

THE RELATIONSHIP OF TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY ACCORDING TO THEIR DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS AT LAI ZA HIGH SCHOOL, KACHIN STATE, MYANMAR

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship of teachers' perceptions towards the Professional Learning Community according to their demographic factors of age, educational background, teaching experience and training experience at Lai Za High School, Kachin State, Myanmar. Ninety full time teachers from Lai Za high school, participated in this study and the researcher identified the teachers' demographic factors, and determined the relationships of teachers' perceptions towards the Professional Learning Community in Lai Za high school. While the researcher hypothesized that there was a significant relationship between teachers' perceptions towards the Professional Learning Community and their demographic factors the findings were inconclusive but provided some insights into why the relationship between these two factors are not significant. In order for PLCs to work in Lai Za High School, many of the problems currently facing the school will have to be addressed.

Keywords: Demographic Profile, Teachers Perception, Professional Learning Community, Lai Za High School.

Introduction

We all know that the purpose of schools is student learning, and that the most important influence on student learning is teacher quality. Based on that, continuous Professional Learning through the Professional Learning Community (PLC) is one of the most crucial factors effecting teacher quality in schools. According to Pruitt and Robert (2003), the Professional Learning Community is one that promotes and values learning as an ongoing, active collaborative process between teachers, students, staff, principals, parents, and the school community to improve the quality of learning and life within the school. Developing schools where every aspect of the community supports learning and provides help to everyone who comes into contact with the school to contribute to the learning community is an important concept. "Learning is not an add on to the role of teaching professional, it is a habitual activity where the group learns how to learn together continuously" (Hord, 2009, p 40).

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According to DuFour, DuFour & Eaker (2006), the Professional Learning Community is a group of educators who meet regularly, sharing knowledge and skills, and who work collaboratively and harmoniously to improve teaching skills and the performance of students.

According to Speire (2011), for the last 20 years, educators have been promoting Professional Learning Communities on an international level as a solution to improving K-12 academic achievement. In brief, the Professional Learning Community focuses on quality teaching that results in students' successful learning. Quality teaching is strengthened and increased through continuous professional learning, and the Professional Learning Community setting promotes this adult learning.

It is vital that there is support from the school administration to be able to participate in the Professional Learning Community. According to Hord and Sommers (2015), the participation of the principal and other campus leaders is important to effect change. It is with this premise that we attempt to marry research and practice, to make schools learning places for educators and students through Professional Learning Communities. Fullan (2001) suggested that it is very important that the leadership in an organization is strong so that it can provide better support to the staff while allowing them a greater role of contributing to the decision making in the school. Strong leadership will lead to a better result. Therefore, it is important that principals and teachers, both formal and informal, are essential in moving the school into professional learning communities.

Objectives

This research had three main objectives:

1. To survey the teachers' demographic factors including age, educational background, teaching experience, and training experience at Lai Za High School, Kachin State, Myanmar.
2. To determine the level of teachers' perceptions towards the Professional Learning Community at Lai Za High School, Kachin State, Myanmar.
3. To determine the relationship of teachers' perceptions towards the Professional Learning Community according to their demographic factors age, educational background, teaching experience and training experience at Lai Za High School, Kachin State, Myanmar.

Literature Review

In this study, the main theory was derived from Hord's model (1997), as well as Olivier, Hipp & Huffman (2010) revised Professional Learning Community assessment based on Hord's model (1997).

Hord's Five Dimensions of the Professional Learning Community Model

Supportive and Shared Leadership

Supportive and Shared leadership is a joint sharing of power and authority between administrators and faculty to make decisions. It is a change from the usual hierarchy where teachers teach, students learn, and principals make decisions. Kleine-Kracht (1993). This change in hierarchy means that it is no longer a top down approach but

one where everyone needs to contribute. This new relationship changes the dynamic between the administrators and teachers getting them to work as a team, and to take responsibility for the outcomes of their decisions. Learning together, the school is better able to deal with problems and build a stronger school. Louis and Kruse (1995) identified the supportive leadership of principals as one of the necessary human resources for restructuring staff into school-based professional communities. Prestine (1993) also said, administrators as well as teachers should be learners who question, investigate and find solutions for school improvement. This democratic system of problem solving empowers both administration and staff to feel confident about sharing ideas in order to come up with the best decisions needed to build a strong school. The administrators, the teachers and the students benefit from this.

