

Running head: FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE SECONDARY TEACHERS OF
DIFFERENT SUBJECTS TO COLLABORATE ON SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT
PROJECTS

**Factors that influence secondary teachers of different subjects to collaborate on school
improvement projects in two private secondary schools: A case of Sabah, Malaysia**

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master
of Science in Educational Leadership

Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education

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TO COLLABORATE ON SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

ii

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Date: April 29, 2022

Ethical Approval



53 Kabanbay Batyr Ave.
010000 Astana,
Republic of Kazakhstan
13 October 2021

Dear Galina Fryshko,

This letter now confirms that your research project entitled: "Factors that influence collaboration among secondary teachers on school improvement projects: A case of private school teachers in Sabah, Malaysia" has been approved by the Graduate School of Education Ethics Committee of Nazarbayev University.

The changes recommended by the reviewer have been addressed and the proposed study now complies with all of the requirements of Nazarbayev University.

You may proceed with contacting your preferred research site and commencing your participant recruitment strategy.

Yours sincerely



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FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE SECONDARY TEACHERS OF DIFFERENT SUBJECTS
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v

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Abstract

For over a decade, the school education system of Malaysia has been undergoing reforms, including teacher professional development, the quality of teaching and student learning outcomes. The ultimate purpose of these reforms is to establish Professional Learning Communities (PLC) at schools. This goal, according to international researchers, can be achieved by teachers collaborating with co-workers on school improvement projects. However, the educational authorities have encountered many difficulties related to the implementation of PLC, such as the inability to distribute policy information to school leaders due to ineffective communication channels, cultural barriers, underestimation of the value of collaboration by teachers and principals, lack of data for the assessment of the factors affecting collaboration in different settings and contexts among others. Besides, there is a dearth of academic research on the kinds of collaboration that exist in private and government schools in Malaysia. This qualitative, multi-case study aimed to explore the factors that enable and impede collaboration among secondary teachers at two private schools in Sabah, Malaysia. Three data collection instruments, face-to-face semi-structured interview, observation of collaborative meetings and document analysis, were employed to collect the data to answer the main research question: What factors influence secondary teachers of different subjects to collaborate on school improvement projects in two private secondary schools in Sabah, Malaysia? Analysis of the data revealed the participants' perceptions of collaboration and the factors that influence collaboration at the school. According to the participants, the most influential factors are sufficient time for collaboration, full support of school leadership, flexibility of collaboration, relevance to teachers' learning, professional communication and consideration of the Malaysian languages. The findings also reflect the challenges of initiating and sustaining meaningful collaboration among teachers at the

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE SECONDARY TEACHERS OF DIFFERENT SUBJECTS TO COLLABORATE ON SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

viii

schools. To develop a collegial and collaborative culture and establish sustainable PLCs at schools, the policy-makers and school principals need to consider seriously the above-mentioned factors.

Keywords: collaboration, professional learning community, PLC, teacher collaboration, collaborative culture, school culture, school improvement.

Аннотация

Более десяти лет система школьного образования Малайзии претерпевает реформы, включая профессиональное развитие учителей, качество преподавания и результаты обучения учащихся. Конечной целью этих реформ является создание профессиональных обучающих сообществ (ПОС) в школах. Эта цель, по мнению международных исследователей, может быть достигнута учителями, сотрудничающими с коллегами в проектах по улучшению школы. Тем не менее, органы управления образованием столкнулись со многими трудностями, связанными с внедрением ПОС, такими как невозможность распространения информации среди руководителей школ из-за неэффективных каналов связи, культурных барьеров, недооценки важности сотрудничества учителями и директорами, отсутствия данных для оценки факторов, влияющих на сотрудничество в различных условиях и контекстах среди прочего. Кроме того, академические исследования о том, какие виды сотрудничества существуют в частных и государственных школах Малайзии, не проводились. Это качественное, многовариантное исследование было направлено на изучение факторов, которые способствуют и препятствуют сотрудничеству между учителями средних школ в двух частных школах в Малазийской провинции Саба. Три инструмента сбора данных, личное полуструктурированное интервью, наблюдение за совместными встречами и анализ документов были использованы для сбора данных, чтобы ответить на основной вопрос исследования: какие факторы влияют на учителей средних школ по различным предметам на сотрудничество в проектах по улучшению школы в двух частных средних школах в Малазийской провинции Саба? Анализ данных выявил восприятия участниками сотрудничества и факторы, влияющие на сотрудничество в школе. По мнению участников, наиболее влиятельными факторами являются: достаточное время для сотрудничества, полная поддержка руководства школы, гибкость сотрудничества, актуальность для обучения учителей, профессиональное общение и учет малайзийских языков. Выводы также отражают проблемы,

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE SECONDARY TEACHERS OF DIFFERENT SUBJECTS TO COLLABORATE ON SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

x

связанные с инициированием и поддержанием значимого сотрудничества между учителями в школах. Для развития коллегиальной культуры и сотрудничества и создания устойчивых ПУС в школах государственным органам образования и директорам школ необходимо серьезно рассмотреть вышеупомянутые факторы.

Ключевые слова: сотрудничество, профессиональное учебное сообщество, ПУС, сотрудничество учителей, культура сотрудничества, школьная культура, улучшение школы.

