



Building Professional Learning Communities (PLC) to Increase the Quality of Education in Elementary Schools

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The low quality of education in Indonesia is a longstanding discussion. But until now the issue of the quality of education has not yet been resolved. This study uses qualitative methods that aim to identify and describe building professional learning communities to improve the quality of education in schools. Data collection is conducted using interviews, observation, and documentation techniques. Improving the quality of education is in line with the design of today's teacher quality improvement programs that emphasise collaboration oriented to enabling teachers to overcome any problems encountered; which are interactive and interrelated programs and implemented continuously and planned systematically and comprehensively.

Keywords: *quality of education, professional learning community.*



I. INTRODUCTION

Education is a very important asset to the progress of a nation. Therefore, the government is currently very serious in handling quality improvement in the field of education. This is done to catch up with the education sector in Indonesia compared to other countries. The government has made various efforts in the context of efforts to improve the quality of education in Indonesia. Professional teachers always have to develop competition and professionalism (Kristiawan & Rahmat, 2018). Teachers should improve competence through bettering themselves by education and training, workshops, readings, and references to enrich others by setting aside a few percent of the professional stakes he/she gets (Jihad, 2013).

Factors that influence the quality of education include the curriculum, workforce resources, school facilities and facilities, school management and education funding (H Abuddin Nata, 2012). In this case, what needs to be examined is the workforce resources in which a very large role is the teacher who is a professional staff member. To actualise their duties, the teacher as a professional must always develop his/her competence and professionalism.

The government will facilitate teachers to be able to develop their professionalism in an ongoing manner as outlined in Law number 20 of 2003, concerning the national education system, law number 14 of 2005, concerning teachers and lecturers and government regulation number 19 of 2005, concerning national education standards. This program is directed to be able to reduce the gap between the knowledge, skills, social competencies and personalities that they have now and what they demand in the future with their professions (Utomo, 2016).

Based on the description above, then a teacher should improve his competence by increasing the amount of education and training, workshops, enriching reading references and so on, by setting aside a few percent of professional payment he/she gets. Professionalism is an activity carried out by someone and becomes a source of income for life that requires expertise or skills that meet certain quality standards or norms and requires professional education (Avalos, 2011).

In addition to the above criteria, the quality of education that was successfully characterised by a high sense of teaching satisfaction, including high student expectations, achievement of teaching curriculum targets, excellent guidance on spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of instructors, with none of the students who have psychological or emotional problems, there is no conflict between the student's relationship with the teacher / staff.

Currently, teachers face challenges far greater than in previous eras. The teacher confronts students with far more diverse characteristics in terms of cultural background, family economy, religion, and so on. The expectations of the community and parents of the quality of education



are increasingly high. From time to time, the government develops higher quality standards for processes and educational outcomes. At the same time, the rapid advancement of information technology, for example, the internet, has caused teachers' information, knowledge, and skills to become obsolete (Darling, 2006; Mulford, 2008). Various challenges faced by teachers have been implicated in teacher quality standards.

In the past, qualified teachers were teachers who were able to teach well (Hollins, 2011). In this era, these criteria are not enough. Qualified teachers are teachers who can become learners throughout their careers. Teachers can develop learning following the development of the environment (Suriansyah & Aslamiah, 2019). Teachers are also able to work with, learn from, and teach other teachers to improve the quality of learning in the classroom, are able to teach according to the quality standards of the learning process, and able to utilise technology.

The community has a lot of expectations from teachers. School successes or failures are often addressed to teachers. The community's justification can be understood because the teacher is an active resource. The best possible curriculum, facilities, facilities and learning inscriptions, can be in place, but if the quality of the teacher is low then it is difficult to get high-quality educational outcomes. Various efforts can be taken to create good productivity, one of which is to improve the quality of work. Efforts to improve the quality of education are central to all kinds of efforts to improve the quality and change in education (Suhayati, 2013). The problem of teaching quality by teachers must receive continuous supervision and coaching. Supervision in education aims to develop the potential of students through quality learning activities that are served by teachers (Aslamiah, n.d.).

