

**REPOSITIONING TEACHERS' CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT THROUGH PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES:
THE ROLE OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOUR**

Dr. E. C. Okwuagwu

Department of Education Management, University of Abuja, Nigeria

Corresponding Email; esthychiji@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This conceptual analysis examines how educational leadership behaviour can reposition teachers' continuous professional development through professional learning communities in Nigeria. It responds to a persistent problem in teacher development: participation in workshops and centrally organised training does not necessarily produce sustained instructional improvement when schools provide little time, feedback, collegial inquiry or leadership support for implementation. Contemporary scholarship, Nigerian policy evidence and recent meta-analytic research were synthesised around educational leadership behaviour, continuous professional development, professional learning communities, teacher learning and school improvement. Distributed Leadership Theory, Transformational Leadership Theory, Communities of Practice Theory and Adult Learning Theory provide complementary explanations. The analysis shows that leadership behaviour shapes the organisational and relational conditions for professional learning; PLCs connect formal CPD with classroom implementation through collaborative inquiry; trust, protected time and distributed responsibility sustain PLC quality; and professional development affects teaching more reliably when cooperation, coaching, self-regulation and follow-through accompany training. A Leadership-Supported PLC-CPD model is proposed in which leadership creates enabling conditions, PLCs organise inquiry, CPD develops professional knowledge and classroom application provides the route to teacher effectiveness and school improvement. The article concludes that repositioning CPD in Nigeria requires institutional change at school and system levels, not simply more training events.

Keywords: educational leadership behaviour; continuous professional development; professional learning communities; teacher professional learning; teacher effectiveness; school improvement

1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching requires continuous learning because curriculum reforms, digital technologies, inclusive education, new assessment expectations and changing learner needs regularly alter the professional demands placed on teachers. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2020) describes teachers as knowledge professionals whose work depends on sustained learning, professional judgement and collaboration. UNESCO (2024) similarly presents educational leadership as a responsibility for setting direction, focusing on learning, fostering collaboration and developing people. These positions make teachers' continuous professional development (CPD) an organisational concern as well as an individual professional obligation. CPD should therefore strengthen subject knowledge, pedagogical competence, reflective judgement and teachers' capacity to respond to problems arising from classroom practice (Sancar et al., 2021; Wang & An, 2023).

The central difficulty concerns the distance between participation in professional development and improvement in teaching. Workshops, seminars and conferences can introduce curriculum knowledge, instructional approaches and policy expectations, but attendance alone does not show that teachers have changed their classroom practice. Lindvall et al. (2025), in a critical review and meta-analysis of studies using large representative datasets, found positive average relationships between professional development, instruction and student achievement, but they cautioned that many studies could not support strong causal claims. More rigorous evidence remains encouraging. Visscher et al. (2025), analysing 128 high-quality studies, reported that in-service teacher professional development improved student achievement on average, although effects varied considerably. Their analysis further suggested that professional-development designs incorporating several learning principles, including teacher cooperation, coaching and self-regulation, produced stronger student outcomes. Thus, the quality of the learning process matters more than simple exposure to training.

Existing Nigerian evidence shows that the answer cannot be assumed. Osiesi et al. (2024), evaluating the Nigerian government's Mandatory Continuing Professional Development programme in Ekiti State, found gains in professional exchange, commitment and continued professional relevance, but the programme did not improve the observed teaching competence of the sampled teachers. Sasere and Makhasane (2023) similarly reported that teachers and school leaders considered uniform, centrally organised programmes insufficiently responsive to varied professional needs and preferred more school-based provision. These studies do not negate formal CPD. Instead, they show that professional knowledge requires a school-level structure through which teachers can interpret, practise, review and adapt what training introduces.

Professional learning communities (PLCs) offer such a structure. Admiraal et al. (2021) define schools functioning as professional learning communities through shared learning goals, collective responsibility, collaborative activity, reflective inquiry and organisational support for teacher learning. Antinluoma et al. (2021) similarly identify collaboration, shared purpose and reflective professional practice as central features. A PLC is therefore more demanding than a staff meeting, departmental gathering or informal exchange of teaching materials. It requires teachers to examine practice collectively, use evidence about learning, make professional knowledge visible and share responsibility for improvement. Recent scholarship confirms the continuing value of these processes. Liu et al. (2025) found a significant positive correlation between PLC participation and teachers' efficacy beliefs, with collective attention to student learning and reflective dialogue showing especially strong relationships. Li et al. (2026), reviewing PLC research in EFL teacher development, also report gains in pedagogical knowledge, professional identity and collaborative culture, while identifying time constraints, hierarchy and sociocultural conditions as continuing barriers.

