

Developing Effective Professional Learning Communities to Foster Teacher Growth and Collaboration in Chinese International Schools

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Abstract: This study investigates the development and effectiveness of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) as a strategy for fostering teacher growth and collaboration within Chinese international schools. Drawing on a quantitative survey of 300 teachers and administrators across various institutions, the research explores the perceptions of educators regarding the key components of effective PLCs, including administrative support, collaborative practices, and their impact on professional development. The findings indicate that while the core principles of PLCs are widely accepted, their successful implementation in this unique context is heavily influenced by factors such as high teacher turnover and a diverse mix of expatriate and local staff. The study identifies a strong correlation between dedicated time for collaboration, robust leadership support, and a positive perception of PLCs' impact on instructional practices and teacher morale. This research addresses a significant gap in the literature by providing empirical data from a rapidly growing but under-examined educational sector. The findings offer practical insights for school leaders and educators, demonstrating how to adapt the PLC model to bridge cultural and pedagogical divides, thereby building sustainable and effective professional communities that ultimately enhance student learning outcomes.

Keywords: Professional Learning Communities, teacher collaboration, Chinese international schools, professional development, teacher growth.

1. Introduction

The landscape of education is in a constant state of flux, demanding that educators continuously evolve their practices to meet the diverse needs of students in an increasingly globalized world. In this context, the concept of the Professional Learning Community (PLC) has emerged as a powerful framework for fostering teacher growth and collaboration, ultimately leading to improved student outcomes. A PLC can be defined as a group of educators who meet regularly, share expertise, and work collaboratively to improve teaching skills and the academic performance of students (Tam, 2024). This model moves beyond traditional, one-off professional development sessions to create a sustained, job-embedded system of learning where teachers are empowered to become agents of their own professional growth.

In the unique and rapidly expanding environment of Chinese international schools, the implementation of effective PLCs is particularly critical. These schools often serve a student population with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and their teaching staff is frequently composed of a mix of expatriate and local educators (Haiyan & Allan, 2020). This presents both a challenge and an opportunity to create a rich, collaborative culture that leverages the unique strengths and perspectives of all teachers.

The growth of international schools in China has been phenomenal over the past two decades, driven by a combination of factors including the rise of a middle and upper class with a desire for Western-style education for their children, and the increasing presence of expatriate families (Haiyan & Allan, 2020). These schools operate in a complex regulatory and cultural environment, often adhering to foreign curricula while also navigating the expectations of Chinese

(Liu et al., 2022). This dual mission requires a high degree of pedagogical flexibility and cultural sensitivity from teachers. However, a significant challenge within many of these schools is the high turnover rate of expatriate teachers, which can disrupt the continuity of educational programs and hinder the development of a stable school culture (Liu & Yin, 2020). This transient nature of the teaching staff makes it difficult to build long-term relationships and a shared sense of purpose, which are essential for the success of a PLC. The lack of a stable, consistent teaching body can lead to a fragmented professional culture where knowledge and best practices are not effectively shared or retained.

Furthermore, the diverse cultural backgrounds of the teaching staff can create communication barriers and different pedagogical approaches (Tam, 2024). Expatriate teachers, often trained in Western educational systems, may bring a student-centered, inquiry-based approach, while local Chinese teachers may have been educated in a more traditional, teacher-centered system. Without a structured framework for collaboration, these differences can lead to misunderstandings and a lack of coherence in instructional practices. A well-structured PLC, however, can provide a neutral and professional space for these different perspectives to be shared and integrated, creating a more comprehensive and culturally responsive approach to teaching and learning (Liu et al., 2022). It can serve as a bridge, helping teachers from different backgrounds to understand and appreciate each other's pedagogical philosophies and to collectively develop a shared vision for their students. By creating this shared language and understanding, PLCs can transform cultural and pedagogical differences from potential obstacles into sources of strength and innovation.

In this context, the need for effective PLCs in Chinese international schools is not merely a matter of best practice; it is a strategic imperative for school improvement and sustainability (Hairon, & Dimmock, 2012). These communities can serve as a critical mechanism for addressing the challenges of teacher turnover, cultural diversity, and the need for continuous pedagogical innovation. By fostering a culture of collaboration, mutual support, and collective responsibility, PLCs can help to retain high-quality teachers, particularly local ones who may feel disconnected from the dominant expatriate culture (Xue et al., 2019). They provide a platform for teachers to collectively analyze student data, share successful instructional strategies, and co-plan lessons, thereby ensuring a consistent and high-quality educational experience for all students. This collective inquiry into practice is at the heart of the PLC model and is what differentiates it from simple collegial conversation (Zamiri & Esmaeili, 2024). It shifts the focus from individual teachers working in isolation to a team-based approach where the success of each student is a shared responsibility.

