons to teachers.

This condition also demonstrated that collaboration within the TLC was characterized by purposeful collaboration, namely collaboration directed toward authentic professional needs and challenges. McKie (2024) found that professional communities provide teachers with opportunities to share teaching experiences, reflect on their practices, and support one another throughout the professional development process. This finding reinforces the present study's

observation that teachers' teaching experiences in the Strawberry Cluster have served as important resources in the process of collective professional learning.

The collaborative culture was also evident in the process of formulating the TLC program. Observation results showed that the program was developed through joint meetings at the beginning of the semester. Teachers were given opportunities to communicate the challenges they encountered in instruction, and their input was subsequently used as a basis for developing the activity agenda. This finding was supported by documentation in the form of meeting minutes and the TLC work program, which included the objectives, materials, implementation schedule, resource persons, and success indicators of the activities. Thus, the TLC program was not entirely determined through a top-down approach but was developed based on professional needs arising from teachers' instructional practices.

This finding is significant because it demonstrates that teachers' professional development within the TLC has not been entirely determined by top-down policies but has been developed through teachers' active participation in identifying needs and designing professional learning agendas. Observation results showed that teachers were given opportunities to communicate instructional challenges before the activity program was developed, allowing the TLC agenda to emerge from authentic classroom needs. This condition indicates a balance between institutional support and teachers' ownership of the professional learning process. This finding is consistent with Wei (2025), who demonstrated that effective Professional Learning Communities are developed through a combination of organizational support, collaborative practices, and teachers' active participation in determining the direction of professional development. According to Wei (2025), teachers demonstrate higher levels of engagement when learning communities provide opportunities for them to share experiences, collaborate, and contribute to decision-making related to professional learning.

The Head of the Learning Community also explained:

"The TLC program is designed to address various challenges faced by teachers in implementing instruction, preparing teaching materials, assessing children's development, and strengthening professional competencies. Each routine activity must also be reported to the Banjarmasin City Education Office in the following month."

This statement demonstrates that the TLC has occupied a relatively structured position in the professional development of ECE teachers. On the one hand, its activities have been driven by the needs and challenges encountered by teachers; on the other hand, its implementation has been connected to a reporting mechanism to the Education Office. This condition demonstrates a combination of bottom-up professional needs among teachers and top-down institutional structures in the organization of the learning community.

From a PLC perspective, this combination has been important because the sustainability of learning communities has not been determined solely by teachers' willingness to collaborate but also by organizational support structures. Yu & Chao (2023) demonstrated that teachers' participation in PLCs has been influenced by various conditions that can facilitate or constrain collaborative activities. Thus, regular meetings, institutional support, opportunities for interaction, and opportunities for teachers to communicate their professional needs have constituted important conditions for sustaining collaborative practices.

The findings regarding collaboration are consistent with the concept of a Professional Learning Community (PLC), which places collective learning and collaborative work at the core of teachers' professional development (DuFour, 2004; Stoll et al., 2006). Vescio et al., (2008) also demonstrated that collaboration within professional communities can encourage teachers to share knowledge and improve their instructional practices. However, the findings of this study extend this understanding within the context of ECE in Banjarmasin, as collaboration has not occurred solely within individual educational institutions but has also taken place through a community that brings together teachers from 19 ECE institutions within a single cluster.

However, the findings of this study extend this understanding within the context of ECE in Banjarmasin. Collaboration has not occurred solely within individual educational institutions but has also taken place through a community that brings together teachers from 19 ECE institutions within a single cluster. This condition has enabled pedagogical experiences from various educational institutions to be exchanged within a shared professional space. This context has been particularly important because the professional learning of ECE teachers has been closely related to children's developmental needs, including the selection of instructional methods and media, interactions with children, and developmental assessment.

