

Professional learning communities in rural Indonesia: Benefits and challenges encountered by EFL teachers

Satriani Satriani^{1*}, Abdul Kamaruddin², Mukrim Mukrim³

^{1,2,3}Postgraduate English Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Tadulako University, Indonesia

*) Corresponding author, email: satrianir56@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Professional learning communities (PLCs) have become increasingly important in Indonesia under *Kurikulum Merdeka*, yet research on their support for EFL teachers in rural contexts remains limited. Previous studies have mainly examined PLCs in general educational settings, leaving the specific benefits and challenges experienced by EFL teachers in Morowali underexplored. This study investigated the perceived benefits and challenges of intra-school PLCs for EFL teachers in Morowali, Central Sulawesi. It employed a qualitative instrumental case study conducted over approximately six months at two junior high schools, involving two principals, four English teachers, and six students. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations and analyzed using thematic analysis, with triangulation across participant groups and data sources. The findings identified five benefit themes and five challenge themes. PLCs strengthened teachers' pedagogical, reflective, collaborative, and personal competencies and improved classroom quality and student learning outcomes. However, implementation was constrained by time and workload, uneven participation, limited discussion focus, resource limitations, and sustainability issues. The findings highlight the strong potential of PLCs to support EFL teachers' continuous professional growth and enhance classroom learning in rural school contexts. They also demonstrate that PLCs' effectiveness depends on sustained collaboration, adequate resources, and institutional commitment. The study recommends stronger systemic support from policymakers and education stakeholders, particularly through local regulations guiding the implementation and sustainability of PLCs in rural and resource-limited settings.

Keywords: Kurikulum Merdeka; Morowali; professional learning communities; rural education; teacher professional learning

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INTRODUCTION

Professional learning communities (PLCs) have been widely recognized as an important approach to teacher professional learning because they promote collaboration, reflective inquiry, and continuous improvement in classroom practice (Doğan & Adams, 2018; Harris & Jones, 2020; Jones et al., 2013; Stoll et al., 2006). In contrast to traditional one-shot professional development, PLCs position teachers

as active learners who work together to examine teaching problems, share strategies, and respond to student needs in more contextualized ways (Avalos, 2011; Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Kennedy, 2016; Voelkel & Chrispeels, 2017). This orientation has become increasingly relevant in contemporary educational reform because schools are expected not only to improve teacher competence, but also to build collaborative cultures that can sustain instructional innovation. For English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers, this collaborative model is especially valuable because language teaching often requires ongoing adaptation of methods, materials, and assessment to fit diverse learner needs. In this sense, PLCs are not merely organizational structures, but professional spaces where teachers can collectively construct knowledge and strengthen classroom practice.

In Indonesia, the relevance of PLCs has grown significantly under the implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka*, which emphasizes teacher agency, contextualized learning, differentiated instruction, and reflective pedagogical practice (GTK, 2023; Kemendikbudristek, 2023). In line with *Komunitas Belajar's* policy direction, schools are encouraged to establish intra-school learning communities in which teachers collaboratively discuss instructional problems, design learning tools, reflect on lessons, and evaluate student learning outcomes. Such collaboration is expected to support the broader goals of *Kurikulum Merdeka*, including meaningful learning, flexibility in curriculum enactment, and responsiveness to local classroom realities. In practice, PLCs in Indonesia have been linked to activities such as lesson study, peer mentoring, joint planning, classroom reflection, and collaborative problem-solving (Ekawati et al., 2022). These practices suggest that professional learning is increasingly being understood as embedded in teachers' everyday work rather than separated from it. As a result, PLCs have become an important framework for understanding how teacher learning and school improvement can be pursued simultaneously.

A growing body of literature suggests that PLCs can generate meaningful professional and instructional benefits. Studies have linked PLC participation with teacher professional learning, reflective practice, collective efficacy, and student learning outcomes (Stoll et al., 2006; Voelkel & Chrispeels, 2017; Zhang et al., 2023). In particular, Zhang et al. (2023) found that shared purpose, collective focus on student learning, and reflective dialogue within PLCs were positively associated with teachers' collective efficacy. In the Indonesian context, PLC-related practices have also been associated with improved teacher performance, more interactive classroom instruction, and a stronger school learning culture (Dinanty et al., 2024; Jalaludin et al., 2022; Trilaksono et al., 2019). The literature, however, also indicates that PLC implementation is not always smooth or sustainable. Teachers often face challenges related to workload, limited meeting time, uneven participation, insufficient facilitation, and restricted access to professional resources (Khasawneh et al., 2023; Kin & Kareem, 2021). These findings imply that while PLCs are promising, their effectiveness depends heavily on local school conditions, leadership support, and the extent to which collaboration is tied to authentic classroom needs.