Аңдатпа

Малайзияның мектептегі білім беру жүйесі он жылдан астам уақыт реформалардан өтуде, оның ішінде мұғалімдердің кәсіби дамуын, оқушыларға білім берудегі оқыту сапасы мен нәтижесі сияқты мәселелер де бар. Бұл реформалардың мақсаты - мектепте кәсіби білім беретін қауымдастықтар құру болып табылады. Халықаралық зерттеушілердің пікірлеріне сүйенсек, егер мұғалімдер мектепті жақсарту бойынша жобалармен жұмыс істейтін әріптестерімен өзара ынтымақтастықта болса, бұл мақсатқа жетуге болады. Сонымен қатар, білім беруді басқарушы органдар кәсіби білім беру қауымдастығын енгізу кезінде тиімсіз байланыс арналары, мәдени кедергілер, мұғалімдер мен директорлар арасындағы ынтымақтастықты дұрыс пайымдамау және ынтымақтастыққа әсер ететін факторларды бағалау үшін қажет деректердің болмауы мен басқа да мәселелер көптеген қиындықтарға жолықты. Сондай-ақ, Малайзиядағы мемлекеттік және жеке мектептерде ынтымақтастықтың қандай түрлері бар екендігіне қатысты академиялық зерттеулер жүргізілмеді. Бұл сапалы, көпвариантты зерттеу Малайзияның Саба провинциясындағы орта мектептер мен екі жеке мектеп мұғалімдері арасындағы ынтымақтастыққа мүмкіндік туғызушы және кедергі келтіруші факторларды зерделеуге бағытталды. Зерттеудің Малайзияның Саба провинциясындағы екі жеке мектеп пен орта мектептерді жақсарту бойынша жобадағы ынтымақтастыққа әртүрлі пәндердің орта мектеп мұғалімдеріне қандай факторлар әсер етеді деген негізгі сұрағына жауап беру үшін деректер жинауда жеке жартылай құрылымды интервью, бірлескен кездесулерді бақылау мен құжаттарды сараптайтын үш құрал пайдаланылды. Деректерді талдау ынтымақтастыққа қатысушылардың қабылдауын және мектептердегі ынтымақтастыққа әсер етуші факторларды анықтады. Қатысушылардың пікірінше, мейлінше әсер етуші факторлар: ынтымақтастық үшін қажет уақыт, мектеп басшылығының толыққанды қолдауы, ынтымақтастықтың икемділігі, мұғалімдерді оқытудың өзектілігі, кәсіби қарым-қатынас пен малайзия тілдерін есепке алу болып табылады. Қорытындылар мектептегі мұғалімдердің арасындағы маңызды ынтымақтастыққа бастамашылық жасау және оны қолдаумен

байланысты мәселелерді көрсетті. Мектептерде ұжымдық мәдениет пен ынтымақтастықты дамыту және тұрақты кәсіби білім беретін қауымдастық құру үшін білім беруші мемлекеттік органдар мен мектеп директорлары жоғарыда аталған факторларды толыққанды ойланып қарастырулары қажет.

Түйінді сөздер: ынтымақтастық, кәсіби оқу қоғамдастығы, мұғалімнің

ынтымақтастығы, ынтымақтастық мәдениеті, мектеп мәдениеті, мектепті жақсарту.

Table of Contents

Author Agreement	i
Declaration of Authorship.....	iii
Ethical Approval	iv
CITI Certificate	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
Abstract	vii
Table of Contents	xiii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 Chapter Overview	1
1.2 Background of the Study	1
1.3 The statement of Problem	3
1.4 The purpose of Research.....	6
1.5 Research Questions	6
1.6 Significance of the Study	6
1.7 Outline of the Thesis	8
Chapter 2: Review of the literature	9
2.1 Introduction.....	9
2.2 Collaboration Defined.....	9
2.3 School Culture and Collaboration.....	11
2.4 Types and Features of Teacher Collaboration	13
2.5 Interpersonal Characteristics and Collaboration	17
2.6 Factors Enabling Collaboration	19
2.7 Factors Impeding Collaboration	21
2.8 Gaps in Literature	25
2.9 Conceptual Framework.....	26
Figure 1. Conceptual Framework	27
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	30
3.1 Research Design.....	30
3.2 Research Site and Rationale.....	31
3.3 Sampling and Participants.....	32
Table 1. Research Participants' Demographic Information.....	32

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE SECONDARY TEACHERS OF DIFFERENT SUBJECTS TO COLLABORATE ON SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

xiv

3.4 Data Collection Tools	34
3.5 Data Collection Procedures.....	35
3.6 Data Analysis	37
3.7 Ethical Considerations	38
Chapter 4: Research Findings	41
4.1 Introduction.....	41
4.2 Perceptions of Collaboration.....	42
4.2.1 Teamwork.....	42
4.2.2 Goal achievement	43
4.2.3 Sharing ideas and imparting knowledge.....	44
4.3 Motivating Factors	45
4.3.1 Collaboration as a tool to solve problems	45
4.3.2 Learning and environment.....	47
4.3.3 The role of school leaders.....	49
4.4. Components for successful collaboration	50
4.4.1 Moral support and skills training.....	50
4.4.2 Relevance and room for spontaneity	51
4.4.3 Structure, flexibility and pro-activity	52
4.5 Challenges of Collaboration	54
4.5.1 Work pressures	54
4.5.2 Communication and language	55
4.5.3 Indifference and lack of motivation.....	57
4.5.4 Skills and character traits.....	58
4.6 Summary	59
Chapter 5: Discussion.....	60
5.1 Introduction.....	60
5.2 Participants' Notions of Collaboration	60
5.2.1 Teamwork.....	60
5.2.2 Goal achievement	61
5.2.3 Sharing ideas and imparting knowledge.....	62
5.3 Purposes Collaboration Can Serve.....	63
5.3.1 Collaboration as a tool to solve problems	63

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE SECONDARY TEACHERS OF DIFFERENT SUBJECTS TO COLLABORATE ON SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

xv

5.3.2 Learning from collaboration	64
5.4 Factors Influencing Collaboration	65
5.4.1 Role of leadership	66
5.4.2 Moral support	67
5.4.3 Relevance and flexibility	68
5.4.4 Communication	68
5.5 Challenges of Collaboration	70
5.5.1 Increasing workload and time issue.....	70
5.5.2 Communication across the board	71
5.5.3 Indifferent attitude of teachers.....	73
5.6 Summary	74
Chapter 6: Conclusion.....	76
6.1 Introduction.....	76
6.2 Research Questions, Implications and Recommendations	76
6.2.1 What do secondary school teachers understand by collaboration and its importance in their work at the school?.....	76
6.2.2 What factors enable teachers to collaborate?	78
6.2.3 What factors impede collaboration?	80
6.3 Recommendations.....	81
6.3.1 Recommendations for school leaders	81
6.3.2 Recommendations for teachers.....	83
6.3.3 Recommendations for policy-makers	84
6.5 Limitations of the Study.....	84
6.4 Reflection on the Thesis and Research	85
References	87
Appendices	104

List of Figures

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework27

List of Tables

Table 1. Research Participants' Demographic Information.....32

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Chapter Overview

The first chapter concentrates on the topic of the current study, which is the factors that enable and impede teachers' collaboration at two secondary schools and provides a description of the study's background and its context. Next, it discusses the research problem, states the research questions and explains the purpose of the research. Lastly, it ends with explaining the significance of the study.