Thus, the collaborative mechanism within the Strawberry Cluster TLC can be understood as a process that connects teachers' individual experiences with collective professional learning. Challenges initially encountered by individual teachers have been brought to the community forum, discussed collectively, and subsequently used to generate alternative practices that can be implemented in the classroom. This pattern demonstrates a shift from individually oriented professional learning toward collective learning grounded in teachers' authentic experiences.

Action Research as a Habit of Inquiry

The research findings demonstrated the presence of action-based inquiry practices in teachers' instructional activities. Teachers identified challenges arising during instruction, discussed them within the learning community, considered alternative solutions, and subsequently implemented improvements in their instructional practices. The issues discussed were related to authentic classroom conditions, such as student engagement, the appropriateness of instructional methods, and the use of instructional media.

This practice demonstrates that instructional challenges have not remained merely topics of discussion but have instead served as a basis for teachers to consider improvement actions. This finding is consistent with the function of the TLC as a space that connects practical experiences with professional learning processes. When teachers have brought classroom challenges to the community forum, these individual experiences have been transformed into sources of collective learning that can be analyzed and addressed through collaboratively developed solutions.

The observation results showed that discussions during TLC activities have not only focused on instructional planning but have also involved evaluating teachers' classroom experiences. Teachers have shared challenges encountered in their classrooms and discussed possible improvements with other group members. This practice has demonstrated an iterative process between classroom experiences and professional learning within the community.

From a Professional Learning Community (PLC) perspective, this pattern is related to the principle of action inquiry or habit of inquiry, which refers to teachers' habitual practice of identifying problems, using instructional experiences and evidence as a basis for consideration, and seeking alternatives for improvement ([Hord, 1997](#)). Hudson ([2024](#)) emphasized that effective PLCs encourage teachers to develop habits of inquiry into instructional challenges and to use evidence from practice as a basis for improvement. Thus, inquiry has not been understood merely as a formal research activity but rather as a professional habit of questioning instructional practices, identifying problems, and seeking evidence to inform improvement actions.

This finding is further supported by Nehez ([2024](#)), who demonstrated that action research within PLCs can be used to identify actions needed to improve community practices while simultaneously enhancing professional learning. The study showed that the inquiry process within PLCs involves identifying practical challenges, exploring possible courses of action, and using this process to improve instructional practices. This is consistent with the conditions observed in the Strawberry Cluster TLC, where instructional challenges encountered by teachers have become topics for collective discussion and a basis for determining possible improvement strategies.

The relationship between action research and professional learning is further supported by Francisco et al., ([2024](#)). Their study demonstrated that action research can serve as a form of practice-based professional learning, as teachers learn by examining challenges that arise within their own professional practices. This process enables teachers to develop their knowledge while simultaneously making changes to the practices they implement. This perspective helps explain

that the inquiry practices within the Strawberry Cluster TLC have not only generated solutions to instructional challenges but have also served as a professional learning process for teachers.

More recent findings from Cheng et al., (2025) also demonstrate a relationship between teacher inquiry, PLCs, and teachers' professional development. The study found that teacher inquiry has a strong influence on teachers' professional development, while PLCs can serve as a pathway that strengthens the relationship between teacher inquiry and professional growth. These findings reinforce the interpretation that TLC forums can function as environments in which teachers' habits of inquiry are developed through interaction and collaborative learning.

In the context of this study, the uniqueness of the inquiry practice lies in the connection between the community forum and instructional challenges in ECE. Teachers have not conducted inquiry into abstract issues but rather into challenges arising from their everyday classroom experiences. Thus, the TLC has functioned as a bridge connecting practical experiences, professional discussions, improvement actions, and reflection on instructional outcomes.

These findings extend previous PLC research, which has largely emphasized the importance of collaboration and the use of evidence in teachers' professional development. In the context of the Strawberry Cluster ECE, the habit of inquiry has not existed in isolation but has developed from a collaborative culture that has enabled teachers to bring individual challenges into a shared learning space. Thus, collaboration has served as a condition that enables the professional inquiry process to take place continuously, while inquiry has provided a more concrete direction for collaboration by focusing discussions on authentic challenges and needs arising from instructional practices.