Although PLCs have been studied in various international and Indonesian settings, important contextual gaps remain. Existing studies in Indonesia have largely examined PLCs in general education contexts, broader school reform programs, or regions outside Central Sulawesi, such as Java and other eastern Indonesian areas (Napitupulu & Wibawanta, 2022; Radnasari & Andrianto, 2025; Trilaksono et al., 2019). Much less is known about how PLCs function specifically for EFL teachers, whose professional needs are shaped by the demands of language pedagogy, classroom interaction, and curriculum adaptation. This gap is even more visible in rural and geographically dispersed regions, where teacher collaboration may be influenced by limited infrastructure, unequal access to resources, and contextual teaching challenges. In Central Sulawesi, and especially in Morowali, PLCs are developing in schools, yet research that closely examines their role in supporting EFL teacher practices remains absent. As a result, policy and school-level decisions may rely too heavily on findings from other contexts that do not fully represent the realities of rural EFL teaching.

This study is situated in Morowali Regency, Central Sulawesi, and focuses on two junior high schools, SMPN 2 Bungku and SMPN 1 Wita Ponda, that represent different school settings within the same region. Morowali offers an important research context because schools in this area work

within the policy framework of *Kurikulum Merdeka* while also facing practical and geographical constraints that shape teacher collaboration differently from urban settings. The novelty of this study lies in its specific attention to PLCs for EFL teachers in a rural Indonesian context, with an emphasis on both their perceived benefits and their implementation challenges. Rather than discussing PLCs as a general reform mechanism, this article examines how English teachers experience PLC participation in relation to pedagogical growth, collaboration, and classroom practice, while also considering the perspectives of school leadership and students. In this way, the study contributes a more contextualized account of PLCs and extends the discussion of collaborative teacher learning into a setting that has received limited scholarly attention. This study aims to investigate the role of intra-school PLCs in supporting EFL teacher practices in Morowali. More specifically, it addresses two research questions:

1. What are the perceived benefits of intra-school PLCs for EFL teachers' practices?
2. What challenges do EFL teachers encounter when participating in PLCs?

By answering these questions, the study seeks to contribute empirically to the literature on teacher professional learning and to offer practical insights for schools, principals, and policymakers seeking to strengthen collaborative professional development in rural EFL contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Professional learning as a shift from TPD to TPL

The discussion of PLCs is closely related to the broader shift from traditional teacher professional development (TPD) to teacher professional learning (TPL). TPD has commonly been understood as a structured and often externally delivered activity, such as workshops, seminars, or short in-service training sessions, intended to upgrade teachers' knowledge and skills (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Guskey, 2002). Although such activities may introduce new ideas, they are often limited by their short-term, compliance-driven, and transmission-oriented nature. In contrast, TPL emphasizes that teacher learning is continuous, collaborative, and grounded in daily professional practice. It positions teachers not as passive recipients of expert knowledge, but as active participants who construct understanding through reflection, inquiry, and interaction with colleagues (Kennedy, 2016). In this perspective, professional growth becomes more contextual, socially mediated, and directly connected to classroom realities. This conceptual shift is important because it provides the theoretical basis for viewing PLCs as meaningful sites of teacher learning rather than merely administrative meeting structures (Avalos, 2011; Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Kennedy, 2016).

The distinction between TPD and TPL also has practical implications for the design and evaluation of teacher learning. In more conventional TPD models, Guskey (2002) stated that training agendas are often predetermined by external authorities, with limited room for teachers to shape content according to classroom needs. As a result, teachers may gain awareness of new approaches without having sufficient opportunity to apply, test, and refine them in practice. TPL, however, emphasizes sustained engagement, peer dialogue, and cycles of implementation and reflection (Kennedy, 2016). This makes PLCs especially relevant for EFL teachers, whose work often requires adapting materials, interaction patterns, and assessment strategies to highly varied classroom contexts. Thus, PLCs can be understood as one of the most visible expressions of TPL in school settings, where teacher learning is embedded in professional routines and oriented toward instructional improvement.

PLCs in global educational discourse

Globally, PLCs have been widely recognized as a promising approach to school improvement and teacher professional growth. International literature consistently describes PLCs as collaborative structures in which teachers engage in shared inquiry, reflective dialogue, collective responsibility, and evidence-based decision-making (Stoll et al., 2006; Voelkel & Chrispeels, 2017). Unlike isolated professional development activities, PLCs promote ongoing interaction among teachers and

encourage them to examine teaching problems together in relation to student learning. Scholars have argued that PLCs are not simply scheduled meetings but represent a professional culture built around shared goals, collaborative inquiry, collective responsibility, and continuous learning (Stoll et al., 2006; Voelkel & Chrispeels, 2017). In this way, PLCs are associated with stronger teacher agency, reduced professional isolation, and more adaptive teaching practices. The concept has become influential because it offers a response to the increasing complexity of education, where teachers are expected to improve learning outcomes while addressing diverse student needs in changing policy environments (Doğan & Adams, 2018; Harris & Jones, 2020; Rečs & Geske, 2019; Stoll et al., 2006).

Even though PLCs are globally recognized, their implementation varies across contexts. In some Western systems, Doğan and Adams (2018) reported that PLCs are highly formalized, with regular meetings, data protocols, and structured inquiry cycles. In resource-constrained contexts, PLCs may function as cost-effective school-based alternatives to external training. Despite these variations, the common assumption is that sustained collaboration helps teachers build capacity, improve classroom practice, and enhance student learning. At the same time, international research warns that PLC effectiveness depends heavily on contextual conditions. Leadership support, time allocation, facilitation, trust, and alignment with school goals all influence whether PLCs become meaningful learning spaces or simply routine gatherings (Christensen et al., 2024; Harris & Jones, 2020; Jalaludin et al., 2022). Therefore, global literature offers both encouragement and caution: PLCs have strong potential, but their impact depends on how they are enacted in specific educational settings.