So, the teacher must be a professional and have knowledge, and teach their knowledge to others so that people have an increase in the quality of human resources. Then the teacher's teaching performance is related to the task of planning, managing learning and evaluating student learning outcomes. As a planner, the teacher must be able to design learning in accordance with conditions in the field, as a manager, the teacher must be able to create a conducive learning climate so that students can learn well, and as an evaluator the teacher must be able to carry out assessment of student learning processes and outcomes (Sanjaya, 2006).

Brown explained that the assignment and role of the teacher, among others is: mastering and developing subject matter, planning and preparing daily lessons, and controlling and evaluating student learning activities (Sardiman, 2004). In the education profession, especially the teaching profession, the quality of the process and learning outcomes are a reflection of the teacher's professional abilities. The presence of teachers in the learning process has an important role. The role of teachers cannot be replaced by technology such as radio, television, tape recorders,



internet, computers, and the most modern technology. Many human elements such as attitudes, value systems, feelings, motivational habits and exemplary behaviour are expected. The results of the learning process cannot be achieved except through educators.

How important the teacher's role is and how difficult the teacher's duties and responsibilities are, especially the moral responsibility to be patronised and imitated. At school a teacher becomes a measure or a guideline for his students, in a community, a teacher becomes a standard or role model for every community member. *Professional Learning Community (PLC)* is a process of knowledge acquisition that is carried out through a collaborative inquiry process and solves problems originating from work whose indications can be traced to the learning needs of teachers sourced from the interests of the learning process teaching, learning experiences of teachers who commissioned jointly, and the results appear in the capacity of teachers in the school (Permana & Sudarsyah, 2016). *Professional Learning Community* is carried out on an ongoing basis to produce the teaching profession as expected (Linder, Post, & Calabrese, 2012).

The Professional Learning Community is aimed at building an effort between individual and collective teaching teams towards a higher level of professionalism and developing its influence throughout the school's educational identity, with the ultimate goal being that learning activities are conducive for students. The involvement of educators in the *Professional Learning Community* activities will lead to the realisation of empowerment for all elements in an educational entity, especially for the teaching team in creating a continuous learning process (Philpott & Oates, 2017). Therefore, in various countries, the *Professional Learning Community* has become increasingly popular at the elementary, middle and upper levels.

A change in an institution cannot be separated from the leadership factor, with the presence of identity *Professional Learning Community* in an educational institution that cannot ignore the importance of a leadership role in the running of the institution. So specifically the type of leadership that stands out in the era of accountability and responsibility is the Instructional Leadership. So it can be explained that the success of the *Professional Learning Community* in schools is due to the collaboration between the principal, teacher professional development, *lesson study*, climate and culture of the school, as well as facilities and infrastructure that support good teaching and learning in schools (Watson, 2014).

From this explanation, it can be concluded that the *Professional Learning Community* is formed based on a culture that is built based on human values and strong communication and ongoing professional discussion. The focus is on collaboration, which is the main centre of group work. Uniting all members in one school community for the same goal, is to improve student learning outcomes to the maximum extent possible, by creating learning networks both in schools and



with parties outside the school. Learning should require collaborative efforts from all parties involved. Ideas should be encouraged and reinforced for each member's learning.

The reason for choosing a primary school in East Banjarmasin sub-district is to know more about the implementation of PLCs in improving the quality of education in primary schools. Ideally, teachers always appear professionally with the main task of educating, teaching, guiding, directing, training, evaluating, and evaluating students in early childhood education through formal education, basic education, and secondary education. Professional teachers must have four competencies, namely: pedagogical competence, personal competence, social competence, and professional competence obtained through professional education. Even though the various methods that have been applied by SDN class teachers in the East Banjarmasin District in the learning process are felt to have still not brought progress towards significantly improving the quality of education.

Being professional means being an expert in the field and an expert qualified in carrying out his work. But not all experts can be qualified. Because being qualified is not only a matter of expertise but also concerns issues of integrity and personality. In the perspective of human resource development, being professional is a unity between the concepts of personality and integrity that is combined with his skills or expertise (Livingston, 2014).

