Professional Learning Communities Approach: Implications for Policy and Practice

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Introduction

Over the last decades researching and developing teachers' professional development frameworks and practices had underwent a paradigm shift. This shift was driven by the complexities of teaching and learning requirements, an increased necessity for reforming educational systems, and more need for accountability and quality outcomes (Vescio, Ross & Adams, 2007). The main feature of these new approaches is that they shift professional development beyond merely focusing on a teacher's simple attainment of knowledge and skills to a framework that requires teachers to deeply reflect on their own practices, to innovate new classroom pedagogy, and authentic understanding and expectations of student outcomes (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995).These new approaches of teacher professional development include a variety of practitioner-based activities such as: peer observation and assessment, working cooperatively on shared projects such as curriculum development or strategy planning, engaging in lesson study groups, conducting action research, and participating in individually guided activities such as online distant learning or academic higher educational programs. When teachers engage in professional development activities that entail sharing questions, finding answers, experimenting practical actions and engaging in a productive dialogue, this may promote their sense of belonging as knowledge workers in their professional learning communities, and this would support them in achieving their learning and teaching goals which would reflect at the end on their students' knowledge, skills and values (Al-Mahdi, 2019a, Al-Mahdi, 2019b, Al-Mahdi & Al-Wadi, 2015). This chapter aims to explore professional learning community as an innovate approach in teachers' professional development and discuss possible ways for implementing it in Bahrain

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for teachers. In addition, these studies can provide evidence for decision-makers regarding the usefulness and feasibility of applying professional learning communities and may lead to the development of new trends in this field that are appropriate to the nature and context of educational systems in our local communities that are suitable to the conditions, needs and nature of schools (governmental or private).

Bahrain Teachers College can also play an important role in promoting the use of professional learning communities by allocating courses specific to this educational approach for students who are doing their studies in the baccalaureate stage so that future graduates are prepared to employ professional learning communities in their classrooms and schools.

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