Shared Values and Vision

In this dimension, the focus is on student centered learning which is supported by continual teacher learning. Administration and faculty also share an unwavering commitment to student learning that is consistently displayed through the faculty's work. The goals of this dimension are necessary for creating and sustaining successful Professional Learning Community (Blankstein, 2004; DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

Louis & Kruse (1995) defined Shared Values and Vision as an essential part of the Professional Learning Community, where the teachers focus on the students, creating a learning environment that supports the students' capabilities and their academic achievement.

The benefits of shared values and vision are reduced isolation of teachers, better informed and committed teachers, and the academic improvement of students. This is seen as a strong staff development approach and a powerful strategy for school change and improvement (Hord, 1997).

Collective Learning and Application

This dimension focuses on the community receiving training to support student learning. It requires that school staff at all levels are engaged in processes that collectively seek new knowledge amongst staff and apply that learning to solutions that address students' needs.

According to Hord (2004), staff spend time assessing whether they have been effective and decide what they need to learn to become more effective in their efforts to help students become successful learners. In order to do this teacher, integrate their new learning into the teaching plans and activities as well as their administrative practices. Using this new plan, the teachers implement their new knowledge into the classroom. The process is cyclical. After the implementation of new knowledge into the classroom, the teachers once again evaluate, revise, strengthen and make changes to their new approach. This cyclical process is continuous (Hord & Sommer, 2015).

Shared Personal Practice

In this dimension the community shares feedback and provides support to benefit the teaching staff and the organization. According to Midgley and Wood (1993), the teachers also need an environment that values and supports hard work, the acceptance of challenging tasks, risk taking, and the promotion of growth. Teachers evaluating

each other, is part of a process of “peers helping peers” where teachers visit each other’s classroom, often to observe, take notes, and discuss what they saw with the teachers they have visited. This peer coaching can only be done if there is mutual respect and trust among staff members. This is often the last dimension to be implemented because it takes a long time to build trust between staff members.

Building respect and understanding is one of the basic requirements to build this dimension. If teachers are successful in building mutual respect and collaborative relationships then they will be able to help, support, and trust each other. According to Wignall (1992), once teachers build a relationship, they will be more willing to discuss issues and share both success and failure in the implementation of their teaching. They will also be more supportive of each other in a teaching capacity.

Supportive Conditions (Relationships & Structures)

This dimension focuses on providing structural and relational factors. Structural factors such as time, place to meet, resources and policies, and relational factors such as providing support for interpersonal development, open communication and respect. According to Hord (2004), supportive conditions determine when, where, and how the staff regularly come together as a unit to do the learning, decision-making, problem solving, and creative work that characterize a Professional Learning Community. In order for this dimension to work well, there should be structural conditions such as shared leadership, collective learning and shared practice.

According to Louis & Kruse, (1995), physical factors that support learning communities have been identified as, time to meet and talk, small size of the school and physical proximity of the staff to one another, teaching roles that are interdependent, communication structures, school autonomy, and teacher empowerment. According to Boyd (1992), additional physical factors include the availability of resources, schedules and structures that reduce isolation, policies that provide greater autonomy, foster collaboration, provide effective communication, and provide for staff development.

Conceptual Framework

This research aimed to identify the relationship of teachers’ perceptions towards the Professional Learning Community according to their demographic factors from Lai Za high school in Kachin state, Myanmar.

The following Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of this study that includes demographic factors representing age, educational background, teaching experience, and training experience. There are five dimensions of the Professional Learning Community which include: Supportive and Shared Leadership, Shared Values and Vision, Collective Learning and Application, Shared Personal Practice and Supportive Conditions.