PLCs in the Indonesian context

In Indonesia, PLCs have gained renewed importance through the implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka*, which emphasizes teacher agency, contextualized learning, collaboration, and continuous improvement. Under this policy direction, intra-school learning communities, often referred to as *Komunitas Belajar*, are encouraged as mechanisms for strengthening professional practice and improving student outcomes (Kemendikbudristek, 2023). This policy marks a significant departure from older professional development patterns that were often episodic, administrative, and disconnected from actual classroom needs. Within the Indonesian discourse, PLCs are increasingly framed as spaces where teachers can reflect together, co-design learning activities, discuss student difficulties, and respond to pedagogical challenges in more grounded ways. They also align with broader reform agendas supported by *Guru Penggerak*, *Sekolah Penggerak*, and the *Platform Merdeka Mengajar*, all of which seek to make teacher learning more continuous, collaborative, and school-based.

Indonesian studies suggest that PLCs implementation can strengthen pedagogical skills, increase teacher confidence, and improve school learning culture. They also show that such benefits do not emerge automatically. Leadership plays a key role in creating time, structure, and trust for collaboration, while institutional culture influences whether teachers participate openly and meaningfully. In some cases, PLCs are supported by strong principal leadership and a clear instructional focus; in others, they are constrained by administrative demands, limited facilitation, or a lack of shared purpose. This means that PLCs in Indonesia should not be viewed only as policy instruments, but as socially and institutionally situated practices. For rural and geographically dispersed areas, this issue becomes even more important because contextual constraints may shape collaboration differently from schools in urban centers. Consequently, the Indonesian literature provides a relevant but still incomplete basis for understanding how PLCs function in specific local settings, especially for subject-specific communities such as EFL teachers.

Benefits of PLCs

Recent studies highlight that PLCs provide significant benefits in improving the overall quality of teaching and learning. The study by Dinanty et al. (2024) demonstrates that PLCs create a collaborative platform where teachers and school leaders can work together to address instructional challenges and enhance educational outcomes. Through regular meetings and structured discussions, teachers are able to share insights, reflect on their teaching practices, and co-develop more effective instructional

strategies. This collaborative process enables teachers to move beyond isolated practices and engage in collective problem-solving that directly impacts classroom instruction. Moreover, PLCs foster a culture of continuous professional learning, where teachers are encouraged to experiment with new methods and refine their approaches based on feedback and reflection. As a result, PLCs contribute to a more dynamic and responsive teaching environment that supports both teacher growth and student achievement.

In addition, previous studies have consistently shown that PLCs contribute positively to creating a more supportive and engaging learning environment for students, teaching quality, teacher competence, and student learning. [Dinanty et al.'s \(2024\)](#) study shows that PLCs provide a collaborative platform where teachers and school leaders can discuss instructional challenges, reflect on classroom practice, and co-develop more effective teaching strategies. It also reports measurable improvement in student learning outcomes, with the average post-test score increasing from 48.75 to 70, while the school climate became more supportive and engaging. In addition, the study also refers to [Ndunda \(2022\)](#), whose study in a rural Tanzanian context found that PLC implementation improved teacher collaboration and student learning outcomes. Together, these studies suggest that PLCs can strengthen pedagogical practice, increase teacher confidence, and improve student engagement when collaboration is sustained and connected to classroom needs.

Challenges and sustainability of PLCs

The study also cites several studies showing that PLCs face important challenges in implementation and long-term sustainability. Despite the potential benefits of PLCs, previous research indicates that their implementation can be constrained by practical, organizational, and teacher-related challenges. [Jalaludin et al. \(2022\)](#) suggest that professional learning may be less effective when teachers have insufficient opportunities to practice, reflect, and follow up on what they learn, potentially creating a gap between professional learning and classroom application. Teachers have also reported workload pressure, competing time demands, limited administrative support, financial constraints, insufficient training in collaborative methods, and limited understanding of the benefits of PLC participation ([Fay & Levin, 2019](#); [Kin & Kareem, 2021](#); [Tayag, 2020](#)). In particular, limited time is a recurring concern because teachers often have extensive instructional responsibilities that restrict opportunities for sustained professional collaboration. [Rečs and Geske \(2019\)](#) note that teachers spend most of their working time on direct instruction, leaving limited opportunities for structured collaboration and increasing the risk that PLCs become superficial rather than meaningful professional learning spaces. In Indonesia, these challenges may be intensified by institutional and bureaucratic conditions; [Trilaksono et al. \(2019\)](#), for example, found that public schools in eastern Indonesia experienced bureaucratic constraints and limited time for collaboration that hindered the implementation of PLC action plans. These findings suggest that the establishment of a PLC structure alone is insufficient to ensure effective implementation, particularly when teachers lack adequate time, resources, facilitation, and institutional support.