However, PLCs do not sustain themselves merely because teachers have been placed in groups. Leadership behaviour determines whether teachers receive protected time, access to evidence, professional support, facilitation and permission to question established practice. Oppi and Eisenschmidt (2022) documented how a teacher-led PLC became difficult to sustain when leadership attention declined and collaborative time was withdrawn. Gu et al. (2025) provide more recent evidence by showing that leadership practices concerned with setting direction, developing people, redesigning the organisation and managing instruction all predicted PLC development, while trust significantly mediated these relationships. Leadership therefore operates through both organisational arrangements and social relationships. Teachers are more likely to expose instructional difficulties, seek feedback and test unfamiliar approaches when leaders create a climate of professional trust and disciplined inquiry.

Accordingly, this article retains the value of national regulation, externally organised training and professional certification, but rejects an event-centred understanding of CPD. It argues for an integrated model in which formal programmes introduce or deepen professional knowledge, PLCs contextualise that knowledge through collaborative inquiry, leadership behaviour protects the conditions for sustained learning, and classroom application provides the test of professional growth. The article therefore examines the relationship among educational leadership behaviour, teachers' CPD, PLCs, teacher effectiveness and school improvement and develops a context-sensitive model for Nigerian schools.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria has professional-development policies, accredited providers and continuing public investment in teacher capacity. The problem is therefore less the absence of CPD than the weak connection between professional-development participation and teachers' continuing work after training. Where teachers return from workshops to timetables that contain no collaborative learning period, school cultures that discourage peer observation, leaders who focus mainly on administrative compliance, or departments that lack structured inquiry, new knowledge can remain individual and temporary. Osiesi et al. (2024) illustrate this problem by reporting professional benefits from mandatory CPD without corresponding improvement in observed teaching competence. The finding points to an implementation problem between learning opportunities and classroom enactment.

PLCs are increasingly recommended as a response, but collaboration can also become symbolic. Teachers may meet regularly and still avoid evidence, critical questioning or examination of learner difficulties. Grimm (2024) shows that PLC conversations can remain superficial when facilitation does not move teachers beyond the exchange of techniques towards deeper examination of teaching and learning. Likewise, Gu et al. (2025) demonstrate that trust and leadership practice influence PLC functioning. The unresolved problem is therefore how Nigerian educational leaders can create, sustain and guide PLCs so that they extend formal CPD instead of becoming another administrative routine. A clearer conceptual model is needed to explain the leadership behaviours, collaborative processes and implementation conditions through which CPD can influence teacher effectiveness and school improvement.

Objectives of the Study

The study seeks to: conceptualise the relationship between educational leadership behaviour and teachers' continuous professional development. Specifically, the objectives are to:

- i. examine professional learning communities as structures for school-based professional learning.
- ii. identify leadership behaviours that promote or constrain sustained collaborative learning.
- iii. explain how PLCs can connect formal CPD with classroom implementation.
- iv. propose a leadership-supported model for strengthening teacher effectiveness and school improvement in Nigeria.

Research Questions

The study is guided by four questions.

1. How does educational leadership behaviour influence teachers' continuous professional development?
2. In what ways do professional learning communities function as structures for sustained school-based professional learning?
3. Which leadership behaviours are required to establish and sustain effective PLCs?
4. How can PLC-supported continuous professional development contribute to teacher effectiveness and school improvement in the Nigerian educational context?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Educational Leadership Behaviour

Educational leadership refers to the influence exercised by formal and informal leaders to establish educational direction, organise professional relationships and create conditions that improve teaching and learning. The behavioural emphasis directs attention from position to practice. Dorukbaşı and Cansoy (2024) explain instructional leadership through actions that clarify instructional expectations, support professional learning and coordinate teaching processes. Gu et al. (2025) similarly operationalise leadership through setting directions, developing people, redesigning the organisation and managing the instructional programme. Educational leadership behaviour may therefore be defined as the observable actions through which leaders create professional direction, organise resources, support teacher learning, distribute responsibility and maintain attention to instructional improvement.