(See Figure 1 on the next page)

Method/Procedure

This research aimed to identify the relationship of teachers’ perceptions towards the Professional Learning Community according to their demographic factors including

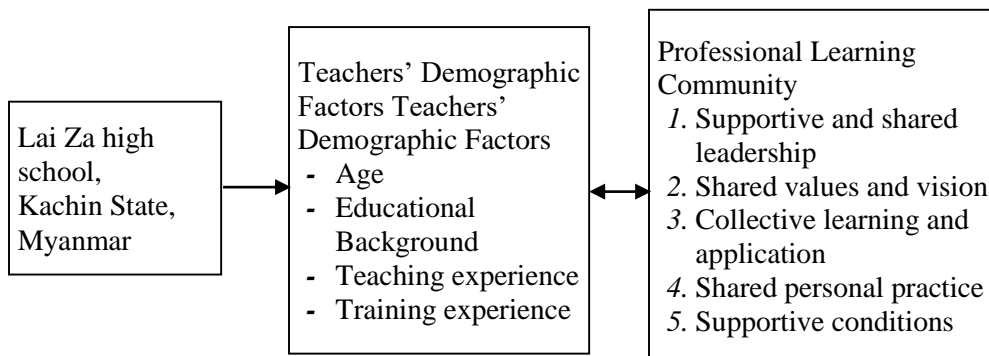


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of This Study

age, educational background, teaching experience and training experience at Lai Za high school, under the Kachin Independence Organization in the Kachin state, Myanmar.

This research was designed as a quantitative and relationship study using the Olivier, Hiff & Huffman, (2010) Professional Learning Community Assessment – Revised as a major research instrument for data collection. The researcher used frequency and percentage, mean and standard deviation, and Pearson Product Moment Correlation were the statistical techniques applied to identify the teachers' demographic factors, and determine the relationships of teachers' perceptions towards the Professional Learning Community in Lai Za high school.

The questionnaire was divided into two parts: (I) Demographic Profiles of Teachers age, educational background, teaching experience and training experience and part (II) Professional Learning Community Assessment – Revised.

The target population for this study was all full-time teachers from Lai Za High School in Kachin state, Myanmar. The participants were ninety teachers who are working at Lai Za High School in the academic year 2016-2017.

To be able to conduct and achieve the research objectives, first, the researcher requested permission from the principal of the Lai Za High School. After getting permission from the principal, the researcher went back to the Lai Za Township, Kachin State, Myanmar to discuss the objectives of the research with the teachers from Lai Za High School, Kachin State, Myanmar. On 16th June, 2016, the researcher distributed a total of 90 survey questionnaires to the teachers and collected the questionnaires on 18th June, 2016.

Findings/Results

Research Objective One

Research objective one was to survey the teachers' demographic factors including: age, educational background, work experience, and training experience in Lai Za High School, Kachin state, Myanmar.

Table 1: Age Groups of Teachers from Lai Za High School

Ages	Number	Percentage
1. 18 – 29 years old	34	37.8
2. 30 – 39 years old	42	46.7
3. 40 – 49 years old	14	15.5
Total	90	100

Table 1, lists four groups of teachers aged: 18-29 years, 30-39 years, 40-49 years, 50 and above years. The findings of the age-grouped table have shown that the highest percentage of teachers aged 30-39 years was 46.7%, and the lowest percentage of teachers aged 40-49 years was 15.5%, and there were no teachers whose age was between 50 and above. Therefore, according to the research findings, the majority of teachers were between 30-39 years old at Lai Za high school, Kachin state, Myanmar.

Table 2: Educational Background of Teachers from Lai Za High School

Educational Background	Number	Percentage
1. High School	50	55.5
2. Distance Learning	8	8.9
3. Bachelor's Degree	32	35.6
Total	90	100

Table 2 lists four types of educational backgrounds of teachers. These are High school, Distance Learning, Bachelor's degree and Master's degree. The findings from the teacher's educational background table have shown that 50 teachers were high school teachers, which was 55.5% of the target group and the highest percentage. Thirty-two teachers (35.6%) were Bachelor's Degree holders, which was the second highest percentage, and 8 teachers (8.9%) were distance learning. There were no Master's degree teachers teaching in Lai Za high school.