But in reality, many are found to be teachers who have made teaching the last profession choice. Less *bona fide*, if he/she is *stuck* there is no other job or social status that is closely related to poverty, a small salary, and not prosperous even below the poverty line. Even teachers who are selected who have important origins there who teach, even though the teacher is the operator of an educational curriculum (Parkay, Anctil, & Hass, 2014). They are the spearhead of the fighters against stupidity. Even the teacher is the link and pillar of civilisation and a common thread for the process of change and progress of a society or nation.

Considering that teachers are a very idealistic profession, it is time for the quality of professional teachers to be developed. When referring to the above concept, being professional is gathering quality with integrity, being a professional teacher is a necessity (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). However, the teaching profession is also very attached to the role of psychological, humanist and even identical with the image of humanity. Because it is like a laboratory, a teacher is like a scientist who is experimenting on the fate of human children and also a nation. Maybe everyone can be a teacher, but being a teacher who has expertise in educating or teaching needs adequate education, training and flight hours.

Based on the description as in the previous section, the problems in this study are as follows :



1. What is the picture of the character of the school as a Professional Learning Community in improving the quality of education in primary schools in East Banjarmasin District?
2. What are the forms of *Professional Learning Communities* in improving the quality of education in primary schools in East Banjarmasin District?
3. What is the model of *Professional Learning Communities* in improving the quality of education in elementary schools in the East Banjarmasin District?
4. What are the obstacles of *Professional Learning Communities* in improving the quality of education in elementary schools in the East Banjarmasin District?

Based on the problems in this study, the objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To explain the picture of the character of the school as a Professional Learning Community in improving the quality of education in primary schools in East Banjarmasin District.
2. To explain the forms of *Professional Learning Communities* in improving the quality of education in elementary schools in East Banjarmasin District.
3. To explain the *Professional Learning Communities* model in improving the quality of education in elementary schools in East Banjarmasin District.
4. To explain the obstacles of *Professional Learning Communities* in improving the quality of education in elementary schools in East Banjarmasin District.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

To improve the quality of education in schools, Denim said that if an institution wants to improve the quality of it's education then it must involve at least five dominant factors, namely:

- a. Principal's leadership: the principal must have and understand a clear work vision, be able and willing to work hard, have a high work motivation, be persistent and steadfast in working, provide optimal service, and work discipline is strong.
- b. Teacher: maximum involvement of teachers, by increasing the competence and professional work of teachers in seminars, workshops, and training so that the results of these activities are applied at school.
- c. Student: The approach that must be taken is "children as the centre" so that the competencies and abilities of students can be explored, so that schools can inventory the strengths that the students have.
- d. Curriculum: their curriculum is consistent, dynamic, and integrated to enable and facilitate the quality standards expected, and *goals* can be achieved optimally.
- e. Collaborative Network: cooperation networks are not only limited to the school and community environment (parents and the community) but with other organisations,



such as companies or government agencies so that the output of the school can be absorbed in the world of work (Danim, 2007).

f.

Based on the above opinion, it can be explained that the principal and teachers have a great responsibility in improving the quality of education in schools. Mainly the teacher, because the teacher is the spearhead in the field (in class) who is in direct contact with students in the learning process. Therefore, to improve the quality of learning, a teacher must have the requirements in teaching and student learning to build an effective classroom and cooperation in learning to create a pleasant atmosphere and mutual respect, including:

- 1) Teachers must use more methods when teaching. Variations in methods result in the presentation of material attracting the attention of students and are easily accepted by students, so the class comes alive. If the learning methods are always the same (monotonous), this will bore students.
- 2) Growing motivation is very influential in the progress and development of students. Furthermore, through the learning process, if the teacher's motivation is right and on target, this will increase learning activities, with clear objectives, students will learn more diligently, actively and more enthusiastically. If teachers have these competencies, it is not impossible to improve the quality of learning in schools that can be realised (Sallis, 2014).

There are already many teachers who have mastered learning strategies and models, but the reality in our field is that there are still many teachers who are still impressed only in teaching obligations, many lectures (*telling methods*) and less helping the development of student activities (Sukma, Mahjuddin, & Amelia, 2017). The teacher does not use strategies and models in the learning process; for him/her what is important is how the learning process can take place. This reality can be found in almost all schools, both in public and private schools, not least in madrassas or Islamic-based schools. If this is left unchecked, it can affect the quality of education in schools, which in turn will find schools that are sterile and not in demand by students and will eventually go out of business.