Thus, action research as a habit of inquiry within the Strawberry Cluster TLC can be understood as a professional learning process that connects problem identification, collaborative discussion, improvement actions, and learning from practical experiences. This pattern demonstrates that teachers have not merely been recipients of professional knowledge but have also become active learners who generate knowledge from their own experiences and the instructional challenges they encounter.

Teachers' Professional Reflection in Instruction

Professional reflection emerged as the third finding in the practice of the Teacher Learning Community (TLC) within the Strawberry Cluster. Teachers engaged in reflection on the instructional processes they had implemented, both individually and through collective discussions during learning community activities. The aspects considered in the reflection included the appropriateness of instructional methods, the use of instructional media, students' responses, the achievement of learning objectives, and challenges encountered during the instructional process.

The research findings showed that reflection was not conducted merely to assess whether instructional activities had been implemented but was also used to determine improvement strategies for subsequent lessons. Teachers identified aspects of instruction that were considered less than optimal and then considered changes to the methods, media, or approaches to be used in subsequent sessions. Thus, reflection has functioned as a link between previous instructional experiences and subsequent instructional planning. This pattern demonstrates that reflection within the TLC has been characterized by action-oriented reflection, as the results of reflection have been used as a basis for determining changes in instructional practices.

Several teachers in the learning community reported that reflection had helped them understand the strengths and weaknesses of their instructional practices. Reflection also provided opportunities for teachers to gain perspectives from colleagues regarding the instructional challenges they encountered. Observation results showed that the evaluation of instructional experiences had become part of the discussions during learning community activities, particularly when teachers shared their experiences and discussed challenges encountered in the classroom. Thus, teachers' individual experiences did not remain merely as personal evaluations but developed into sources of collective learning through dialogue with colleagues.

This practice demonstrates the characteristics of reflective dialogue within a Professional Learning Community ([Hord, 1997](#)). Reflection in the TLC has not occurred solely as an individual activity but has developed into a dialogic process in which one teacher's experiences have become the subject of experience sharing and feedback from other teachers. This finding is consistent with Segal ([2024](#)), who demonstrated that collective teacher reflection is a complex process that does not always occur linearly. Reflection within groups has not only served to evaluate instructional practices but has also provided a space for developing shared understandings of professional experiences and teacher identity.

This perspective is important for explaining the practices within the Strawberry Cluster because teachers' reflections have not occurred in isolation but have taken place through interactions with other teachers. When a teacher has shared an instructional experience or challenge, other teachers have been able to provide perspectives based on their own experiences. This process has enabled an exchange of perspectives that has broadened teachers' understanding of instructional challenges. Thus, collective reflection has functioned as a mechanism for transforming individual experiences into shared professional knowledge.

This finding is further supported by Avgitidou et al., ([2024](#)), who demonstrated that collaborative inquiry and reflection within professional learning communities can constitute important components of the professional learning process. Collaboration and reflection enable educators to re-examine their practices, question pedagogical decisions, and develop new understandings through interaction with other community members. This is consistent with the practices of the Strawberry Cluster TLC, where teachers have not only shared their teaching experiences but have also discussed those experiences to determine possible improvements for subsequent instruction.

In the context of the Strawberry Cluster ECE, reflection has been characterized by its close connection to the learning needs of young children. Teachers have not only evaluated the achievement of learning objectives but have also considered children's responses and engagement as a basis for determining instructional improvements. This has been important because the characteristics of ECE require teachers to continuously adapt their instructional strategies to children's responses, interests, needs, and developmental stages. Therefore, reflection has served as an important process for ensuring that teachers' pedagogical decisions remain oriented toward children's learning experiences.

These findings are consistent with research on collaborative reflection-based professional development, which has shown that supporting teachers' psychological needs during collaborative reflection activities can enhance teachers' reflectivity and professional motivation. The study demonstrated that reflection is not only related to the evaluation of practices but can also strengthen the quality of professional learning when teachers receive support to participate actively in the reflective process. In the context of the Strawberry Cluster TLC, opportunities to share experiences and receive feedback from colleagues have constituted a form of social support that has enabled reflection to take place collaboratively.