Table 3: Number of Years of Teaching Experience - Teachers from Lai Za High School

Teaching Experience	Number	Percentage
1. 1 – 3 years	11	12.2
2. 4 – 6 years	21	23.3
3. 7 – 9 years	15	16.7
4. 10 and above years	43	47.8
Total	90	100

Table 3 lists the number of years of teaching experience of the targeted group of teachers from Lai Za High School. The research findings showed the highest percentage of teachers had between 10 and above years of teaching experience at 47.8%. and the lowest percentage group was 11 teachers who had between 1 to 3 years at 12.2%.

Table 4 lists the types of training experience that the target group of teachers received. The training categories were, No Training, Only Child-Centered Approach (CCA), Child-Centered Approach (CCA) and Reading Writing for Critical Thinking

(RWCT), and CCA, RWCT and others. The research findings showed that the highest percentage of teachers' training experience group was 39 teachers who took only the Child-Centered Approach (CCA) training at 43.3. The lowest percentage was only 1 teacher who had no training experience at 1.1%.

Table 4: Training Experience of Teachers from Lai Za High School

Training Experience	Number	Percentage
1. No Training	1	1.1
2. Only CCA	39	43.3
3. Both CCA and RWCT	16	17.8
4. CCA, RWCT and others	34	37.8
Total	90	100

Research Objective Two

Research objective two was to determine the teachers' perceptions towards the Professional Learning Community at Lai Za High School, Kachin State, Myanmar.

Table 5: Teachers' Perceptions towards the Professional Learning Community at Lai Za High School

No	Five Dimensions of PLC	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation level
1.	Supportive and Shared Leadership	2.50	.31	Low
2.	Shared Values and Vision	2.38	.08	Low
3.	Collective Learning and Application	2.37	.12	Low
4.	Shared Personal Practice	2.30	.15	Low
5.	Supportive Conditions	2.25	.20	Low
	Total	2.36	.09	Low

Table 5 lists the five dimensions of PLC's and the results found from data collected of Teachers' perceptions towards the Professional Learning Community at Lai Za High School. The overall mean score of the teachers' perceptions towards the Professional Learning Community based on Hord's five dimensions were 2.36, in the scale of 1.51- 2.50. The mean standard deviation was .09. According to the criteria of interpretation, it means that the teachers' perceptions towards the Professional Learning Community at Lai Za high school was regarded as low. According to the findings, the research found all Hord's dimensions to be low.

Research Objective Three

Research objective three was to determine the relationship of teachers' perceptions towards the Professional Learning Community and their demographic factors: age, educational background, teaching experience and training experience at Lai Za High School, Kachin State, Myanmar.

Table 6 demonstrates the relationship between the teachers' perceptions towards the Professional Learning Community and teachers' Age in Lai Za high school. According to the findings from the data analysis of this study, it was shown that the Professional Learning Community with their age, since Pearson correlation r

was .091 and p-value was .393, which was bigger than the .05 level of significance. Therefore, there was no significant relationship between the Professional Learning Community and the teachers' ages at Lai Za high school in Kachin State, Myanmar.

Table 6: Correlation of Teachers' Perceptions towards Professional Learning Community and their Age at Lai Za High School, Kachin State, Myanmar

		Professional Learning Community
Age	Pearson Correlation	.091
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.393
	N	90

Table 7 showed the relationship between the teachers' perceptions of the Professional Learning Community and teachers' educational background. According to the findings from the data analysis of this study in the above table, it was shown that the Professional Learning Community with their educational background, since Pearson correlation r was .018 and p-value was .869, which is larger than the .05 level of significance. Therefore, this result was interpreted as there was no significant relationship between the Professional Learning Community and the educational background of teachers in Lai Za high school, Kachin State, Myanmar.