So the principal, teachers, and employees (*stakeholders*) have the responsibility of all elements of education to improve the quality of learning in schools, especially teachers as the spearhead in the classroom, because they are in direct contact with students in the learning process (Wittek & Kvernbekk, 2011). The principal's leadership and teacher's creativity that is professional, innovative and creative, is one of the benchmarks in improving the quality of learning in schools, because these two elements are figures that are in direct contact with the learning process. These two elements are the central figures that can provide confidence to the community (parents) and



students, and community satisfaction will be seen from the outputs and outcomes carried out in each period. If the service to the community is good, they will be aware and will automatically help all the needs desired by the school, so that it will not be difficult for the school to improve the quality of education in the school.

The professional learning community in madrasas can be interpreted as a collection of professionals such as teachers, staff, and school principals who are committed to collaborating in a learning process to improve the quality of learning in the classroom. The binding of this community is the values, views, beliefs, hopes and shared goals, such as the vision and goals of the school that are mutually agreed upon (DuFour & DuFour, 2013).

At school, a community can consist of students, teachers, staff, school principals or a combination of them. The definition of a learning community is a group of people who share the same goals and collaborate to create a conducive learning environment and increase learning opportunities for all members to develop their potential. While professional itself means someone with a specialization in the field of expertise. His/her expertise is obtained not only from training results but also from the process of following his/her scientific development (Tam, 2015). Included in the professional group at the school are the principal, teachers, and support staff.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

The approach used in this research is a qualitative descriptive approach. Qualitative research is one in which researchers are involved and they describe the forms of events that occur on the object of research (Pidarta, 2005). A qualitative approach is one which orientates towards natural phenomena. This qualitative research requires researchers to conduct a thorough and focused exploration to get a clearer and deeper understanding of the object under study, in connection with the collection of data, to provide a description or affirmation of a concept or phenomenon, and also to answer questions related to the research subjects (Silverman, 2016).

This research was conducted at the Public Elementary School in East Banjarmasin District. The data needed is in the form of information about PLC activity data in SDN East Banjarmasin District as a basis for ensuring that what will be examined are professional teachers, teacher activity data relating to improving self-competence and professionalism of teachers outside the KBM (for example: courses, training, upgrading, workshops, workshops, seminars, KKG, in house training, panel discussions, scientific meetings and various other training and education), the results of assessing teacher performance, class action research reports, and so on. Sources of data in this study include the principal, class teachers and SDN administrative staff in East Banjarmasin District.



IV. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Before researching the implementation of PLC, the researcher determines the object of research who is the teacher who already has an educator certificate, that is the teacher who has been legally recognised by the government as a professional teacher in doing his work. The teacher's professionalism must be maintained and even needs to be developed through PLC activities. The implementation of PLC for teachers has general goals and specific objectives. The general goal of the PLC is to improve the quality of education services in schools to improve the quality of education. While the specific objectives of the PLC are: 1) facilitating teachers to achieve predetermined professional competency standards; 2) facilitating teachers to continue to update their current competencies with future demands related to their profession; 3) motivating teachers to remain committed to carrying out their main tasks and functions as professional staff; 4) elevating the image, dignity, dignity of the teaching profession, respect, and pride to that teaching profession (Little, 2012).

Based on the results of interviews with the school principal, it shows that principally the school principal has known some of the goals of the PLC which are the expectations of all stakeholders namely increasing the quality of education services in schools to improve the quality of education. The PLC program is structured based on teacher performance profiles which are the results of Teacher Performance Assessment. Teacher PK results are also the basis for determining teacher credit scores to develop teacher careers as mandated in the Minister of State Regulation on Empowerment of State Apparatuses and Bureaucratic Reform No. 16/2009 concerning Teacher Functional Position and Credit Scores. Teacher Performance Assessment is carried out not to complicate teachers, but to create professional teachers who can guarantee a quality learning process. In the case of self-evaluation, the school principal advised all teachers to conduct self-evaluation as input for the preparation of the PLC program in schools incorporated in the East Banjarmasin sub-district but were not given a self-evaluation format by the PLC program preparation guidelines.