Beyond initial implementation, the sustainability of PLCs depends on whether schools can establish organizational and cultural conditions that encourage continued teacher engagement. Previous studies identify contextual conditions, administrative leadership, teacher autonomy, and available resources as important factors influencing the effectiveness and sustainability of PLCs ([Khasawneh et al., 2023](#); [Meesuk et al., 2021](#); [Sriklaub & Ruengtrakul, 2022](#)). Leadership is particularly important because school leaders can provide protected time, facilitate collaboration, recognize teachers' contributions, and connect PLC activities with broader school improvement goals ([Christensen et al., 2024](#)). A supportive school learning culture is equally significant, as collegiality, collective efficacy, trust, and readiness for change can determine whether collaborative learning becomes embedded in everyday professional practice ([Jones et al., 2013](#); [Stoll et al., 2006](#)). Conversely, hierarchical structures, weak leadership commitment, limited resources, and participation driven primarily by administrative compliance may reduce teachers' ownership and weaken the continuity of PLC activities ([Tayag, 2020](#); [Trilaksono et al., 2019](#)). For EFL teachers in particular, sustainability also

requires opportunities to connect collaborative learning with authentic language-teaching problems and classroom needs. Thus, the sustainability of PLCs should be understood not simply as the continuation of scheduled meetings but as the capacity of schools to maintain meaningful cycles of collaboration, reflection, inquiry, and shared professional responsibility over time. [Jalaludin et al. \(2022\)](#) explain that PLC-related professional learning may become ineffective when teachers have insufficient time for practice, reflection, and follow-up, causing a gap between theory and classroom application.

Theoretical and research gap for the present study

Taken together, the reviewed literature shows that PLCs are best understood as collaborative forms of teacher professional learning that can strengthen pedagogy, reflective practice, professional identity, and student learning experiences. At the same time, the literature reveals recurring barriers related to time, leadership, participation, facilitation, and sustainability. In Indonesia, PLCs are increasingly supported through *Kurikulum Merdeka* and *Komunitas Belajar*, yet existing research has largely focused on PLCs in general school settings rather than on EFL teachers specifically. Moreover, most Indonesian studies were conducted outside Central Sulawesi, and none directly examined PLCs for EFL teachers in Morowali. This leaves an important contextual and subject-specific gap, especially given that EFL teaching entails distinctive pedagogical demands and that rural schools may face different collaboration conditions than urban ones.

For that reason, the present study is positioned to contribute both theoretically and contextually. Theoretically, it extends discussion on PLCs as forms of TPL and as communities of practice shaped by collaboration, leadership, and local conditions. Contextually, it provides evidence from rural junior high schools in Morowali, a setting that has not been adequately represented in previous PLC research. By focusing on the perceived benefits and challenges of intra-school PLCs for EFL teachers, the study responds directly to gaps identified in the literature. It offers a more localized understanding of how collaborative professional learning operates in practice. This makes the study relevant not only to scholarship on PLCs, but also to ongoing efforts to strengthen teacher learning and school improvement in rural Indonesian education.

METHOD

This article is derived from a larger qualitative instrumental case study ([Creswell & Miller, 2000](#)) on PLCs and EFL teacher practices in Morowali. For the present article, the analysis centers on the selected participants consisting of four teachers, two principals, and six students from two schools that is located in Bungku Tengah subdistrict and Wita Ponda subdistrict, Morowali region. These schools were purposively selected because both have established PLCs that actively engage English teachers in collaborative learning practices as part of *Kurikulum Merdeka*. School 1 represented a school situated in the capital area of Bungku, where PLCs were expected to be relatively structured and well-supported, while School 2 reflected the dynamics of a school located in a more rural setting, facing diverse challenges and opportunities. The participant selection was intentional because these participants provided particularly rich accounts of teacher learning, leadership support, classroom change, and ongoing constraints. Rather than seeking statistical representation, the study prioritized information-rich cases that could illuminate how PLCs were understood and practiced.

The researcher obtained institutional permission from the researcher's university and permission from the participating schools to conduct the study before collecting data. The school authorities were informed about the purpose, procedures, and scope of the research before the data collection began. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed that they had the right to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any stage without consequences. For student participants, who were minors, informed consent was obtained from their parents or legal guardians before the interviews were conducted. Participants were also informed about the use of interviews and classroom observations for study purposes. To protect participants' privacy, their identities were anonymized using participant codes, such as Teacher 1, Teacher 2, Teacher 3, Teacher 4, Principal 1,

Principal 2, and Students 1–3, rather than their real names. Interview and observation data were treated confidentially and used solely for the purposes of this study. These procedures were implemented to protect participants' rights, privacy, and voluntary involvement throughout the study.