Teachers' Continuous Professional Development

Teachers' continuous professional development refers to sustained processes through which practising teachers deepen professional knowledge, improve instructional competence, refine professional judgement and respond to changing educational demands. Sancar et al. (2021) conceptualise teacher professional development as a career-long process shaped by learning content, teacher characteristics, professional context, resources and collaboration. CPD therefore includes formal courses, workshops and certification, but it also includes mentoring, coaching, lesson inquiry, professional reading, peer observation, collaborative planning and reflective analysis. The word continuous signifies that professional growth should continue after formal training ends.

Recent meta-analytic evidence sharpens this definition. Visscher et al. (2025) found that teacher professional-development interventions produced positive average effects on

student achievement but that effects varied considerably. Importantly, programme duration alone did not explain stronger outcomes; designs applying a larger number of learning principles appeared more productive. Lindvall et al. (2025) similarly caution against assuming that participation in the professional development teachers usually receive automatically changes instruction. These findings shift attention from counting training hours to examining learning design, follow-through and transfer. CPD should therefore be evaluated by what teachers learn, how they implement it, what feedback they receive and whether instructional practice changes over time.

Professional Learning Communities

A professional learning community is a sustained professional arrangement in which educators pursue shared learning goals, examine teaching, use evidence, exchange professional knowledge and assume collective responsibility for improvement. Admiraal et al. (2021) emphasise shared vision, collective learning, supportive conditions and leadership for learning, while Antinluoma et al. (2021) describe PLC practice through collaboration and professional inquiry. The concept therefore differs from routine collegiality. Teachers constitute a PLC when their collaboration is organised around learning and instructional improvement and when they repeatedly test professional assumptions against evidence.

Teachers' Continuous Professional Development through Professional Learning Communities

The relationship between CPD and PLCs rests on a transfer problem. Formal professional development can introduce knowledge, but teachers require repeated opportunities to interpret that knowledge in relation to particular subjects, learners and classroom constraints. PLCs provide the social and organisational structure for this work. Teachers can jointly plan lessons, observe implementation, examine learner work, compare assessment evidence and revise practice. Liu et al. (2024) demonstrate this bridging function in digital professional development, while McChesney and Cross (2023) show that the school environment influences whether learning is implemented after professional-development activities.

Leadership Behaviour in the Establishment and Sustainability of Professional Learning Communities

Although PLCs emphasise teacher collaboration, leadership shapes whether that collaboration is possible and productive. Leaders control or influence timetables, meeting structures, access to evidence, professional roles and resource allocation. Oppi and Eisenschmidt (2022) show how collaborative learning can weaken when leadership support and protected time disappear. Van den Boom-Muilenburg et al. (2022) likewise identify supportive structures and distributed responsibility as conditions for sustained lesson study. Leadership support must therefore be visible in school organisation.

Teacher Effectiveness and School Improvement

Theoretical Framework

The article is anchored in Distributed Leadership Theory, Transformational Leadership Theory, Communities of Practice Theory and Adult Learning Theory. The theories perform different explanatory functions and are combined because the proposed model concerns leadership distribution, motivation for professional change, collaborative knowledge construction and the learning characteristics of adult professionals.

Distributed Leadership Theory

Distributed Leadership Theory, associated with Spillane et al. (2001, 2004), treats leadership practice as the product of interactions among leaders, followers and organisational situations instead of the work of one formal office holder. Its relevance lies in the practical organisation of PLCs. Principals cannot personally facilitate every subject team, mentoring relationship or inquiry cycle. Heads of department, experienced teachers and designated teacher leaders must therefore share responsibility for professional learning. Gümüş et al. (2022) provide empirical support for this logic by linking teacher leadership capacity with professional learning. In the proposed model, distributed leadership explains how professional-learning responsibilities can be embedded across the school while the principal retains responsibility for coherence, resources and accountability.

Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformational Leadership Theory, developed from Burns (1978) and Bass (1985), explains how leaders build commitment to shared purposes, stimulate professional thinking and support individual development. The theory is useful because repositioning CPD requires cultural change, not only new meeting schedules. Teachers accustomed to receiving externally prescribed training may need encouragement to identify problems, expose uncertainty and participate in inquiry. Transformational behaviour can help establish a shared professional purpose and motivate sustained participation. However, inspiration alone is insufficient. The present analysis therefore combines transformational leadership with distributed and instructional practices that organise time, evidence and responsibility.