The school's effort to improve the competence of its teachers in the past year is to include training for class teachers. If there is a training invitation from the province or city, this means the school does not have a program to improve the quality of educators and education staff, but there are also schools that conduct workshops or IHT preparation of learning devices. The results of school efforts according to school principals and class teachers are the preparation of learning tools by each class teacher to complete the two curriculum units of education level (KTSP) and according to the class teacher of SDN East Banjarmasin District, who says that the school effort does not have very visible results. Schools are only waiting for training invitations from provincial or city education offices.



1. Characteristics of Schools as a Professional Learning Community

The core of the professional learning community in schools is collaborative learning, which is aimed at improving the quality of student learning (Thompson, Gregg, & Niska, 2004). In this learning, there is an exchange of information, knowledge, skills and teaching experience between professionals, for example, teachers with teachers, teachers with support staff, or teachers with school principals.

Learning is focused on everything that happens and is related to the quality of learning, aimed at achieving quality standards in the process and learning outcomes. Therefore, this activity includes solving the problems faced by teachers in the classroom and developing effective learning models or strategies. Collaborative learning is based on the value of cooperation and collegiality (F. C. Lunenburg, 2010). Collaboration means community members are willing to help and support one another for the success of achieving common goals, while collegiality means strong collaboration between teachers and between teachers and principals, to improve the quality of teaching and learning (Andrews & Lewis, 2004).

The value of strong collaboration and collegiality makes every individual in this community feel comfortable not only in terms of learning from other individuals, but also sharing experiences of success and failure with colleagues. Furthermore, Lunenburg says that in schools where a professional learning community has been formed, the teachers are accustomed to communicating and openly discussing various problems or difficulties teaching them to other teachers without fear, hesitation or shame (F. C. Lunenburg, 2010). The teacher is also accustomed to sharing his experiences, knowledge, and abilities with other teachers, without worrying that misunderstandings will occur over the teacher's intentions, for example being considered to boast. Also, teachers respect differences of opinion. Not only through discussion, but also debate, is considered to be common. This is because questioning long-standing habits or traditions then reviewing and discussing them to gain new understanding, knowledge and new things has become a frequent and usual thing to do (F. Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2011).

2. Professional Learning Community forms in school

Professional Learning Community (PLC) is displayed in various forms of formal and informal collaborative learning activities. If collaborative learning has been entrenched in school, a lot of professional collaboration takes place informally. The very nature of a learning community, where collaboration and sharing is the norm, means that much professional learning occurs informally, and may not always be team-based or delivered in the school (Tam, 2015).

Informal professional collaborative learning includes a variety of unorganised interactions between teachers aimed at developing teacher professionalism. This interaction may occur



anywhere, inside or outside the school. One example is junior teachers approaching senior teachers in the classroom to address the teaching problems they have just experienced to get a solution. The focus of the conversation or professional chat is very diverse. Some of these are effective teaching strategies, difficult subjects, diverse student learning styles, new ways of assessment or new strategies for classroom behaviour management. Whereas formal collaborative learning includes research teams, lesson study teams, lesson plan development teams, and various forms of teacher discussion forums (Little, 2012).

3. The Professional Learning Community Model

Various PLC models have been developed by experts. Without ignoring the differences, they mention some of the same elements that are considered important for the creation of a professional learning community (Crowther, Ferguson, & Hann, 2009). These include: a) shared vision and values that focus on student learning and also high expectations of student achievement; b) distributed leadership, which values teacher participation in decision making; c) perceptions of mutual support between staff; d) collaborative learning between professional staff that leads to student needs; e) organising that supports collaborative learning; f) a sense of collective responsibility.

In line with the opinion above is a comprehensive and systemic PLC model proposed by Bolam as follows.

- a. External factors that support and inhibit the formation and perpetuation of PLC.
- b. Internal factors that support and inhibit the formation and perpetuation of PLC.
- c. The process, which consists of Optimising Resources and Structures that drive PLCs, encourages professional learning, evaluates and preserves PLCs, and the leadership and management that facilitates PLCs.
- d. Characteristics, which consist of: (1) content and values agreed upon, (2) shared responsibility for student learning, (3) collaboration focused on group and individual learning, (4) professional inquiry and reflection, (5) openness, cooperation networks, and partnerships, (6) inclusive membership, and (7) mutual trust, respect and support.
- e. Outcomes, in the form of improving the quality of student learning and social development, workforce and developing leadership capacity, and characteristics are seen, and the process runs smoothly (Bolam et al., 2005).