1.2 Background of the Study

The central phenomenon that I explored was the motivation of six secondary teachers from two private schools in Sabah in Malaysia to collaborate with their colleagues on a school improvement project. Thus, investigating the factors that enable or impede collaboration among teachers was the central focus of the study.

My interest in this topic arose from the fact that all schools are different and many operate in the mode of seclusion, where teachers mostly work alone in their classrooms, allocating little time for interacting with their colleagues and not disclosing any of their practice issues to anyone. General observations reveal that teachers at the two selected schools are separated from one another, seldom engage in professional conversations with other educators, professional learning, or solving problems.

In contrast, there are schools where teachers collaborate with each other, share ideas and knowledge, and take an active part in solving problems that occur in their classrooms. In collaborative school cultures, teachers draw upon collegial support and teamwork to be more effective teachers to their students as well as ensure their learning never ceases. Thus, Fullan and Hargreaves (1991) asserted that collaborative schools boast more

pleasant and productive work environments which lead to the improvement of student academic performance.

Most countries are striving to improve their education systems “to compete more effectively in what is increasingly a knowledge-based economy” (Bush et al., 2019, p. 2). Because globalisation enables governments to observe how economies and education systems of other countries are developing and progressing, they attempt to imitate what has succeeded in other countries, ignoring the fact that the efficacy of borrowing policies heavily depends on context and culture. One illustrative example from Asia is the Malaysia Education Blueprint (MoE, 2013).

In the Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) (2013-2023), it is emphasised that quality teaching is of the utmost importance. The officials refer to it as “the most effective lever” (p. 9) that has the capability to transform primary and secondary schools and improve student performance. The goal is to prioritise the quality of teaching by using successful present practice and rewarding quality teaching with more career opportunities in education. To achieve this aim, the programme of Professional Learning Community (PLC), a form of professional development, has been introduced at the provincial and county level by the Ministry of Education (MoE) of Malaysia as part of the MEB (MoE, 2013, p. 160). According to Fullan (2010), PLC is a vital part of the school improvement process, and it is also a tool that can be used by many school stakeholders, such as head teachers, senior teachers, teachers and teacher assistants, to create a thriving school culture that appreciates collaborative learning and improvement.

PLC is seen by many researchers as a strategy that may help establish collaborative learning values among principals, teachers and pupils for the purpose of improving the quality of teaching and learning (DuFour, 2010; Ismail, Yen & Abdulla, 2015; Myers &

Simpson, 1998). Furthermore, the practice of PLC aims to create school communities which forge mutually beneficial relationships with the external and internal environment to solve teaching and learning problems while simultaneously building effective schools. In addition, by practising PLC, teachers can acquire new skills and knowledge which will enable them to innovate their teaching practices with modern learning approaches (Mazlina, 2016).

However, PLC is not free from challenges and it is influenced positively and negatively by a range of factors inside the school.

My study aimed to explore the factors that influence collaboration among secondary teachers of two private schools in Malaysia where the education system is undergoing exciting changes and those changes, at a school level, involve professional teacher development, with building PLCs being viewed as a tool that promotes teacher growth and student improvement. Because the process of forming a PLC differs in every context, it was useful to investigate the phenomenon in Sabah to see what conditions favour teacher collaboration.

1.3 The statement of Problem

While it is true that collaboration can lead to many improvements, the process of collaboration is fraught with complexities which must be dealt with before achieving desired results. Several scholars have highlighted several important components that make collaboration successful. They are: 1) common goals (Cook & Friend, 1991; Welch & Sheridan, 1995); 2) joint work or interdependence (Gray, 1989; Little, 1990; Welch & Sheridan, 1995); 3) equality (Cook & Friend, 1991; Welch & Sheridan, 1995); and 4) voluntary participation (Cook & Friend, 1991; Hargreaves, 1994). These key components, despite having separate definitions when interacting with each other, create collaborative

relationships that can be highly powerful and effective. It is worth noting that for collaboration to work, it should be initiated and sustained by teachers and continuously supported by school leadership. If it is imposed on them by superiors, the collaborative relationship will lack the most essential component of equality (Slater, 2004).

However, the centralised education system of Malaysia, where a top-down approach to leadership dominates, makes it difficult for educational policies to be properly interpreted by school stakeholders and reforms timely implemented by regional education departments (Bush et al., 2019). After having conducted 49 interviews with educational officers of various ranks, the researchers discovered that the top-down processes, described as ‘cascading’ by participants from Kelantan, Sabah and Kuala Lumpur, lead to the intended policy information to be misunderstood, lost somewhere between administrative layers and unrealistic to be put in practice due to teacher attitudes and infrastructural obstacles (Bush et al., 2019). The issues reported are serious and need to be addressed should MoE expect successful outcomes from the policies presented in the MEB (Honing, 2006).