Table 7: Correlation of Teachers' Perceptions towards Professional Learning Community According to Their Educational Background at Lai Za High School, Kachin State, Myanmar

		Professional Learning Community
Educational Background	Pearson Correlation	.018
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.869
	N	90

Table 8, showed that the relationship between the teachers' perceptions of the Professional Learning Community and teachers' teaching experience. According to the findings from the data analysis of this study, it was shown that the Professional Learning Community with their teaching experience, since Pearson correlation r was .097 and p-value was .364, which is bigger than the .05 level of significance. Therefore, there was no significant relationship between the Professional Learning Community and teaching experience at Lai Za high school in Kachin state, Myanmar.

Table 8: Correlation of Teachers' Perceptions towards the Professional Learning Community and Their Teaching Experience at Lai Za High School, Kachin State, Myanmar

		Professional Learning Community
Teaching Experience	Pearson Correlation	.097
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.364
	N	90

Table 9 demonstrated the relationship between the teachers' perceptions towards the Professional Learning Community and training experience. According to the findings from the data analysis of this study, it was shown that the Professional Learning Community with teacher training experience, since Pearson correlation r was .005, and p -value was .964, which is bigger than the .05 level of significance. Thus, there was no significant relationship between the Professional Learning Community and teacher training experience at Lai Za high school in Kachin state, Myanmar.

Table 9: Correlation of Teachers' Perceptions towards the Professional Learning Community and Their Training Experience at Lai Za High School, Kachin State, Myanmar

		Professional Learning Community
Training Experience	Pearson Correlation	.005
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.964
	N	90

Discussion

Teachers' Demographic Profiles

Age

The data shows that the majority of teachers were aged between 30-39 years, and the lowest percentage of teachers were aged 40-49 years, and there were no teachers whose age was between 50 and above. According to the researcher experience, a possible reason for having fewer teachers aged 40-49 and no teachers aged over 50 is likely due to the lack of pension provided in the Kachin Educational Department, under the Kachin Independence Organization. Interestingly, teachers working in Kachin Educational Department can start teaching after high school, so a majority of younger teachers between 30-39 years.

Educational Background

The data shows that the highest level of teachers' educational background was high school at 55.5%, and the lowest percentage was distance learning teachers at 8.9%. There were no Master's degree teachers. The majority of teachers at Lai Za High School have a high school diploma. There are several reasons for this. Depending on the teacher's educational background, they are assigned to teach a certain level. Teachers with a high school diploma teach at the primary school level, teachers with a bachelor's degree teach at the middle school and high school level, and those with a distance learning diploma are assigned to teaching based on teaching experience. There is a larger need for Primary school teachers in Lai Za High School, as the majority of the students are at the Primary and Middle School level.

The Kachin Educational Department also offers teaching opportunities straight out of high school, which is a good option for many people and thus the majority of teachers have just a high school diploma.

Teaching Experience

The data shows that the highest level of teaching experience was 10 and above and the lowest one was 1-3 years at. This could be because a lot of teachers take a teaching job straight out of high school. So, by the time they are 30-39 years old, they already have over 10 years of teaching experience.

The findings also show that the teachers with the least amount of experience have only 1-3 years of experience. There are only 11 of these teachers at Lai Za High School and are likely to be the youngest teachers at the school.

Training Experience

The data shows that the highest level of training experience was the Child-Centered Approach (CCA) training, and the lowest one was no training experience.

There is NGO called Shalom Foundation that provides Child-Centered Approach (CCA) training to all teachers at Lai Za High School. Another Non-Governmental Organization called Thinking Class Foundation provides Reading, Writing for Critical Thinking (RWCT) for middle and high school level teachers only. Considering the number of Primary School teachers and that all teachers at Lai Za high school get CCA training, it makes sense that the findings shows that the majority of teachers at Lai Za High school have received just CCA training.

The Level of Teachers' Perceptions towards the Professional Learning Community

According to the findings of this study, the total mean score of teachers' perceptions towards the Professional Learning Community at Lai Za high school was 2.36, in the scale of 1.51 – 2.50. According to the criteria of interpretation, it means that the teachers' perceptions towards the Professional Learning Community at Lai Za high school was regarded as low.