The broader study was conducted over approximately six months, from October 2025 to February 2026. Data came primarily from semi-structured interviews and were supported by classroom observation notes. The interview protocol was organized according to participants' roles. Teacher interviews addressed PLC participation experiences, perceived professional benefits, changes in teaching practices, collaboration, and challenges affecting continued participation. The principal interview focused on leadership support, facilitation, scheduling, resources, teacher participation, and the sustainability of PLC activities. Student interviews examined perceived changes in teaching strategies, classroom activities, engagement, motivation, understanding of English lessons, and experiences with strategies or materials developed through teacher collaboration. Each interview lasted approximately one hour per participant, although the number of interview sessions varied according to participant group and the depth of information required. Interviews with the English teachers were conducted in English, while interviews with the principal and students were conducted in Indonesian to facilitate clear and comfortable expression of their experiences and perspectives. The interviews were conducted individually in a quiet setting to encourage participants to provide open and reflective responses. The interviews were audio-recorded with participants' permission and transcribed for analysis.

Classroom observations were conducted as non-participant observations and lasted approximately the same duration as one English lesson for each teacher. They were conducted on different days according to each teacher's English teaching schedule. This arrangement enabled the researcher to observe teachers' classroom practices within their regular instructional routines without disrupting the planned teaching schedule. The observation particularly focused on the actualization of pedagogical practices that teachers reported developing or strengthening through PLC participation. Therefore, the observation checklist was designed to examine whether teachers' reported professional learning could be identified in their classroom teaching practices.

The data were analyzed through thematic analysis following [Braun and Clarke \(2006\)](#) procedures: familiarization, coding, category development, theme review, theme definition, and reporting. The process involved repeated reading of transcripts, initial coding of meaningful units, grouping related codes into broader categories, reviewing theme consistency, and refining interpretive themes. Additionally, classroom observation notes were compared with teachers' interview accounts to examine whether reported PLC-related professional learning was reflected in their actual classroom practices. Observation evidence was then coded alongside interview data and used to confirm, complement, or contextualize emerging themes. This analysis was informed by the idea of learning as a social practice within a community of practice, but the emphasis remains on empirical explanation: how teacher collaboration was described, how it was translated into classroom action, and what conditions helped or limited that process. The final themes reported here are pedagogical strengthening, reflective and collaborative learning, classroom improvement, and persistent implementation constraints.

FINDINGS

PLC benefits in supporting EFL teacher practices

The focused dataset shows that PLCs were experienced primarily as a professional space for improving pedagogical practice. Teacher 1 stated that through PLC participation, she developed pedagogical skills, assessment strategies, classroom management, and the use of technology, and she added, "*Collaboration allowed me to share experiences, good practices, and challenges faced in learning while receiving constructive feedback from colleagues.*" In a similar direction, Teacher 2 described PLC discussions on student data, classroom observations, and instructional strategies as helping her recognize that students learn differently and therefore require varied approaches. These accounts indicate that the

teachers did not see the PLCs merely as a formal meeting, but as a learning structure that sharpened their instructional awareness.

The principal's testimony reinforces this finding from an organizational point of view. The principal explained that the school created an internal learning community in which problems identified in classroom teaching were discussed collectively so that all obstacles could be resolved collectively. He also emphasized that the primary benefit is the sharing of knowledge, because one teacher's new understanding can become a resource for others. Importantly, he linked this collaboration to direct supervision: obstacles were not identified only from teacher reports, but also from classroom observations followed by feedback. In this sense, the PLC functioned as both a collegial and supervisory mechanism that connected discussion with instructional improvement.

The improvement in classroom quality was also reflected in the way teachers described learning as becoming more structured, more interactive, and more responsive to students' understanding. Teachers did not simply say that students became active, but they also connected this change with clearer instructional design and more suitable classroom strategies. Teacher 3 explained that formative feedback helped students understand their weaknesses and improve their performance, which means that improved classroom quality also included better support for learning progress, not only more enjoyable activities. Teacher 4 likewise noted that after applying active learning techniques shared in PLC, her lessons became more engaging and structured, showing that improved engagement and improved classroom organization happened together.

Student interviews gave the clearest classroom-level evidence because they directly described changes in motivation, comprehension, enjoyment, and participation during English lessons. Student 1 explained that English learning felt easier because the teacher translated difficult words into Indonesian and used real-life examples. Student 2 described English lessons as more enjoyable because of games, quizzes, project-based media, and direct teacher support, while Student 3 reported that quiz activities and teacher monitoring made students feel motivated and not afraid of making mistakes. These comments are important because they show that the value of PLCs was not limited to teacher perception; it was also experienced by learners as clearer, more engaging, and more supportive teaching.

Another strong theme in the data is reflective and collaborative professional learning. Teacher 1 explicitly connected PLC participation with reflection, explaining that colleague discussion helped her review her own teaching and find innovative ways to improve learning outcomes. The principal likewise described the PLC as a routine where teachers gathered, shared problems, and sometimes presented best practices for collective feedback. This indicates that PLCs supported not only skill development but also professional habits of inquiry, feedback, and revision. The significance of this pattern lies in the fact that teacher learning became grounded in concrete classroom problems rather than abstract advice alone.

Challenges affecting PLC effectiveness

The findings also show that PLC effectiveness was limited by persistent practical constraints. Teacher 1 identified workload as the biggest challenge, explaining that it was difficult to balance teaching duties, administrative work, and PLC tasks. She also noted that limited time often made meetings rushed and prevented discussion from reaching deeper conclusions. In addition, she pointed to a lack of openness, the tendency for discussions to drift into administrative issues, limited access to journals and reliable internet, and the influence of cultural hierarchy on junior teachers' willingness to speak. These comments show that the challenge was not a lack of belief in PLCs, but the difficulty of maintaining depth, focus, and equal participation within real school conditions.