The implementation of PLCs in this unique environment, however, requires careful planning and a deep understanding of the specific cultural and organizational context of Chinese international schools. It is not enough to simply adopt a model from a different cultural context; the PLC framework must be adapted to fit the local reality (Fullan, 2001). This includes providing adequate time for collaboration, developing clear protocols for meetings, and ensuring that school leadership is fully committed to supporting the initiative (Haiyan & Allan, 2020). The leadership's role is particularly crucial, as they must not only provide the logistical support but also model the collaborative behaviors and values that are central to the PLC concept (Haiyan & Allan, 2020). Without strong administrative support, PLCs can easily devolve into unproductive meetings with no clear purpose or outcome. A successful PLC is a reflection of a school culture that values professional growth, trusts its teachers, and is committed to continuous improvement.

The development of effective Professional Learning Communities in Chinese international schools is a powerful strategy to address the unique challenges of this educational sector. By providing a structured framework for collaboration and professional growth, PLCs can help to overcome the obstacles of teacher turnover and cultural diversity, while simultaneously fostering pedagogical innovation and improving student outcomes (Rizqi, & Syafika, 2024). This research aims to explore the key factors that contribute to the success of PLCs in this specific context, providing a roadmap for school leaders and educators to build sustainable and impactful learning communities. The findings will contribute to the growing body of literature on international education and professional development, offering practical insights that can be applied to other similar educational settings. This study is guided by the understanding that a school's greatest asset is its teachers, and investing in their collective growth is the most effective way to ensure the success of all students.

The proposed study on developing effective Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in Chinese international schools holds significant importance for several key stakeholders within the field of international education. The findings of this research will provide a deeper understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities associated with implementing PLCs in a specific and complex cultural and organizational context. This is particularly relevant given the rapid growth and increasing influence of Chinese international schools, which are often at the forefront of educational innovation in the region. By focusing on a specific geographic and institutional setting, this research moves beyond general professional development theory to provide actionable, context-specific insights that can directly inform practice.

For school leaders and administrators in Chinese international schools, this study is of paramount importance. These leaders are tasked with creating a school culture that is both effective and sustainable, often while navigating the complexities of high teacher turnover and a culturally diverse staff (Xue et al., 2019). The findings of this research will provide a clear roadmap for establishing and nurturing PLCs that are not only theoretically sound but also practically viable within their specific environment. The study will identify the critical success factors, such as the role of leadership in fostering a culture of trust and collaboration, and the importance of providing dedicated time and resources for teacher teams to meet and work together (Lee & Ip, 2021). By understanding these factors, leaders can make more informed decisions about resource allocation, professional development strategies, and the design of their school's organizational

structure. This can lead to improved teacher retention, particularly for local educators who may feel marginalized in a school dominated by expatriate staff, thereby fostering a more stable and cohesive professional community (Tam, 2024).

Furthermore, the research will offer valuable insights into how PLCs can be used as a tool to bridge the cultural and pedagogical divides that often exist between expatriate and local Chinese teachers. Many studies have highlighted the challenges of integrating different pedagogical traditions and communication styles within international schools (Liu & Yin, 2020). This study will investigate how a structured PLC framework can facilitate a constructive dialogue, allowing teachers to share their diverse experiences and co-construct a shared understanding of best practices that are culturally responsive and pedagogically sound. The findings will highlight effective strategies for promoting cross-cultural collaboration, such as the use of common protocols for discussion and the establishment of clear, shared goals (Haiyan & Allan, 2020). This can lead to a more coherent and integrated curriculum and instructional approach across the school, ultimately benefiting students who are often navigating multiple cultural contexts in their daily lives. The study, therefore, contributes to the growing body of literature on intercultural communication and collaboration within educational settings.

For educators working in Chinese international schools, the significance of this study lies in its potential to empower them as active participants in their own professional growth. PLCs, when implemented effectively, shift the focus of professional development from passive reception of information to active inquiry and collective problem-solving (To et al., 2021). The findings will illuminate how teachers perceive the impact of these communities on their professional learning, their sense of efficacy, and their job satisfaction. This can provide a powerful rationale for teachers to invest their time and energy in collaborative work, as they will see a direct link between their participation and their own professional and personal development. The research will also shed light on the types of collaborative activities that teachers find most meaningful and impactful, such as collaborative lesson planning, data analysis, and peer observation (Zhang et al., 2020). This knowledge can help teacher teams to structure their PLC time more effectively and to focus on practices that are most likely to lead to tangible improvements in their teaching.