Furthermore, research on PLCs among preschool teachers has shown that continuous reflection is one of the core characteristics of professional learning communities. A study involving preschool teachers identified a read–practice–share pattern that connects learning, practice, experience sharing, and reflection in an ongoing process. The study also demonstrated that peer support and leadership play important roles in sustaining PLCs. These findings are highly relevant to the context of the present study, as the Strawberry Cluster TLC has likewise demonstrated a connection between practical experiences, experience sharing, and reflection on children's learning.

Thus, professional reflection within the Strawberry Cluster TLC cannot be understood merely as an evaluation activity conducted after instruction. Reflection has functioned as a professional learning mechanism that connects instructional experiences, dialogue with colleagues, interpretation of children's responses, and planning for instructional improvement. This pattern demonstrates that teachers have learned from the practices they have implemented and have used the resulting insights to determine subsequent actions.

When linked to the two previous findings, reflection also serves as a component that connects the collaborative work culture and the habit of inquiry. The collaborative culture provides teachers with opportunities to communicate their experiences and challenges, while the habit of inquiry encourages them to question these challenges and explore possible alternatives. Reflection is then used to evaluate the experiences and determine subsequent improvements. Thus, the three aspects of the Strawberry Cluster TLC form an interconnected cycle of professional learning (see [Figure 2](#)).

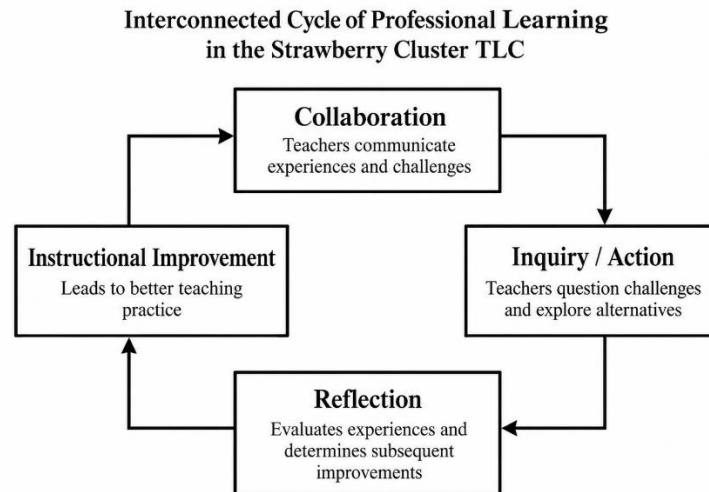


Figure 2. Interconnected cycle of professional learning

These findings extend previous PLC research by demonstrating that professional reflection in the ECE context has not only functioned as a characteristic of learning communities but has also served as a mechanism connecting teachers' professional learning with the authentic needs of young children. In other words, the TLC has provided a space that enables teachers to transform instructional experiences into professional knowledge and subsequently use that knowledge to continuously adapt their instructional practices.

The Teacher Learning Community Mechanism for Instructional Improvement

When the three findings are analyzed as a whole, the Teacher Learning Community (TLC) in the Strawberry Cluster operates through a cyclical professional learning mechanism. The process begins with a collaborative work culture that provides teachers with opportunities to share experiences, discuss instructional practices, and identify challenges encountered in the classroom. These challenges then become the focus of inquiry as teachers consider alternative improvement actions. After being implemented in instruction, the resulting experiences are reflected upon both individually and through the community forum. The outcomes of this reflection subsequently serve as a basis for teachers to adjust their instructional strategies in subsequent activities.