Supportive and Shared Leadership

According to findings, the interpretation of the perception of teachers towards Hord's Supportive and Shared Leadership is low. There was no previous study conducted in this school so this is the very first research and result that revealed most of the teachers in Lai Za high school are weak at supportive and shared leadership. The researcher also believes that this could be due to the Principals being viewed with respect and that teachers could possibly feel uncomfortable sharing in the decision-making process at the school.

Shared values and Vision

According to the findings, the interpretation of the perception of teachers towards Hord's Shared Values and Vision is low.

It is the researcher's experience that the teachers prefer to focus on students learning, and making sure all the students pass their exams, rather than focus on Shared Values and Vision.

In contrast to the findings at Lai Za High School, Stamper's findings for teacher's perceptions towards Shared Values and Vision using Olivier, Hiff & Huffman, (2010) Professional Learning Community Assessment – Revised was moderate.

Collective Learning and Application

According to the findings, the interpretation of the perception of teachers towards Hord's Collective Learning and Application is low. The researcher believes that this could be due to the lack of time teachers at Lai Za High School have available to do collaborative work. The school receives several displaced students from the conflict area bordering Kachin State every year. The teachers have to do everything in their power to integrate the students into the school, and make sure that they pass the final exam.

According to Stamper (2015), with reference to his findings of perception towards Collective Learning and Application, staff members sought to work together to gain knowledge, skills, and strategies and apply this new learning to their work. It is clear from Stamper's data, that given the right circumstances, Collective Learning and Application can be a positive asset to a school.

Shared Personal Practice

According to the findings, the interpretation of the perception of teachers towards Hord's Shared Personal Practice is low. The researcher believes that this could be due to the lack of time to do anything other than teach the classes at Lai Za High School. Providing feedback to each other is also culturally inappropriate in Kachin. According to Kachin culture only the Principal should be providing feedback to the teachers.

Stamper's research of teacher's perception towards Shared Personal Practice was moderate. In reference to staff members informally sharing ideas and suggestions for improving student learning 67% reported agree and 22% reported strongly agree.

Supportive Conditions

According to the findings, the interpretation of the perception of teachers towards Hord's Supportive Conditions is low. The researcher believes that there is a possible reason are related to the low supportive conditions this is due to the lack of Professional Learning Community infrastructure set up at the school. As a result of the influx of displaced students from conflict areas, the teacher's main focus was to integrate the students into the school and ensure that they pass the exam. No priority was given to collective learning and collaborative practice.

The Relationship of Teachers' Perceptions towards the Professional Learning Community and Their Demographic Factors: Age, Educational Background, Teaching Experience and Training Experience

In this study the researcher looked at the relationship of teacher's perceptions towards the Professional Learning Community according to their demographics: age, education background, teaching experience and training experience at Lai Za High School, Kachin State, Myanmar.

The researcher hypothesized that there was a significant relationship between teachers' perceptions towards the Professional Learning Community and their demographic factors. However, the results of the study showed otherwise. In fact, the results of the study showed that the relationship of teachers' perceptions towards the Professional Learning Community according to their demographic factors: age,

educational background, teaching experience and training experience all had a value larger than the .05 level of significance. Thus, there was no significant relationship between the Professional Learning Community and the listed demographics.

According to the findings, the researcher believes there are several reasons for this. The researcher had been teaching at the school for ten years when the school started to receive displaced students. Due to the over population of students, there was not enough resources. The teaching method of the school has been teacher-centered so that it is weak in collaborative practice. As shown in the findings the majority age group of teachers at Lai Za High School is quite young. (30-39). Even though the teachers are young and energetic, they are stretched to their limits when trying to deal with displaced students with few resources.

In the researcher's experience, teachers did try to share teaching methods and classroom related problems. However, much more will have to be done to make the concepts of the Professional Learning Community a part of the system, and also a priority at the school.

The researcher thinks that in this kind of situation, if the school had a Professional Learning Community, teachers might have been able to support each other better and would have received better support from the administration during the most difficult times. As it stands, teachers do not have much support and teachers are struggling within their current system.

In order for perceptions to change towards Professional Learning Community at Lai Za High School, more attention will need to be given to dealing with the issues currently facing the school. Only then can the Professional Learning Community be given priority.

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