The members of the Board of Inspectors and Quality Assurance (JNJK), upon having supervised 12,045 teachers in 2013, found that only 12% of teachers achieved a satisfactory level of teaching and learning (MoE 2013, as cited in Rusdin & Ambotang, 2018). The inspectors deemed the result unsuccessful because they had expected the success rate of 51.81% (MoE, 2013). It is evident from the data that the innovation of teaching is necessary (Bakar & Iksan, 2016). To keep up with the latest developments of global education, Malaysian teachers may demonstrate a change in attitude to teacher education by committing themselves to mastering new skills and acquiring new knowledge that could help them become more competent teachers (Ahmad & Jingga, 2015). In their recent research, Rusdin

and Ambotang (2018) claim that the professional development programme led by teachers has not proven to make teachers' knowledge important. They then suggested that introducing a teacher-focused development programme at schools, that aims at establishing a PLC among colleagues, can give teachers innumerable opportunities to refine their teaching competence and professionalism. The studies of science teachers in Malaysia, conducted by Rusdin and Ambotang (2018), demonstrate that a PLC can be a fantastic source of improvement for teachers if they are engaged in it in the process of teaching in their educational setting. In addition, several international studies highlighted a positive correlation between the practice of PLC on school cultures and the improvement of student performance (Eaker et al., 2002; Hord, 2004; Kruse, 2001; Mullen & Sullivan, 2002; Phillips, 2003).

The positive aspect of collaboration among teachers is that it can be practised by any school regardless of its status, government, semi-government, private or international. Besides, minimum resources are required to initiate the process, except for the time which schools should allocate (DuFour, 2004). DuFour (2004) also claimed that, most importantly, teachers must stop complaining about a lack of time and begin collaborating for the benefit of the school; therefore, he believed that establishing an effective PLC is "a question of will" (p. 4) meaning it requires a great deal of determination.

The issue at the selected schools and other schools in Malaysia is that there is a paucity of research that exclusively concentrated on the kind of collaboration that may exist among teachers, the extent to which such collaborative projects work effectively and the factors that influence, both positively and negatively, such collaboration. Therefore, my study aimed at discovering the factors that impede or encourage teacher collaboration on school improvement projects. The participating teachers from Sabah shed more light on why some

collaborations on school projects fail while others succeed, eventually becoming sustainable practices.

1.4 The purpose of Research

The purpose of this research was to explore the central phenomenon of teacher collaboration in the context of private secondary schools in Sabah, Malaysia. To be specific, I investigated the factors that influence collaboration among secondary school teachers on various school improvement projects. The study explored factors that encourage, motivate and enable teachers to work in collaboration as a team as well as the factors that inhibit such collaboration.

1.5 Research Questions

Main question: What factors influence secondary teachers of different subjects to collaborate on school improvement projects in two private secondary schools in Sabah, Malaysia?

Sub-questions:

1. What do secondary school teachers understand by collaboration and its importance in their work at the school?
2. What factors enable them to collaborate?
3. What factors impede their collaboration?

1.6 Significance of the Study

All secondary teachers, school leaders and the research participants who work in the Southeast Asian context may benefit from my study because the findings could help them contemplate the existing problems in their educational settings, provide them with some

insights on the motivation behind teacher collaboration and possibly even inspire them to form a PLC at their schools.

Malaysian policy-makers and educational managers are also the potential beneficiaries because PLC is listed as one of the important indicators in the MEB that is to be achieved by 2025 in the professional development of teachers. They therefore could draw upon my findings, especially as some new aspects to teacher collaboration are revealed, to update their school professional development programmes which aim to improve teachers' competency by means of collaborative learning.

Although there are many studies on PLC and teachers' collaboration in various educational contexts in Malaysia, only a handful has been conducted in private schools and in Sabah, Malaysia. Thus, my research might add to the academic body of knowledge for the region.

Upon having read a fair amount of literature and pondered my experience of collaboration with my colleagues at school, I came to the conclusion that collaboration is a complex activity due to various factors; it has myriad layers, such as human, social and cultural among others, which might not always be visible in the beginning. It is therefore important to investigate, especially in as many contexts as possible, because every context and setting most likely has disparate factors affecting collaboration among teachers. In the future, I intend to do more action research into the topic and be more empathetic when encountering obstacles during collaborations.

1.7 Outline of the Thesis

The thesis contains six chapters: the introduction, the literature review, the methodology, the findings, the discussion and the conclusion.

The first chapter introduces the topic and its context, states the problem, explains the purpose of the study, presents the research questions and explains the significance of the study. The second chapter critically reviews the existing literature on the topic of collaboration at schools. The third chapter elaborates on the chosen method of research and discusses all the aspects associated with it, including ethics. The fourth chapter describes the findings in the order of the research questions. The fifth chapter discusses the research findings and corroborates them with relevant research and scholarly insights. Lastly, the sixth chapter concludes the thesis with answering the research questions, explaining the study's limitations and giving recommendations to the potential beneficiaries.

Chapter 2: Review of the literature

2.1 Introduction

To gain a deeper understanding of collaboration in education and on what aspects the research to date has focused, it is necessary to review the literature pertaining to collaboration and its role in school culture, the types and forms of collaboration, the interpersonal dynamics impacting collaboration among teachers and the factors encouraging and inhibiting collaboration. I discuss these in this chapter by drawing upon relevant studies from the local and international contexts.

2.2 Collaboration Defined

Friend and Cook (1992) define collaboration as a voluntary interaction between two equal individuals who have made a joint decision to achieve a goal. Hargreaves (1994), Phillips and McCullough (1990), and Montague and Warger (2001) refer to teachers' collaboration as communication that aims to solve a problem or write lesson plans. According to Miskel, McDonald and Bloom (1983), collaboration usually takes place informally due to being initiated by an individual teacher. In contrast, Lortie (1975) and Little (1999) refer to collaboration as a formal activity that is initiated by school leadership. Birchak et al. (1998) and Stokes (2001) explain that formal forms of collaboration, such as mentoring, co-teaching and study groups, occur less frequently than the informal forms such as solving problems together, interaction among colleagues and spontaneous conversation.