Principal 1's account partly confirms and partly softens these concerns. He acknowledged that time was the main constraint and explained that Saturday sessions were sometimes too short for meaningful exchange. At the same time, he stressed that teacher commitment was high and that the school attempted to sustain PLCs through the school operational fund (SOF)-funded competence improvement and, when needed, In-house training lasting two to three days. This leadership response

suggests that sustainability depends not only on teachers' motivation but also on how schools redesign time and support structures. Overall, the findings show that PLCs were meaningful and productive, but their impact depended on whether collaboration could move beyond routine scheduling into adequately supported professional inquiry.

Principal 2 indicated that several factors could affect the effectiveness of PLC implementation, particularly teachers' time constraints, workload, participation, and commitment. The principal recognized that teachers often have multiple responsibilities that make it difficult to allocate sufficient time for PLC activities and collaborative discussion. Another challenge concerned differences in teachers' willingness to participate, as some teachers were more actively engaged in sharing ideas and discussing instructional problems than others. The principal also noted that maintaining teachers' motivation was important because insufficient motivation could reduce the quality and continuity of PLC activities. In addition, PLC discussions needed to remain focused on genuine instructional challenges rather than becoming routine meetings with limited practical outcomes. From the principal's perspective, adequate leadership support was therefore necessary to identify teachers' instructional difficulties and provide appropriate solutions. The principal also emphasized the importance of creating supportive conditions so that teachers could participate without feeling criticized or pressured. These findings indicate that PLC effectiveness depends not only on the existence of a formal PLC structure but also on teachers' willingness to collaborate, sufficient time, effective facilitation, and supportive instructional leadership.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined the perceived benefits of intra-school professional learning communities (PLCs) for EFL teachers, the challenges they encountered, and the conditions influencing continued engagement and sustainability. Overall, the findings suggest that PLCs participation functioned as more than a formal meeting structure: it created opportunities for teachers to develop pedagogical competence, reflect on their practice, exchange professional knowledge, and respond to classroom needs. At the same time, the benefits were constrained by limited time, competing workloads, uneven participation, resource limitations, and personal commitments. The central finding is therefore that PLCs can support meaningful EFL teacher learning when collaborative activities remain closely connected to classroom practice and are supported by appropriate institutional conditions.

Regarding the first research question, the findings indicate that PLC participation strengthened teachers' pedagogical competence, particularly in lesson planning, assessment, classroom management, teaching strategies, and the use of learning media and technology. Teacher 3, for example, described development in pedagogical skills, assessment strategies, classroom management, and technology use, while collaboration enabled teachers to exchange practices and identify solutions to instructional problems. Teacher 4 similarly reported becoming more aware of differences in how students learned and consequently recognizing the need for varied instructional approaches. These changes suggest that PLCs support professional learning by moving teachers from individual problem-solving toward collaborative examination of classroom needs. This interpretation is consistent with Jalaludin et al. (2022), who describe PLCs as spaces for inquiry in which teachers examine student learning and adjust instructional practices, and with the broader PLC literature emphasizing collaborative inquiry and collective professional learning (Stoll et al., 2006; Voelkel & Chrispeels, 2017). The present findings extend this literature by showing how such processes operated in an EFL setting in rural Indonesia, where teachers used collegial exchange to adapt pedagogical practices to their students rather than simply adopting externally provided techniques.

A second important benefit concerned teachers' reflective and collaborative professional learning. The findings suggest that PLC discussions encouraged teachers to reconsider their instructional decisions, receive feedback, share classroom experiences, and become more intentional in planning and evaluating their teaching. This is important because professional learning becomes meaningful when teachers can connect new knowledge to problems encountered in their own classrooms. The principal's observation that knowledge sharing helped teachers learn new

developments and improve their competence through continued discussion and supervision further supports this interpretation. Student accounts also provided indirect evidence of classroom-level changes: Students described the use of real-life examples, quizzes, project-based media, clearer learning stages, teacher monitoring, and direct support. These accounts complement the teachers' perceptions by indicating that professional learning was translated into observable classroom experiences. The finding aligns with [Zhang et al. \(2023\)](#), whose study linked PLC characteristics such as shared purpose, collective focus on student learning, and reflective dialogue with teacher collective efficacy. It also supports the Community of Practice perspective adopted in this study, in which professional learning develops through mutual engagement, joint activity, and a shared repertoire of practices rather than through the passive reception of knowledge.

For the second research question, the most prominent challenge was the tension between PLC participation and teachers' existing workload. Teachers reported that limited meeting time and competing teaching and administrative responsibilities reduced the depth of their participation. Teacher 3 identified limited time as a difficulty, while Teacher 4 explained that time constraints limited her ability to engage deeply in PLC activities. The problem was not simply attendance; short or rushed meetings could prevent teachers from exploring classroom problems sufficiently, reaching well-developed solutions, or planning effective follow-up. This finding is consistent with [Fay and Levin \(2019\)](#), [Tayag \(2020\)](#), and [Trilaksono et al. \(2019\)](#), who identify time and workload as persistent barriers to collaborative professional learning. It also reflects the concern raised by [Jalaludin et al. \(2022\)](#) that professional learning can lose its impact when opportunities for practice, reflection, and follow-up are inadequate. The Morowali context therefore illustrates how the effectiveness of PLCs is shaped by the practical organization of teachers' work: even teachers who value collaboration may struggle to participate meaningfully when PLC activities are treated as an additional responsibility rather than as an integrated component of professional work.