Communities of Practice Theory

Communities of Practice Theory, developed by Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998), explains learning as participation in shared social practice. Mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoires develop as practitioners solve problems together. This theory provides the strongest account of how PLCs transform individual knowledge into collective professional capacity. Teachers learn not only by receiving information but by discussing lessons, interpreting learner responses, observing colleagues and negotiating

improved practice. In the proposed model, Communities of Practice Theory explains why sustained participation makes professional learning more contextual and why collaborative structures can reduce professional isolation.

Adult Learning Theory

Adult Learning Theory, particularly Knowles's (1984) andragogical perspective, portrays adults as learners who draw on experience, value relevance and respond strongly to problem-centred learning. Teachers therefore engage more meaningfully when professional development addresses authentic instructional problems and recognises their accumulated knowledge. Sasere and Makhasane's (2023) Nigerian findings concerning the need for context-responsive school-based development align with this assumption. Adult Learning Theory explains why PLC agendas should not consist solely of centrally prescribed topics. Teachers should participate in identifying learning needs, testing new practices and evaluating results.

Together, the theories form a coherent explanatory sequence. Transformational leadership builds commitment to professional change; distributed leadership organises shared responsibility; Communities of Practice Theory explains collaborative knowledge construction; and Adult Learning Theory explains how teachers engage with relevant, practice-based learning. None of the theories alone explains the entire proposed relationship, but together they clarify how leadership-supported PLCs can convert CPD from episodic participation into sustained professional learning.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a conceptual and thematic review design. It did not collect primary data or calculate a new statistical effect. The analysis updated and extended the existing manuscript through peer-reviewed scholarship, Nigerian policy and programme materials, and recent reviews relevant to educational leadership, teacher professional development and professional learning communities. Priority was given to publications from 2020 to August 2026, while foundational theoretical works were retained because they supply the conceptual basis for the study.

Sources were examined around recurring concepts derived from the study questions: leadership behaviour, CPD quality, PLC characteristics, trust, teacher leadership, collaborative inquiry, classroom implementation, teacher effectiveness and school improvement. Particular attention was given to Nigerian evidence and to recent meta-analytic findings capable of clarifying what can and cannot be claimed about professional-development effects. The synthesis compared areas of scholarly agreement, qualification and contradiction and used these relationships to refine the proposed leadership-supported

PLC-CPD model. Because the study uses published and publicly available material, no human participants were involved and ethical approval was not required.

4. CONCEPTUAL/THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

Educational Leadership Behaviour and Teachers' Continuous Professional Development

The first conceptual result is that leadership behaviour operates as an enabling or constraining condition for CPD. Nigerian evidence supports this proposition. He et al. (2024) found that principals' instructional leadership predicted teachers' professional development, while Bada et al. (2024) associated instructional leadership practices with teacher effectiveness. International evidence clarifies the mechanism. Gu et al. (2025) show that setting direction, developing people, redesigning the organisation and managing instruction support PLC development, with trust acting as a mediator. Consequently, leaders influence professional learning through priorities, time, relationships, resources and follow-through.

This result reframes CPD as an implementation responsibility. When a teacher returns from formal training, the school should provide opportunities to discuss the content, try relevant practices, obtain feedback and examine learner responses. Without these conditions, CPD can remain an individual event. Leadership behaviour therefore connects system-level professional-development provision with the school's capacity to use it.

Professional Learning Communities as Structures for School-Based Learning

The second result is that PLCs provide an institutional structure for continuity, but only when collaboration is inquiry-driven. Reflective dialogue, collective attention to student learning, evidence use and deprivatised practice distinguish developmental collaboration from routine collegial exchange. Liu et al. (2025) report especially strong relationships between efficacy beliefs and PLC dimensions concerned with reflective dialogue and collective focus on students. Grimm (2024) nevertheless shows that PLC conversations can produce little improvement when they focus mainly on sharing techniques without analysing learning.

The conceptual implication is that Nigerian schools should define PLCs by function, not by name. Departments, subject associations or lesson-study groups can serve as PLCs if they repeatedly examine problems of teaching and learning, but scheduled meetings alone are insufficient. Leaders should therefore assess the quality of inquiry, evidence use and instructional follow-through instead of counting meetings.

Leadership Behaviours Required to Sustain Professional Learning Communities

The third result identifies six interdependent leadership behaviours: shared professional direction, protected collaborative time, instructional guidance, distributed responsibility, relational trust and resource support. These behaviours reflect both existing scholarship and recent evidence. Oppi and Eisenschmidt (2022) demonstrate the fragility of collaboration when leadership support and time disappear, while Gu et al. (2025) show the importance of organisational redesign and trust. Teacher leaders also require preparation to facilitate inquiry instead of merely chairing meetings. Effective PLC leadership is therefore neither rigid control nor administrative withdrawal. It combines purpose, support, professional participation and accountability for learning.