This mechanism was identified through the interrelationship among interview data, observations, and documentation of TLC activities. The interviews showed that teachers brought their instructional experiences and challenges to the community forum for collective discussion. The observation results revealed activities involving experience sharing, instructional planning discussions, practice evaluation, and the exploration of alternative solutions to identified challenges. Meanwhile, documentation in the form of work programs and meeting minutes showed that community activities were designed and implemented regularly based on teachers' professional development needs. The interrelationship among these data sources demonstrated that collaboration, inquiry, and reflection have operated as interconnected processes rather than as isolated activities.

Thus, the three aspects identified in this study have not functioned as separate practices. The collaborative work culture has provided the conditions for inquiry to occur; inquiry has generated considerations and improvement actions, while reflection has enabled teachers to evaluate these experiences and determine subsequent improvements. This mechanism can be understood as a cycle (see [Figure 3](#)). This cycle demonstrates that professional learning has taken place continuously, as instructional experiences have become sources of learning for the community at subsequent stages.

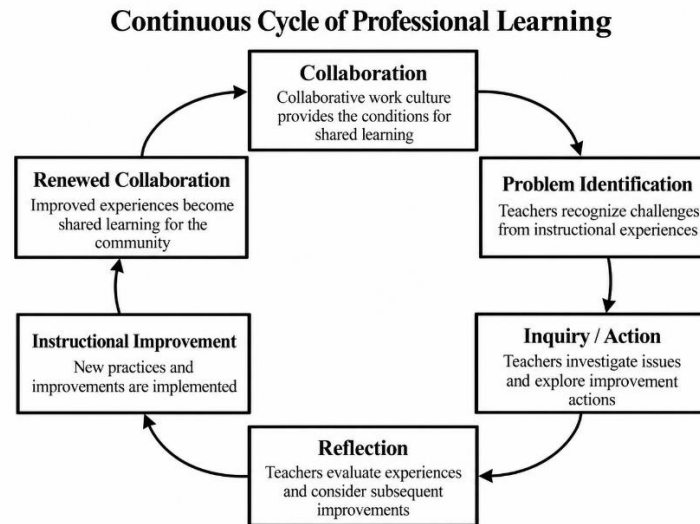


Figure 3. Continuous cycle of professional learning

These findings extend the existing literature on Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), which has largely emphasized teacher collaboration, collective learning, and professional reflection as core characteristics of PLCs ([DuFour, 2004](#); [Stoll et al., 2006](#); [Vescio et al., 2008](#)). This study demonstrates that, in the context of ECE in Banjarmasin, these three elements have not merely existed as characteristics of a professional community but have also been interconnected within a learning mechanism that originates from authentic classroom challenges and leads back to the improvement of instructional practices. Thus, the contribution of this study lies in explaining how the TLC connects teachers' individual experiences with collective professional learning through a process of collaboration, inquiry, action, and reflection.

The ECE context provides distinctive characteristics because teachers' professional discussions have centered on the needs and responses of young children, including the appropriateness of instructional methods, the use of instructional media, children's engagement, and developmental assessment. In addition, the learning community, which involves teachers from 19 ECE institutions within a single cluster, has expanded the space for experience sharing beyond the boundaries of individual educational institutions. This condition has enabled teachers to gain perspectives and alternative practices from different ECE settings. Thus, the TLC has not only functioned as a platform for enhancing teachers' competencies but also as a social mechanism that transforms individual experiences into collective professional knowledge.

These findings also demonstrate that the sustainability of the TLC has not been determined solely by the frequency of meetings or the amount of material delivered but by the community's ability to sustain a cycle of professional learning grounded in teachers' authentic needs. When instructional challenges have been brought to the forum, discussed collaboratively, followed up through practice, and reflected upon, TLC activities have become more closely aligned with classroom learning needs. This reinforces the view that effective teacher professional development needs to be contextual, collaborative, and continuous.