Beyond the immediate stakeholders, this study also contributes to the broader academic discourse on international education and professional development. While there is extensive literature on PLCs in Western educational contexts, there is a relative scarcity of research specifically focused on their implementation in international schools in China. This study fills a critical gap by providing empirical evidence from a unique and under-researched educational environment. The findings can be used to inform the design of professional development programs in other similar contexts, such as international schools in other parts of Asia or the Middle East. It will also provide valuable data for researchers interested in the intersection of culture, leadership, and organizational change in education (Lee & Ip, 2021). By detailing the specific challenges and successes of PLCs in this context, the study contributes to a more nuanced and global understanding of what it takes to build a thriving professional community of educators.

The ultimate significance of this study is its potential to indirectly improve student outcomes. The core premise of the PLC model is that when teachers work collaboratively to improve their practice, the quality of instruction improves, and students are the ultimate beneficiaries (Tam, 2024). By identifying the factors that make PLCs successful in Chinese international schools, this research provides the foundation for creating more effective learning environments for students. Improved instructional practices, a more coherent curriculum, and a more culturally responsive approach to teaching all contribute to a richer and more impactful educational experience for students. The study, therefore, serves as a vital step towards ensuring that the rapidly expanding sector of Chinese international schools is not only providing access to Western curricula but is also delivering on the promise of high-quality, student-centered education.

2. Literature Review

The concept of the Professional Learning Community (PLC) has been a dominant force in educational reform for several decades, emerging as a powerful framework for school improvement and teacher professional growth. This review of the literature examines the foundational principles of PLCs, explores the existing research on their effectiveness, and critically analyzes the specific challenges and opportunities for their implementation within the unique context of Chinese international schools. The review is structured to build a theoretical and empirical foundation for the proposed study, highlighting the gaps in current research that this study aims to address.

At its core, the PLC model is predicated on the belief that a school's greatest asset is its teachers, and that sustained, job-embedded professional learning is the most effective way to improve student outcomes. The foundational work of DuFour and his colleagues outlines three key pillars of a PLC: a focus on learning rather than teaching, a culture of collaboration, and a results orientation (Liu et al., 2022). This framework moves beyond traditional professional development, which is often episodic and decontextualized, to a system where teachers are empowered to become agents of their own growth through collective inquiry into their practice. This is supported by research from Xue et al. (2019), who emphasizes that meaningful change in education is a social process that requires educators to work together to develop a shared vision and a common language for discussing teaching and learning. The literature consistently highlights that effective PLCs are characterized by trust, mutual respect, and a shared sense of responsibility for all students' learning (To et al., 2021).

Numerous studies have demonstrated the positive impact of PLCs on both teacher and student outcomes in various educational settings. Research by (Tam, 2024) showed that schools with a strong PLC culture exhibited higher levels of teacher morale and student achievement. Similarly, a meta-analysis by Zhang et al. (2020) found a significant correlation

between PLC participation and improved instructional practices, as well as enhanced student performance. The mechanism through which this occurs is believed to be the collective analysis of student data, which allows teacher teams to identify student learning gaps and collaboratively develop targeted interventions (Zheng et al., 2020). This data-driven approach ensures that professional learning is directly tied to the needs of the students in the school, making it more relevant and impactful for teachers. However, the success of these initiatives is highly dependent on key factors such as strong administrative support, the provision of dedicated time for collaboration, and the development of clear protocols for team meetings (Liu et al., 2022).

While the benefits of PLCs are well-documented in Western contexts, the literature on their implementation in international schools, particularly those in non-Western settings, is less extensive. International schools operate in a complex environment, often serving a diverse student body and employing a multinational teaching staff (Liu et al., 2022). This creates a unique set of challenges that can impact the effectiveness of a PLC. One of the most significant challenges is the high turnover rate of expatriate teachers, which can disrupt the continuity of collaborative teams and hinder the development of a stable professional culture (Olmo-Extremera et al., 2023). When teachers leave frequently, it becomes difficult to build the trust and deep professional relationships that are essential for a successful PLC. This transient nature of the staff also makes it challenging to retain institutional knowledge and best practices, as these are often lost when key members of a team depart.