The renowned researchers in the field of collaboration proposed that the nature of collaboration can very well be described by the following key components (Wood & Gray, 1991): 1) common goals (Cook & Friend, 1991; Welch & Sheridan, 1995); 2) joint work or

interdependence (Gray, 1989; Little, 1990; Welch & Sheridan, 1995); 3) parity or equality (Cook & Friend, 1991; Welch & Sheridan, 1995); and 4) voluntary participation (Cook & Friend, 1991; Hargreaves, 1994). Each is examined separately to determine its importance in collaboration.

Common goals, joint work and interdependence. Members of collaborative activities have common goals from which they and their organisation can benefit (Cook & Friend, 1991; Welch & Sheridan, 1995; West, 1990). These goals are usually constructed by the collaborating teachers, instead of being imposed by authority figures to whom they report. The commitment to achieve common goals and bonding is fortified when individuals have accepted shared goals. Besides, the need for each other's contribution for the purpose of achieving success is their driving force in collaboration.

Equality. This is another integral component of collaboration (Cook & Friend, 1991; Cole & Knowles, 1993; Stewart, 1996). Any educational setting has employees of different status, such as principals, teachers, teaching assistants and other supporting staff, who may need to collaborate to achieve a common goal. For such a collaboration to succeed, all members should feel that their opinion or contribution matters. It could be determined that collaboration provides a more interactive and equitable method of work that aims to achieve a goal for all educators, regardless of where they are placed in the chain of command. Lieberman and Grolnick (1997) claimed that collaboration is about the equal distribution of power and influence as well as sharing of knowledge, and it also encourages networking (Katz, Earl & Jaafar, 2009).

Collaboration is voluntary. According to Cook and Friend (1991), authentic collaboration happens only if members are willing to participate in it without any external

pressure. In other words, collaborative activities should not be ordered from above but rather be initiated by individuals who have a mutual understanding, strive to achieve the same educational goal and expect their contributions to bring value. In contrast, contrived collegiality is the term used by Hargreaves (1994) to describe collaboration that is instructed by superiors, which means it is involuntary. Thus, the conditions of collaboration differ when it is involuntary; not all collaborating individuals are eager to make their contributions or can be productive because they either feel controlled or unequal in the imposed collaborative relationship.

In conclusion, collaboration seems to be a complex, multi-faceted term that includes many features. It appears that all the listed components are vital for the collaboration's initiation, progression and sustainability. However, two components which may have the potential to fortify collaboration significantly are its voluntary nature and equality; without them, most collaborative activities may result in dampening the collaborators' inspiration making them feel unvalued or their contributions are worthless.

2.3 School Culture and Collaboration

This section provides the literature review of school culture, learning community and their relation to collaboration.

The discussion above suggests that collaboration among teachers helps schools to be more effective; it has, therefore, become a driving component of school policy documents (Hargreaves, 1994). One key factor that influences collaboration among teachers and their interactions can be called school culture. Fullan and Hargreaves (1992) defined a culture of collaboration as a working environment where educators share ideas. Because every school is a 'living organism' in its special 'ecosystem', which consists of specific rules, values,

attitudes and routines, it implies that school cultures cannot be alike. Thus, how collaboration or colleagues working together on projects is understood and practised differs between settings.

The above leads to the discussion about how collaborative school culture is formed. One key strategy would be to create learning communities at schools. Eaker et al. (2002) claimed that learning communities have the capacity to improve collaboration among teachers providing them with opportunities for further professional growth. Hord (1997) believed that shared values and missions are fundamental for the formation of professional learning communities. When working together, teachers should design a common vision of how to improve the school and then make an action plan on how to achieve common goals.

Lesser and Storck (2001) highlighted that educators in learning communities are akin to students in the learning process. If every participant is a learner in the collaborative learning community, then teachers may begin thinking that they can help their pupils to learn instead of thinking they can teach them (DuFour, 2004).

It is therefore important that school staff are constantly supported by school leaders and departmental heads who do their best to create positive interactions and learning environments aiming at realising common goals as well as including all school members in the process of decision-making. Hence, the PLC can be an effective framework for teachers' professional identity development and pupils' learning.

According to Kafyulilo (2013), school culture is a version of collaboration in which teachers learn what students learn. Seidel Horn (2010) emphasised that collaboration aims to build a culture among teachers which comprises powerful pedagogical knowledge that is then to be continuously disseminated within the school. Lohman (2005) insisted that when

teachers interact, it leads them to develop professionally and to create a positive learning environment.

Several Malaysian researchers, who conducted quantitative studies at private and local schools, claimed that the schools with the highest level of PLC are usually well-resourced and structured (Turmudi et al., 2017), while rural schools tend to lack specific support structures for collaboration or the formation of PLC (Ansawi & Pang, 2017). Furthermore, the size of a PLC can affect the level of PLC practice; the ideal group size for a collaborative activity is four to six people (Chuan et al., 2013).

Based on the above review of learning communities and school cultures, it can be concluded that for creating an effective sustainable PLC, with collaboration at its heart, schools require teachers' initiative and desire to learn, share and cooperate, the setting of common goals, missions and actions plans, opportunities to collaborate at a mundane level, unwavering support of school leaders and the cultivation of a set of values which underpin safe contributing of individuals in a group.

2.4 Types and Features of Teacher Collaboration

The following section of my literature review is devoted to the types and forms of collaboration in education to identify what the research to date has focused on, and it also touches upon theories that can help me design my study's theoretical or conceptual framework.

Nias, Southworth and Yeomans (1989) suggested that the core values of collaboration among educators are trust, support and open mindedness. Rosenholtz (1989) named two forms of school culture: the first one is *moving* schools, where learning, support and interaction among teachers are the key features; and the second is *stuck* schools, where teachers are confined to their classrooms and feel alienated. The authors' findings make

perfect sense because effective collaboration requires positive values and culture which should be cultivated at schools and shared among individuals.

Turning now to Hargreaves's (1994) five forms of collaboration, which are isolation or individualism, collaboration, balkanisation and a "moving mosaic" (p. 239), he examined collaborative cultures by analysing the relationships between teachers and their co-workers.