Practically, these findings imply that the professional development of ECE teachers can be directed toward strengthening learning communities that are classroom-needs-based and oriented

toward instructional improvement. ECE administrators and school leaders can support the sustainability of TLCs by providing time for collaboration, creating opportunities for teachers to communicate instructional challenges, encouraging inquiry-based practices, and facilitating collective reflection. Thus, the TLC mechanism can serve as an alternative form of professional development that complements conventional one-shot training.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the Teacher Learning Community (TLC) among ECE teachers in the Strawberry Cluster, North Banjarmasin, can be understood as a mechanism for continuous professional learning that connects individual instructional experiences with collective professional learning. The primary contribution of this study lies in identifying three interconnected aspects of TLC practices: (1) collaborative work culture, (2) action research as a habit of inquiry, and (3) professional reflection in instruction. These three aspects form a cyclical professional learning process, beginning with experience sharing and the identification of instructional challenges, followed by inquiry and the implementation of improvement actions, and subsequently reflection, which serves as a basis for further improvement of instructional practices.

Practically, the findings demonstrate that the professional development of ECE teachers should be directed toward learning communities that are conducted regularly, grounded in authentic classroom needs, and oriented toward addressing instructional challenges. ECE administrators and education stakeholders can strengthen TLCs by providing adequate time and space for collaboration, facilitating the sharing of good practices, supporting teacher inquiry, and fostering a culture of continuous reflection. The involvement of teachers from 19 ECE institutions within the Strawberry Cluster also demonstrates that TLCs can serve as a space for exchanging knowledge and experiences across educational institutions.

This study has several limitations. First, it was conducted within a single learning community in North Banjarmasin District using a descriptive qualitative approach; therefore, the findings are contextual and are not intended to be statistically generalized to all ECE learning communities. Second, the study focused on teachers' professional development practices and processes and did not directly measure changes in the quality of instructional practices or children's learning outcomes. Future research could expand the investigation to multiple clusters and regions with different characteristics to gain a broader understanding of variations in TLC practices across ECE contexts. Longitudinal studies are also needed to examine the sustainability and development of the three TLC aspects over time. In addition, mixed-methods research could be conducted to investigate the relationship between the quality of TLC implementation, changes in teachers' instructional practices, and children's learning and developmental outcomes. Thus, TLCs can be developed not merely as forums for teacher meetings but as sustainable professional learning mechanisms through the integration of collaboration, inquiry, and reflection to support improvements in the quality of ECE.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

All authors contributed to and collaborated in analyzing the initial research problem, identifying theories relevant to the study, determining the research methodology, and conducting the data collection process. All authors also collaborated in preparing the research findings, developing the discussion, and formulating the conclusions of the study.

AI DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The authors declare that this research was prepared, researched, written, and edited without the aid of artificial intelligence (AI) techniques.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to express their deepest gratitude and highest appreciation to all informants who participated in this study.

FUNDING

This research received no external funding.