The findings further show that PLC effectiveness was affected by interpersonal, content-related, and resource constraints. Uneven participation, differences in confidence and readiness, reluctance to express difficulties, broad or administratively oriented discussions, and limited teaching resources sometimes weakened the collaborative process. These conditions are important because PLCs depend on professional trust and a willingness to expose classroom difficulties to colleagues. When discussion becomes too general or disconnected from actual instructional problems, collaboration may remain at the level of information sharing rather than develop into collective inquiry and problem-solving. This finding is consistent with [Stoll et al. \(2006\)](#) and [Voelkel and Chrispeels \(2017\)](#), who emphasize collaborative culture, shared responsibility, and reflective dialogue as foundations of effective PLCs. It also complements research identifying leadership, resources, facilitation, and contextual conditions as important determinants of PLC effectiveness ([Christensen et al., 2024](#); [Khasawneh et al., 2023](#)). Rather than indicating that teachers were unwilling to collaborate, the findings suggest that participation was shaped by the quality of the environment in which collaboration occurred.

The findings also concerned continued engagement and the sustainability of PLC participation. The findings indicate that teachers generally recognized the value of PLCs, but continued engagement depended on whether participation could be reconciled with professional and personal responsibilities. Teacher 3 noted that personal commitments could limit the time and energy available for PLC participation, while teacher 4 similarly reported that responsibilities outside school sometimes reduced their availability and energy. These findings suggest that sustainability cannot be understood simply as teachers' willingness to attend meetings; it involves maintaining the motivation, time, energy, and institutional conditions required for meaningful participation. This interpretation supports [Guskey's \(2002\)](#) argument that teachers' motivation can be strengthened when professional learning produces visible improvements in practice, as well as [Voelkel and Chrispeels \(2017\)](#) emphasis on the relationship between meaningful PLC experiences and collective efficacy. It also reinforces the argument of [Khasawneh et al. \(2023\)](#) and [Meesuk et al. \(2021\)](#) that sustainability is influenced by contextual conditions, leadership, teacher autonomy, and available resources.

The theoretical and practical implications of the findings are therefore closely connected. Theoretically, the study supports the view that teacher learning is social, situated, reflective, and practice-oriented, while demonstrating that the enactment of these principles depends on contextual support. Practically, schools should position PLCs as part of teachers' professional work rather than as an additional activity. School leaders can strengthen PLCs by providing protected collaboration time, keeping agendas focused on authentic classroom problems, encouraging evidence-based discussion, supporting a non-judgmental culture, and providing appropriate teaching and digital resources. For EFL teachers, bringing lesson plans, student work, assessment evidence, and classroom problems into PLC discussions may help transform meetings into more focused cycles of inquiry and instructional improvement. At the policy level, support for school-based PLCs should consider the realities of rural and resource-constrained schools rather than relying only on standardized structures or compliance-oriented requirements.

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting these findings. First, the study employed a qualitative instrumental case-study design and focused on a limited number of participants and one selected school context for the present article, so the findings are intended to provide contextual understanding rather than statistical generalization. Second, evidence concerning student learning was based primarily on students' classroom experiences and perceptions, together with teachers' and school leaders' accounts, rather than standardized measurements of academic achievement. Third, the researcher's involvement as an EFL teacher and PLC participant provided valuable insider knowledge but may also have influenced interpretation and participant responses. These limitations were addressed through the use of multiple participant perspectives and classroom observations, but they nevertheless indicate that the findings should be interpreted as context-dependent evidence about professional learning and classroom experience rather than causal evidence that PLC participation directly produces improved student achievement.

Future research could build on these findings through broader and more comparative designs. Studies involving a larger number of schools across Morowali and other rural areas of Central Sulawesi could examine whether the identified patterns remain consistent across different institutional and geographic conditions. Mixed-method or longitudinal studies could also investigate whether changes in teacher competence and classroom practice are sustained over time and whether they are associated with measurable changes in student learning outcomes. Further research should examine how different forms of leadership, facilitation, digital support, and protected collaboration time influence teacher engagement and PLC sustainability. Comparative research between rural and urban EFL contexts would also help determine which challenges are specifically associated with geographical and resource conditions and which reflect broader characteristics of school-based professional learning.

Overall, this study contributes to the PLC literature by showing that intra-school PLCs can provide meaningful professional learning opportunities for EFL teachers while simultaneously revealing the contextual conditions that limit their effectiveness and sustainability. The findings demonstrate that collaboration, reflection, and shared problem-solving can translate into changes in pedagogical practice and more engaging classroom experiences, but these processes require adequate time, resources, supportive leadership, and teacher commitment. The study therefore moves beyond viewing PLCs as formal structures and highlights them as context-dependent professional learning practices whose value depends on their connection to teachers' everyday classroom realities. In the Morowali EFL context, the central challenge is not whether PLCs are valuable, but how schools can create the conditions in which their collaborative potential can be sustained and transformed into continuous professional learning.