Let us first discuss *Isolation or Individualism*, which has been criticised by several researchers and labelled as negative (Hargreaves, 1994). However, Hargreaves (1994) believed that working alone can sometimes be positive. He gives an example of some teachers planning more effectively on their own than in a group. He, therefore, outlined three types of individualism: 1) 'constrained individualism' means that teachers are forced to work individually due to restrictive organisational structures; 2) 'strategic individualism' means that teachers choose to work individually; and 3) 'elective individualism' means that working together or individually is dictated by situations (p. 172). Over two decades ago, Flinders (1988) identified the same types of individualism and defined them similarly. This coincidence indicates that the studies of the two researchers may be reliable and are based on the rich data collected at schools.

The second type is *collaboration or collaborative culture*, which is described by Hargreaves (1994) as being spontaneously initiated by teachers when a need arises or an idea occurs while being sometimes supported by school leadership, being voluntary and having no pressure from above, being professional development orientated, happening anytime and anywhere and having no predictable outcomes. It appears that his type of collaboration can only occur in highly democratic schools, where the management and the teachers share common values; for example, trust, mutual respect and the importance of the process of learning for all at the school.

Contrived collegiality is the third type, with formality being its main characteristic.

Hargreaves (2000) stated that this approach is imposed and controlled by the school management. Thus, collaboration is spontaneous and contrived collegiality is obligatory. Hargreaves and Dawe (1990) discovered that imposed collaboration can cause inflexibility among teachers. However, Fullan and Hargreaves (1991) argued that contrived collegiality can have both positive and negative effects on teachers, depending on the situations in which this type is practised. For example, if all school staff have set a common goal and would like to achieve it, then a collaborative project initiated and supported by the principal or another leader could have a positive effect not only on the future collaborative activities but also on the outcome of the project. However, if a project had never been discussed with teachers and then was suddenly presented to them by a superior at a staff meeting and the teachers were told that they had to have a series of collaborative activities with specific goals and action plans/activities, then such collaboration would most likely result in the teachers' reluctance to communicate with each other and participate. In this case, they become 'soldiers' obeying orders of their 'commanders'.

Let me now turn to *balkanisation*, the fourth type of collaboration manifesting when there is competition among groups of teachers at a school. This implies that such culture may produce loser and winner groups. Although this type of collaborative culture encourages teachers to form groups based on personal interests, common goals or language they speak, it can create a school environment with poor communication and socialising (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992). Ford (2013) contended with the authors by stating that working in sub-groups can create a negative environment. Despite the balkanised culture promoting competition among teachers, it can be both favourable and unfavourable, depending on how these sub-groups are supported by school leadership.

The last type discussed by Hargreaves (1994) is the *moving mosaic*. The main features of this culture are risk-taking, creativity, flexibility and continuous professional development of school employees. In addition, the boundaries between departments are not fixed, which implies that teachers are free to collaborate with different subject teachers from other departments or join collaborative activities in other sub-groups. Besides, the department leaders are elected only for a limited period. The values that are promoted by this culture are warmth, respect, open discussion and joint problem-solving. This seems to be an ideal type of collaboration; however, creating such a culture would require schools to have open-minded management and time for teachers to collaborate.

In conclusion, there are many types and forms of collaboration that could be further explored and evaluated. However, should schools wish to improve teachers' professional practices, appropriate collaboration types must be introduced to teachers and properly implemented (Kelchtermans, 2006).

Regarding the context of Malaysia, I have not found any research that has explicitly focused on identifying specific types of collaboration practised by teachers. However, because most school leaders have the advantage when it comes to decision-making and managing daily activities, a dominating form of collaboration could be contrived collegiality, which means that it is imposed by superiors. On the other hand, several researchers (Keong et al., 2017; Ismail et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2017) discovered that there is a correlation between the school's status and the engagement of teachers in PLCs; the higher the status of the school, the more likely the teachers are to be engaged in collaborations. This implies that schools with more autonomy, open-minded and trusting leaders and financial resources offer better conditions for the practice of voluntary, long-term collaborations. Nevertheless, it is unclear whether these collaborations are largely formal or informal. Therefore, my study may

reveal that a prevalent type of collaboration among the interviewed teachers from two private schools is a factor that encourages or impedes the teachers' working together on various projects.

2.5 Interpersonal Characteristics and Collaboration

For any form of collaboration to take place, the interpersonal dynamics need to be in place. This section, therefore, contains a review of the literature that highlights the most important interpersonal characteristics which influence collaboration among teachers.

The first characteristic is *dialogue and participation*. According to Hansen et al. (2010), teachers can participate in making decisions. Southworth (2009) claimed that dialogue is not just a talk, but it is connected to deep professional learning. In addition, effective dialogues contribute to collaboration and facilitate an environment in which teachers can create meaningful connections.

The second interpersonal factor in teachers' collaboration is *trust*. Fullan and Hargreaves (1992) argued that the cultivation of trust among professionals depends on knowledge, skills and values demonstrated by colleagues. O'Reilly and Roberts (1977, as cited in Tschannen-Moran, 2001) stated that trust can only be achieved with open and clear communication and it is a key component of collaboration. Trust and collaboration are interdependent because they need to feed off each other to sustain themselves (Tschannen-Moran, 2001).

A *positive attitude* to teaching is another salient interpersonal characteristic that sustains collaboration among pedagogic staff. Pianata (1999) and Watson (2003) stated that teachers are capable of influencing pupils by creating supportive and effective learning environments which can inspire students to learn; therefore, teachers' positive attitude to

teaching and learning can have a favourable impact on pupils. The studies conducted by the Malaysian researchers also confirmed that the teachers' attitude can prevent them from initiating collaboration or practising PLC; one reason is a lack of understanding of the concept (Abdullah et al., 2017) and another has to do with their feeling embarrassed as they do not know how their actions or words will be perceived by their co-workers and school leaders (Mazlan & Mahamod, 2016). The fear of criticism and the feeling of embarrassment can therefore make them unmotivated, weak and cause alienation (Keong et al., 2018).