4. Constraints that are often encountered in the Implementation of PLC in Schools

Most of the teachers stated that the PLC was identical to the KKG implemented at the level of the subdistrict cluster. During this time, according to most of the teachers' opinions, the implementation of the KKG was sufficient to accommodate the needs of teachers. However, the



participation of teachers in KKG activities is also still very minimal although many benefits are needed by teachers. On the other hand, the KKG is also not sufficiently said to be a vehicle for professional learning because there is no element of feedback and reflection after application in class. Professional learning is said to be effective only if it provides an opportunity for teachers to test the learning they have gained in class, acted upon and given feedback. Therefore effective professional learning is not achieved from traditional professional development programs in the form of seminars, conferences and workshops, once completed.

Ideally, the implementation of PLC allows it to be done formally or informally by the school based on the situation and condition of the school (Cifuentes, Maxwell, & Bulu, 2011). Formally, a PLC can be a professional learning team. In this team, teachers work with a spirit of openness and critical reflection, sharing their experiences, ideas, and expertise, engaging in an ongoing assessment process that fosters deep team learning. Teamwork is directed by a clear and systematic model of problem-solving and learning which includes the cycle of learning, application, improvement, and application of collaborative culture and collective responsibility for the development of effective learning practices and better student performance.

Learning with or with other teachers on cross-subjects collaboratively is one approach of the learning community. Professional learning communities can occur informally. That is, the process of sharing knowledge, experience, and skills occur not in the context of planned and structured program implementation. Examples of informal forms of professional learning community include teacher conversations about learning, unstructured guidance, provision of skills training from experienced teachers to less experienced teachers, and so on.

The application of PLC which, in this case, is understood by the majority of teachers as a school-level KKG, is very possible. This was stated by supervisors, principals, and teachers. Based on the statement of one of the supervisors, it is very possible to hold a KKG at the school level. Broadly speaking, this new version of the KKG or so-called PLC, is very likely to be implemented in schools because it is supported by 6 supporting characteristics of the KPP, namely: shared leadership, shared vision & values, collective learning & application, disseminating teacher teaching strategies, supporting personal relationships and supporting organisational structures. The majority of respondents, who were majority teachers, also stated that they needed the formal application of the KKG at the school level (Bolam et al., 2005). This was also found by Wells, C., & Fun, L. in a survey indicating that teachers want collaboration, sharing information, planning and working together (Wells & Feun, 2008). However, the teacher also stated that all this time they were working referring to curriculum guidelines, so they tended not to work together to determine the important elements of each subject being taught.



However, empowering PLCs at the school level is not easy. Teachers need time and effort to work in a team that might increase the teacher's workload, especially at the beginning. The development of trust and confidence to take risks, experiment, and work collaboratively requires perseverance because it clashes with the norms of autonomy that have historically been a hallmark of teacher work.

Therefore, the role of the principal becomes the main role during the PLC implementation process. Principals need to master the skills to understand the process of change, knowledge about leadership, and sharing to build mutual trust between teachers (Riveros, Newton, & Burgess, 2012). This was stated as important to start the PLC that must be mastered by the principal.

Other support from school principals takes several forms: helping teachers to set clear goals, develop relationships, complement communication tools, and appreciate human resource capacity to change. The application of PLC requires evaluation, monitoring, and sustainability. One strategy for the sustainability of the application of PLC can be done by mentoring individual teachers.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study above, it can be concluded that the Professional Learning Community (PLC) at a certain level has occurred in schools which so far have been through the district level KKG/ MGMP with different levels of implementation at each school. Schools in general still need to strengthen the six dimensions of the professional learning community to become a professional learning community. This is important to do because schools need to become professional learning communities to improve the quality of teachers and learning in the classroom. The ideal PLC model is a model that integrates and synergises internal and external school resources to create an environment conducive to teacher professional collaborative learning aimed at improving the quality of learning and school effectiveness.



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