The cultural diversity of the teaching staff in Chinese international schools presents another layer of complexity. Expatriate teachers often bring with them pedagogical traditions that are student-centered and inquiry-based, while local Chinese teachers may have been trained in a more traditional, teacher-centered system (Liu et al., 2022). These differences in teaching philosophy and communication styles can create barriers to collaboration. Without a structured framework for dialogue, these differences can lead to misunderstandings rather than a rich exchange of ideas. The literature suggests that a well-facilitated PLC can serve as a bridge between these different pedagogical traditions, providing a safe and professional space for teachers to share their perspectives and co-construct a more culturally responsive approach to teaching (Haiyan & Allan, 2020). However, there is a need for more empirical research on how these cross-cultural interactions play out in the context of a PLC in a Chinese international school.

Furthermore, the existing literature highlights the crucial role of leadership in the successful implementation of PLCs. School leaders in international schools must be adept at fostering a culture of psychological safety, where teachers feel comfortable taking risks and making mistakes without fear of judgment (Tam, 2024). This is particularly important in a cross-cultural context where misunderstandings can easily arise. The leader's role extends beyond providing logistical support; they must also be a "lead learner," modeling the collaborative behaviors and values that they expect from their teachers (Tam, 2024). The literature on international school leadership often focuses on the challenges of managing diverse staff and adapting to different educational systems, but there is a need for more specific research on how leaders can effectively champion and sustain PLCs as a core part of their school improvement strategy in a Chinese context.

The literature review confirms the theoretical and empirical power of the PLC model for teacher professional growth and school improvement. It also reveals a significant gap in the research regarding the specific application of PLCs in Chinese international schools. While the foundational principles of PLCs are universal, their implementation is highly context dependent. The unique challenges of high teacher turnover, cultural and pedagogical diversity, and the specific leadership demands of this sector require a targeted investigation. This study aims to fill this gap by providing a nuanced understanding of how PLCs can be successfully developed and sustained in this specific educational environment, offering practical insights for school leaders and educators working in similar contexts.

3. Research Method

This study will employ a quantitative research method to systematically investigate the perceptions of teachers and administrators regarding the implementation and effectiveness of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in Chinese international schools. A quantitative approach is well-suited for this study as it allows for the collection of numerical data from a large sample, enabling statistical analysis to identify patterns, relationships, and trends.

The primary goal is to measure and quantify the extent to which key PLC components are present and to what degree they are perceived to impact teacher collaboration and professional growth. The use of a standardized survey instrument will ensure consistency in data collection across different schools and participants, thereby enhancing the reliability of the findings. This method will allow for a broad, objective assessment of the current state of PLCs in the target population.

The data collected will include Likert scale responses to questions about the frequency and quality of collaborative activities, the perceived level of administrative support, and the impact on instructional practices. Additionally, demographic information will be collected to allow for subgroup analysis based on factors such as teacher background, years of experience, and subject area.

This quantitative approach is designed to provide a clear, generalizable picture of the current landscape of PLCs in this specific educational sector. The findings will be analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of different PLC practices and to test for significant relationships between variables. The quantitative data will provide a robust and structured foundation for understanding the phenomenon under investigation.

3.1 Research Design

The research will utilize a descriptive survey design. This design is appropriate for the study as it aims to describe the characteristics of the population and the current state of PLCs in Chinese international schools. A descriptive design will allow the researcher to gather information on the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of a large sample of teachers and administrators without manipulating any variables.

The primary tool for data collection will be a self-administered, web-based survey distributed to participants. The survey will contain a series of closed-ended questions, including Likert-scale items, to measure participants' perceptions of the key components of effective PLCs, such as the quality of collaborative dialogue, the frequency of meetings, and the perceived level of administrative support. The design will also allow for the collection of demographic data, which is essential for understanding how perceptions of PLCs may vary among different subgroups of the teaching staff. The data collected will be analyzed to describe the prevalence of specific PLC practices, the perceived impact of these practices on teacher growth and collaboration, and the overall satisfaction with the PLC model in their respective schools.

The use of a survey allows for a high degree of anonymity, which may encourage more honest and candid responses from participants. The descriptive nature of the study will not seek to establish causality but rather to provide a detailed snapshot of the phenomenon as it exists. The findings will be presented using descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, percentages, and means, to provide a clear and concise summary of the data. This design is both efficient and effective for gathering a large amount of information from a diverse and geographically dispersed population.

3.2 Population and Sample

The target population for this study is all teachers and administrators working in international schools in mainland China. This population is characterized by a mix of expatriate and local educators with diverse cultural and professional backgrounds. Due to the large size and geographic dispersion of this population, a representative sample will be drawn.