The next interpersonal characteristic is *shared understanding and beliefs*. Many researchers and authors believe that mutual understanding and common visions are the building blocks of collaborative partnerships (Westheimer, 1999). Teachers' willingness to collaborate may depend on whether they have shared beliefs and/or visions with their peers and whether their peers would like to realise them (Schlechty, 2005). Besides, environments where people appreciate co-operation can build learning communities (Smith, Wilson & Corbett, 2009).

Another key characteristic is *openness and respect*, and these should be practised throughout collaboration. Smylie (1994) explained that open communication enables collaborating participants to learn and develop. Interacting while sharing teaching practice, such as observing colleagues' lessons, may lead to openness (Kruse et al., 1995). Bauwens and Hourcade (1995) claimed that to help students achieve their full potential, teachers should be open to employing innovative teaching and learning methods, with one of them being collaboration. Deal and Peterson (2009) contended saying that to connect and rid of barriers, openness is critical. Besides, Silva and Morgado (2005) asserted that respect is very important for collaboration; accepting other people's opinions and their contributions should be practised throughout collaboration.

Taking initiative is the last interpersonal characteristic that is an integral part of collaboration. The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO, 2011) indicated that interactions with colleagues can lead teachers to take risks that aim to improve teaching and learning. Fullan and Hargreaves (1992) asserted that taking risks leads to learning from new experiences. In their research and books, they encouraged teachers to take initiative during collaboration and give advice on how to do it. Taking initiative, according to Alvarez and Anderson-Ketchmark (2011), is putting on a leadership cap for promoting professional learning.

To conclude, different interpersonal factors are important in collaboration among teachers, and they can be called the bedrock of collaborative activities because teachers are first and foremost humans: they want to interact with co-workers, be respected for their expertise, recognised for the daily work they do, appreciated for their talents and contributions, share knowledge, and be heard and responded to at the same time.

2.6 Factors Enabling Collaboration

A great deal of research on collaborative school cultures has highlighted different factors that encourage and impede teachers from collaborating. In this sub-section, I will therefore focus on discussing these factors.

One of the most important factors is that a school establishes a conducive-to-collaboration environment which encourages teachers to build mutually beneficial professional relationships with each other. Hord (2004) indicated that teachers develop a feeling of togetherness, feel more energetic and become more competent in their professional field when positive conditions for collaboration are created within a school. Other studies highlighted teamwork or spirit as a motivating collaborative factor. This refers to teachers'

taking part in seminars, lesson planning, organisation of various school events and collaborative school projects. According to Nias et al. (1989), team-teaching (e.g., joint lesson planning) with a progressive-thinking teacher motivates other teachers to interact as well as creates an enriched learning environment. Consequently, the balkanised type of collaboration can gradually be transformed into a more interactive type of collaboration.

Alignment is another factor that was identified by Senge (1992), who argued that working in alignment with vision can make teachers' thinking clear and organised. Merinik et al. (2009) named alignment as an instrument that helps teachers transform their individual goals into common goals. Both researchers saw alignment as playing an instrumental role in not only realising visions but also achieving common goals that are initially individual in nature.

Group cohesion is another factor, which indicates how much participants in a group like each other (Merinik et al., 2009). Little (2003) and Shaw (1981) stated that when cohesion is present, teams have the potential to solve problems and achieve goals with minimum disagreements. Furthermore, Stoll and Louis (2007), a successful PLC should help the participants to develop a sense of belonging because it encourages teachers to communicate openly and confidently.

Because a school is an organisation, it implies that there are factors which enable collaboration on a structural level (Forte & Flores, 2014). School leadership often initiates and sustains collaboration by promoting it as professional development. Moreover, teachers may learn something new, which can ultimately improve students' achievement, and in the process, they establish a positive rapport and good working relationship with co-workers. Consequently, a school's reputation rises and there is the potential for receiving additional

benefits, such as financial support or access to the latest equipment. It can be concluded that positive interactions and strong relationships with others encourage teachers to collaborate.

Keltchermans (2006) and Williams et al. (2001) defined collaboration as individual and spontaneous, with the latter creating a highly supportive environment. Their studies' findings confirmed that those factors are instrumental in school improvement and professional growth of teachers. Besides, they concluded that cultural environments, where collegiality is strong and collaboration is spontaneous, tend to improve student learning and achievement, teacher competency and school.

2.7 Factors Impeding Collaboration

Now, I intend to elaborate on the factors that inhibit teachers' pro-active behaviour. According to one of the studies by Hargreaves (1993), the main reason appears to be the fear of losing autonomy or being considered incompetent. Fisher et al. (1981) and Shapiro's (1984) findings also confirmed that teachers do not try to seek help and support because they do not want to appear failures; in other words, personal freedom can be lost if teachers ask for someone else's assistance at school. Taking the above findings into consideration, it can be concluded that the fear of losing autonomy causes many issues and insecurities to develop and is therefore a serious inhibiting factor for collaboration.

Apart from the psychological factors which impede teacher collaboration, there are also physical factors (Lortie, 1975). The latter depend on the conditions of the place of work. The typical working environment at a school is traditional and implies that teachers are divided into groups which exist in isolation from each other; the barriers to collaboration are then erected, and they are difficult to remove (Flinders, 1988). McTaggart (1989) contended with the authors, stating that 'privatism' can considerably hinder teachers' collaboration. The

conditions at the schools where privatism or individualism dominate usually put teachers in the mode of accountability; in fact, any initiated collaborative activity is discouraged. This factor can therefore create barriers among teachers that cannot be eradicated by teachers themselves.

Hargreaves (1994) explained that the above problem is exacerbated by a lack of communication between school leaders and teachers. In addition, he argued that boundaries are strong and the way both sides perceive time and work differ. For example, principals and heads devise plans with clear objectives and timelines expecting teachers to accomplish them as prescribed. However, the strategies on how to achieve the set goals successfully are not given to teachers.