REFERENCES

- Antinluoma, M., Ilomäki, L., & Toom, A. (2021). Practices of Professional Learning Communities. *Frontiers in Education*, 6(April), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2021.617613>
- Avgitidou, S., Karadimitriou, K., Ampartzaki, M., Sidiropoulou, C., & Kampeza, M. (2024). *The Role of Collaborative Inquiry and Reflection within a Professional Learning Community*.
- Cheng, S., Wu, S.-C., & Goodman, A. (2025). a Strategy for Promoting Teachers' Professional Development in a Blended Professional Learning Community Environment Through Teacher Inquiry in Jinan, Shandong Province, China. *The EUrASEANs: Journal on Global Socio-Economic Dynamics*, 5(5(54)), 372–385. [https://doi.org/10.35678/2539-5645.5\(54\).2025.372-385](https://doi.org/10.35678/2539-5645.5(54).2025.372-385)
- Clark, A. M., Zhan, M., Dellinger, J. T., & Semingson, P. L. (2023). Innovating Teaching Practice Through Professional Learning Communities: Determining Knowledge Sharing and Program Value. *SAGE Open*, 13(4), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440231200983>
- Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M. E., & Gardner, M. (2017). Effective Teacher Professional Development (research brief). *Effective Teacher Professional Development (Research Brief)*, June, 1–76. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED606741>
- Deming, W. E. (1986). *The New Economics for Industry, Government, Education*. MIT Press.
- DuFour, R. (2004). What is a “professional learning community”? *Educational Leadership*, 61(8), 6–11.
- Francisco, S., Forssten Seiser, A., & Olin Almqvist, A. (2024). Action research as professional learning in and through practice. *Professional Development in Education*, 50(3), 501–518. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2024.2338445>
- Fullan, M. (2007). The New Meaning of Educational Change , Fourth Edition ! In *Change*.
- Haslan, S. N. H., & Mahamod, Z. (2024). Exploration of Collaborative Culture through the Practices Of Professional Learning Community. *International Journal of Arts and Social Science*, 7(7), 62–78.
- Hendrickx, M. M. H. G., Thurlings, M. C. G., & Den Brok, P. (2025). Teachers' collaborative knowledge building in professional learning communities: connecting interaction patterns to learning gains. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, 40(1), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10212-024-00938-y>
- Hord, S. M. (1997). Professional learning communities: communities of continuous inquiry and improvement. *Leadership*, 40(1), 58–59.
- Hudson, C. (2024). A Conceptual Framework for Understanding Effective Professional Learning Community (PLC) Operation in Schools. *Journal of Education*, 204(3), 649–659. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00220574231197364>
- Johannesson, P. (2022). Development of professional learning communities through action research: understanding professional learning in practice. *Educational Action Research*, 30(3), 411–426. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09650792.2020.1854100>
- McKie, K. (2024). Collaboration Counts: Sustained Success in Professional Learning Communities. *Canadian Journal of Science, Mathematics and Technology Education*, 24(3), 380–399. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42330-025-00367-z>
- Nehez, J. (2024). How to identify actions to improve in the practices of a professional learning community: a study of an action research project. *Educational Action Research*, 32(5), 884–902. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09650792.2023.2298424>
- Nurhayati, M. (2022). The Role of the Principal in Coaching Competence Early Childhood

- Education Teacher Pedagogy at PAUD X Bandung. *J. Ris. Educator . Early Childhood Education Teacher*, 15–19. <https://doi.org/10.29313/jrpgp.vi.709>
- OECD. (2021). Beyond Academic Learning. In *Beyond Academic Learning*. <https://doi.org/10.1787/92a11084-en>
- Ridha, S., Aslamiah, Noorhapizah, & Novitawati. (2026). Linking Instructional Supervision to Teacher Development and School Growth in Early-Stage Islamic Elementary Institutions. *Jurnal Inovasi Pendidikan Dan Sains*, 7(1), 114–123. <https://doi.org/10.51673/jips.v7i1.2772>
- Sallis, E. (2012). Total Quality Management in Education. In *International Journal of Social Science, Innovation and Educational Technologies*. <https://doi.org/10.54603/iss.185>
- Segal, A. (2024). Rethinking Collective Reflection in Teacher Professional Development. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 75(2), 155–167. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00224871231188702>
- Stoll, L., Bolam, R., McMahon, A., Wallace, M., & Thomas, S. (2006). Professional Learning Communities: A Review of the Literature. In *Journal of Educational Change* (Vol. 7, Issue 4). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-006-0001-8>
- Vescio, V., Ross, D., & Adams, A. (2008). A review of research on the impact of professional learning communities on teaching practice and student learning. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 24(1), 80–91. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2007.01.004>
- Wei, Z. (2025). Developing Effective Professional Learning Communities to Foster Teacher Growth and Collaboration in Chinese International Schools. *Uniglobal Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 4(4), 207–214. <https://doi.org/10.53797/ujssh.v4i2.25.2025>
- Yu, T. K., & Chao, C. M. (2023). Encouraging teacher participation in Professional Learning Communities: exploring the Facilitating or restricting factors that Influence collaborative activities. *Education and Information Technologies*, 28(5), 5779–5804. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-022-11376-y>