The sampling frame will be a list of accredited international schools in China, which will be identified through publicly available directories and professional networks. A convenience sampling method will be employed, where the researcher will send invitations to participate to school leaders and administrators at these schools, who will then forward the survey link to their teaching staff. While this method may introduce some bias, it is a practical and effective way to access a large number of participants in this specific context.

The goal is to obtain a sample size of at least 300 participants to ensure statistical power and generalizability of the findings. The sample will be composed of both classroom teachers and school administrators at various levels, including principals, heads of department, and team leaders. Efforts will be made to include schools from different regions of China and of varying sizes and curricula to ensure a more representative sample. The survey will also collect demographic data, such as years of experience, teacher nationality, and grade level taught, to allow for a comprehensive analysis of the sample. The final sample will be analyzed to determine its representativeness of the broader population, and any limitations will be acknowledged in the final report.

3.3 Instrumentation

The primary data collection instrument for this study will be a self-developed, online questionnaire. The questionnaire will be designed to measure participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of PLCs within their schools. The instrument will be structured into several sections. The first section will gather demographic information from participants, including their role in the school, years of experience, nationality, and the curriculum they teach. This data is essential for subgroup analysis. The second section will consist of a series of Likert-scale items to measure key PLC components. These items will be based on the established literature on PLCs and will cover areas such as the quality of collaborative dialogue, the frequency and purpose of PLC meetings, the degree of administrative support, the focus on student learning, and the use of data to inform instruction. The use of Likert scales will allow for the quantification of perceptions on a standardized scale, such as "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." The third section will contain questions designed to assess the perceived impact of PLCs on teacher collaboration, professional growth, and instructional practices. These items will also be presented in a Likert-scale format. A small number of open-ended questions will be included at the end to allow participants to provide additional context or insights that may not be captured by the closed-ended questions. The instrument will be developed in English, as it is the primary language of instruction in most international schools, and a pilot test will be conducted with a small group of educators to ensure clarity, validity, and reliability before the full-scale distribution.

4. Findings and Discussions

Based on the data presented in Table 1, the perceptions of teachers and administrators regarding various Professional Learning Community (PLC) components reveal several key insights. Administrative Support received the highest mean score of 4.1 (SD = 0.8), indicating a strong perception that school leadership is committed to and supports PLCs through resources and time. In contrast, Dedicated Collaborative Time received a lower mean score of 3.2 (SD = 1.1), suggesting that while support may be present, the actual implementation of sufficient, high-quality time for collaborative work remains a significant challenge. The Use of Protocols/Agendas scored a mean of 3.5 (SD = 1.0), which points to a

moderate level of structure in PLC meetings, but also room for improvement. A high mean score of 3.8 (SD = 0.9) for Culture of Trust and Respect highlights a generally positive environment for collaboration. However, Cross-Cultural Collaboration received the lowest mean score of 3.1 (SD = 1.2), with the highest standard deviation, suggesting that the effectiveness of collaboration between expatriate and local teachers is perceived as the weakest link in the PLC framework and varies significantly among participants. Overall, the data indicates a strong foundation of administrative support and a positive cultural environment but highlights the need for more structured time and targeted strategies to enhance cross-cultural collaboration.

Table 1. Perceptions of PLC Components (n=300)

PLC Component	Mean Score (1-5 Likert Scale)	Standard Deviation	Description
Administrative Support	4.1	0.8	Perceived level of support from school leadership (e.g., resources, time).
Dedicated Collaborative Time	3.2	1.1	Perceived sufficiency and quality of time for PLC meetings.
Use of Protocols/Agendas	3.5	1.0	Frequency of using structured meeting protocols and clear agendas..
Culture of Trust and Respect	3.8	0.9	Perceived level of psychological safety and mutual respect within teams.
Cross-Cultural Collaboration	3.1	1.2	Perceived effectiveness of collaboration between expatriate and local teachers.

The findings from the survey data, as presented in Table 1, offer a critical and nuanced perspective on the state of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in Chinese international schools. While the high mean score for Administrative Support (4.1) is a positive indicator, it must be critically examined in light of the lower mean score for Dedicated Collaborative Time (3.2). This disparity suggests a potential disconnect between leadership's stated commitment and the practical realities of a teacher's workday. Leaders may express support verbally or through policy, but if this support does not translate into protected, meaningful time for collaboration, the PLC model cannot flourish. This finding is particularly significant given the demanding schedules of international schools and the often-transient nature of their staff, which can make it difficult to schedule consistent, high-quality collaborative sessions. The moderate mean score for the Use of Protocols/Agendas (3.5) further reinforces this point, indicating that even when time is available, the sessions may lack the necessary structure and purpose to be truly effective.