Professional Learning Communities, CPD and Classroom Implementation

The fourth result concerns transfer. PLCs can bridge formal CPD and classroom practice by giving teachers a recurring setting in which to interpret, rehearse, adapt and evaluate new knowledge. Liu et al. (2024) show that PLC participation strengthened the relationship between digital professional development and instructional integration. Visscher et al. (2025) further suggest that teacher cooperation, coaching and self-regulatory principles contribute to stronger professional-development outcomes. The result supports an integrated design in which workshops or courses initiate learning, PLCs sustain collective processing, classroom trials provide evidence, and feedback informs further learning.

Teacher Effectiveness and School Improvement

The fifth result is that teacher effectiveness and school improvement should be treated as downstream outcomes, not automatic products of PLC formation. Professional learning must pass through implementation. Recent meta-analytic research confirms that professional development can improve student achievement on average, but the wide variation in effects cautions against simple causal assumptions (Visscher et al., 2025). Lindvall et al. (2025) reinforce this caution in their review of the professional development teachers typically receive. The conceptual model therefore places classroom application between professional learning and improvement. Schools should evaluate changes in instructional practice and learner evidence before attributing success to CPD or PLC participation.

A Leadership-Supported PLC-CPD Model for Nigerian Schools

The synthesis produces a four-stage model. At the first stage, educational leadership creates enabling conditions through shared instructional priorities, protected time, trust, teacher-leadership roles and access to relevant resources. At the second stage, formal CPD and school-identified needs supply the content for professional learning. At the third stage, PLCs organise collaborative inquiry through lesson planning, peer observation, analysis of learner work, mentoring, coaching and reflective dialogue. At the fourth stage, teachers implement agreed practices, examine evidence and revise instruction. Teacher

effectiveness and school improvement follow only when this cycle produces sustained changes in practice. Feedback from classroom evidence then returns to the PLC and informs subsequent CPD needs. The model therefore treats professional learning as cyclical instead of event-based.

4.1 Discussion

The analysis confirms that educational leadership behaviour is not an external variable added to teacher development after programmes have been designed. It shapes whether professional learning can continue in the school. This conclusion agrees with He et al. (2024) and Bada et al. (2024) in Nigeria and is strengthened by Gu et al. (2025), whose findings show that leadership practices influence PLC development through trust as well as organisational action. The implication is that school leaders require preparation in instructional and learning-centred leadership, not only general administration.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The article concludes that repositioning teachers' continuous professional development in Nigeria requires a movement from event-centred participation towards an integrated professional-learning system. Formal CPD remains necessary, but its influence depends on what schools do with the knowledge teachers acquire. Educational leadership behaviour determines whether teachers receive shared direction, protected collaborative time, relational trust and opportunities to examine practice. PLCs supply the structure for interpreting external knowledge, investigating instructional problems and refining practice through evidence. The proposed Leadership-Supported PLC-CPD model therefore connects leadership, collaborative inquiry, classroom implementation, teacher effectiveness and school improvement in one cyclical process.

5.2 Recommendations

Education authorities and school leaders should institutionalise PLCs as a recognised component of CPD and allocate protected collaborative time during the school schedule. TRCN and other CPD providers should encourage follow-up activities that require teachers to apply, discuss and evaluate professional learning after accredited programmes. Principals should receive development in instructional leadership, facilitation of professional inquiry, trust-building and distributed leadership so that PLC support becomes an operational leadership responsibility.

Schools should train heads of department and teacher leaders to facilitate reflective dialogue, peer observation, analysis of learner work and evidence-informed inquiry. PLC agendas should combine national and school priorities with teachers' identified

instructional needs. Evaluation should move beyond attendance, credit points and meeting counts to examine changes in professional knowledge, instructional practice and learner evidence. State and federal teacher-development initiatives should connect external training with mentoring, coaching and school-based collaborative cycles.

Finally, future Nigerian research should test the proposed Leadership-Supported PLC-CPD model across school levels, ownership types and geographical contexts. Longitudinal and mixed-method studies should examine how leadership, trust, PLC quality and classroom implementation interact over time and should distinguish teacher-reported improvement from observed instructional change and learner outcomes.

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