The findings answer both research questions by showing that PLCs supported EFL teacher practice in meaningful ways while remaining vulnerable to familiar implementation constraints. On the benefit side, the selected participants described PLCs as a setting for pedagogical refinement, reflective learning, and collaborative knowledge exchange. This aligns closely with the wider literature that positions PLCs as school-based structures for sustained teacher learning rather than episodic professional development (Avalos, 2011; Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). In the Morowali

case, what stands out is that teacher growth was not discussed in abstract terms; it was consistently tied to lesson clarity, strategy variation, student support, and observable classroom change.

The principal's role is especially significant in interpreting because the PLC had practical influence. The principal did not present the learning community as a ceremonial program. Instead, he linked it with classroom observation, feedback, best-practice sharing, and opportunities for continuing competence development. This supports arguments from [Harris and Jones \(2020\)](#) and [Voelkel and Chrispeels \(2017\)](#) that leadership matters not only because it authorizes collaboration, but because it structures and legitimizes it as part of school improvement. In this article, leadership appears as a bridge between teachers' willingness to collaborate and the school's capacity to sustain that collaboration.

The student interviews strengthen the explanatory value of the findings because they show how teacher learning reached the classroom. Student 1's reference to real-life examples and bilingual explanation, Student 2's emphasis on games and projects, and Student 3's feeling of safety during quiz-based learning all suggest that PLC-informed teaching practices were translated into pedagogy that students perceived as understandable, motivating, and supportive. This is consistent with [Doğan and Adams \(2018\)](#) and [Dinanty et al. \(2024\)](#), who argue that PLCs are most meaningful when teacher collaboration leads to visible instructional change and more positive student learning experiences.

At the same time, the challenge findings remind us that promising collaboration does not remove structural pressure. Teacher 1's description of rushed meetings, administrative drift, weak access to resources, and unequal participation echoes concerns in [\(Rečs & Geske, 2019\)](#), [\(Tayag, 2020\)](#) and [\(Trilaksono et al., 2019\)](#). The present article, therefore, confirms a recurring pattern in the PLC literature: collaboration is often valued more than it is protected. Teachers may believe in the model, but without enough time, focused facilitation, and equitable participation, PLCs risk becoming shallow or inconsistent. The Morowali evidence adds a contextual layer by showing how workload and cultural hierarchy can shape the depth of discussion in rural school settings.

Overall, this article suggests that PLCs in rural EFL contexts should be understood as both promising and conditional. They are promising because they support teacher reflection, strategy development, and classroom improvement. They are conditional because their quality depends on leadership routines, protected time, resource access, and the creation of safe, non-hierarchical discussion spaces. The key contribution of this article is therefore not to claim that PLCs are universally effective, but to show more precisely how and under what conditions they become useful for EFL teacher practices in Morowali.

CONCLUSION

This article examined how PLCs supported EFL teacher practices through a focused analysis of the teachers, the principals, and the students. The findings show that PLCs contributed to pedagogical development, reflective and collaborative professional learning, and better classroom experiences for students. At the same time, the article also identified recurring challenges, particularly limited time, uneven discussion depth, resource constraints, and sustainability concerns. These findings matter because they show that PLCs can function as a meaningful model of school-based professional learning in rural Indonesian settings, but only when collaboration is supported structurally and not treated as an additional burden. The study is limited by its small participant subset and narrow geographic focus, so its conclusions are analytically suggestive rather than broadly generalized. Even so, it offers a useful contribution to the discussion of PLCs in EFL education by linking teacher voice, leadership support, and student classroom experience within one coherent account. Future research may compare participant subsets across schools, examine long-term PLC sustainability, or analyze how leadership practices mediate the relationship between teacher collaboration and classroom change.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT:

The author declares no conflict of interest related to this manuscript.

About the authors

Satriani is a master's candidate at Tadulako University of Palu and an English teacher at SMPN 4 Wita Ponda, Morowali region. She then earned her bachelor's degree in Teacher Training and Education from Muhammadiyah University of Palu. Her research interests include English teaching and learning and teacher professional development. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-9427-525X>, email: satrianir56@gmail.com.

Abdul Kamaruddin obtained a bachelor's degree in English education from the University of Tadulako in Indonesia. He then earned his master's and doctoral degrees in English Language Teaching from the University of Newcastle, Australia (2005), and La Trobe University, Australia

(2014). His research interests include English teaching and learning, curriculum and material development, and language assessment. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-2420-5555>, email: abdul_kamaruddin@untad.ac.id

Mukrim obtained a bachelor's degree in English education from the University of Tadulako in Indonesia. He then earned his master's and doctoral degrees in Language Teacher Education from Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand (2012), and Leeds University (2019), United Kingdom. His research interests include English teaching and learning, teacher professional development, teacher research, and informal digital learning of English. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7763-0201>, email: mukrim@untad.ac.id