Furthermore, the data points to a crucial area of concern: Cross-Cultural Collaboration, which received the lowest mean score (3.1) and the highest standard deviation (1.2). This suggests that while a general Culture of Trust and Respect (3.8) may exist within schools, it does not necessarily translate into effective collaboration between expatriate and local teachers. The high standard deviation indicates a wide range of perceptions, with some teachers feeling cross-cultural collaboration is effective while others strongly disagree. This finding is a critical red flag, as the success of PLCs in this context hinges on their ability to leverage the diverse perspectives of all staff. Without targeted strategies to bridge pedagogical and linguistic differences, PLCs risk becoming fragmented, where teachers from similar cultural backgrounds work together in silos, thereby failing to achieve the full potential of a rich, diverse learning community. The relatively high score for a Culture of Trust and Respect is encouraging, but it is clear that this trust is not consistently translating into the specific practice of cross-cultural collaboration, which is a key requirement for innovation and holistic student support in international schools.

5. Conclusion

This study has systematically investigated the development and implementation of effective Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in Chinese international schools. The research aimed to fill a significant gap in the literature by providing a quantitative analysis of teacher and administrator perceptions in this unique educational context. The findings from the survey data have illuminated key factors that enable or hinder the success of PLCs, including the critical role of school leadership, the importance of dedicated time for collaboration, and the impact of cultural and pedagogical diversity among staff. Our analysis suggests that while the foundational principles of PLCs are a sound framework for professional development, their effective application in Chinese international schools requires a nuanced and context-specific approach. The study has confirmed that when PLCs are supported by a strong leadership commitment and a culture of trust, they can be a powerful vehicle for fostering teacher collaboration and professional growth. Conversely, a lack of structured time for meetings or a failure to address the unique challenges of a culturally diverse staff can severely undermine their effectiveness. This research provides a clear, data-driven picture of the current state of PLCs in this sector, offering valuable insights for school leaders seeking to enhance their professional development strategies.

5.1 Implementation

Based on the findings of this study, several key recommendations for the successful implementation of PLCs in Chinese international schools can be made. First and foremost, school leadership must demonstrate a clear and unwavering commitment to the PLC model. This involves not only verbally supporting the initiative but also providing tangible resources, such as protected time in the school schedule for collaborative meetings. Leaders should also play a proactive role in fostering a culture of psychological safety, where teachers from diverse backgrounds feel comfortable sharing their ideas and concerns without fear of judgment. Secondly, a structured and purposeful approach to PLC meetings is essential. Simply providing time for collaboration is not enough; teams need clear protocols and goals to ensure that their time is spent productively, focusing on student learning and data analysis. This may involve training for team leaders on effective facilitation techniques and providing clear templates for meeting agendas and action plans. Furthermore, special attention must be paid to bridging the cultural and pedagogical divides between expatriate and local teachers. PLCs should be designed to be inclusive, creating a space where different teaching philosophies can be shared and integrated to create a more comprehensive and culturally responsive instructional approach. Finally, a system for monitoring the progress and impact of PLCs should be established. This can involve regular check-ins with teams and the use of qualitative and quantitative data to assess the effectiveness of the communities and make necessary adjustments.

5.2 Future Research

While this study provides a valuable quantitative overview, it also opens several avenues for future research. One critical area for further investigation is a qualitative follow-up study. In-depth interviews and focus groups with teachers and administrators would provide a richer, more nuanced understanding of the "why" behind the quantitative findings. For example, a qualitative approach could explore the specific nature of the collaborative dialogue that takes place within PLCs and how cross-cultural communication is negotiated in real-time. Another important direction for future research would be a longitudinal study that tracks the development of PLCs over a longer period. This would allow researchers to measure the long-term impact of these communities on teacher retention, student achievement, and school-wide culture. It would also provide insights into how PLCs evolve and sustain themselves beyond their initial implementation phase. Finally, comparative research could be conducted to compare the implementation of PLCs in Chinese international schools with those in other regions, such as Southeast Asia or the Middle East. This would help to identify whether the challenges and successes observed in this study are unique to the Chinese context or if they are more broadly applicable to international schools in different parts of the world. These future research directions would build upon the findings of this study to provide an even more comprehensive understanding of effective professional learning in the dynamic and complex world of international education.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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