The studies conducted by Forte and Flores (2013) discovered that teachers grappled with exploring collegial collaboration named a lack of time as the main reason. They stated that it is essential to have free time for discussions and reflections with colleagues. It appears that various bureaucratic tasks consume much of teachers' time. To address this problem, school leaders should identify effective ways to reduce the paperwork burden that teachers carry.

Another important impeding factor is teaching workload. In addition to being overloaded with teaching hours and paperwork, teachers must attend compulsory meetings. Thus, they usually cannot find any time to establish collaborative relationships with their colleagues (Leithwood, Leonard & Sharratt, 1998). Several Malaysian researchers also found in their studies of PLCs at schools that the teachers' high workload is a major inhibiting factor (Keong et al., 2018; Saad et al., 2017; Rahim et al., 2015 & Yaakob et al., 2017). Harris and Jones (2018) discussed the problem of high work pressure that is caused by some policies and they suggested that any foreign strategy, policy or programme must be adapted

to a local context and culture. This finding was supported by Mohammad et al. (2015), who stated that for the successful implementation of PLC and avoidance of a negative impact on the education system, every local context should be considered. In addition, a lack of time and space allocated for collaboration at Malaysian schools is also a considerable obstacle (Daud et al., 2014; Rahim et al., 2015; Thang et al., 2010). The above findings seem to be true; the Malaysian teachers' workload, the bureaucratic procedures and a chronic lack of time inhibit their effort to form a sustainable PLC.

Two other factors that studies indicated are a lack of collaborative skills (Friend, 2000) and restriction by school leaders (Little, 1990; Rosenholtz, 1990). While the former can eventually be developed, the latter is often impossible to remove. McManus and Kauffman (1991) contended stating that teachers lack collaborative skills that they need for successful interactions with co-workers. Their findings revealed that the reason for not having collaborative skills is that teachers used to work in isolation for many years, before the major educational reforms began in the 1990s (McManus & Kauffman, 1991). School leaders also prevent teachers from collaborating by using appraisal schemes which often evaluate individual performance. Keong et al. (2018) contended with the findings asserting that school leaders who are less open-minded, less creative and excessively authoritarian prevent the formation of PLCs at schools. In addition, Mohamad et al. (2015) recommended that the MoE should provide proper training for head teachers on how to establish and maintain a PLC.

Another important factor that inhibits teacher collaboration is a lack of professional communication skills. Friend (2000) argued that poor communication could be responsible for an unsuccessful collaboration. Several other researchers stated that the training on how to communicate professionally needs to be provided by school leaders if they

wish to help teachers improve their interactions with colleagues (McCormik, Noonan, Ogata and Heck (2001). Peterson (1994) added that leaders of collaboration should be prioritised for the education on effective communication because they usually solve problems, plan and make decisions. The above findings and statements are plausible; without strong communication skills, collaboration among teachers would probably result in conflict and a waste of time.

The last widely known factor that impedes collaboration, according to Malaysian and other international academics, is the cultural barrier. For example, in western cultures, teachers are often used to sharing their practices regardless of age and teaching experience, while in eastern cultures, more experienced senior teachers, although seen as the ones who know the most, are often reluctant to share their knowledge and skills with younger teachers because of the fear of appearing patronising (Khalid et al., 2014; Murugaiah et al., 2012). As a result, it can be difficult for senior teachers to accept criticism or negative comments from less experienced young teachers. Abdullah et al. (2017) and Zawawi (2008) found that senior teachers tend to expect junior teachers to respect them, which affirms that the teachers' community can be hierarchal. When describing the language used by the Malay community, Zawawi (2008) referred to it as being 'sugar-coated'; this indicates that the cultural communication norms of Malaysia contradict those in the west.

In conclusion, cultivating and sustaining a favourable collaborative school culture is a challenging task that requires commitment and perseverance, not only from teachers but also from leaders. Solutions to problems can only be found if leaders and teachers are willing to work on them collaboratively. It is evident from the reviewed literature in this sub-section that several notable Malaysian researchers have mainly identified the factors impeding collaboration or the formation of a PLC, which implies that there is a need to investigate the

factors encouraging collaboration. My study could therefore contribute to bringing to light the factors that facilitate collaborative activities among teachers at two private Malaysian schools.

2.8 Gaps in Literature

Upon having reviewed the existing literature on the topic of collaboration, it appears that there are gaps. The following gaps are mainly reported by the researchers specialising in the field of teacher professional development and collaboration.

There are few studies that focus on the forms of teacher collaboration which lead to learning (de Jong, Meirink & Admiraal, 2019). Hargreaves and O'Connor (2017) indicate that the current forms of teacher collaboration at schools predominantly concentrate on exchange of ideas among teachers and dialogue. Thus, the authors suggest that the researchers should focus their attention on the types of teacher collaboration and how teachers take responsibilities collectively to enrich their teaching practices. Besides, recent research contains little investigation of teacher collaboration in various school contexts of teachers (Horn, 2005; Runhaar, Sanders, & Yang, 2010).

Friend (2000) reported that several confusing statements related to the process of collaboration need to be addressed. The examples include: the more teachers collaborate, the better; collaboration has no negative effects on teachers; and collaboration is a natural occurrence because humans are social beings. The same author asserted that the interpersonal styles of collaborating teachers differ (Friend, 2000). Thus, he suggested to explore these styles and their interactions.

The topic of frequency of collaboration has also not been explored sufficiently; in other words, how often collaborations should occur. Hill and Guthrie (1999) insisted that a disciplined approach must be in place for collaboration to be successful, while Schrage (1995) argued that such a disciplined method to collaboration could result in boring routine meetings. Thus, because collaboration is now considered an important part of the educational reform in many countries, further efforts need to be made to investigate the above controversies.

According to Ismail, Ishak, and Kamaruddin (2020), more robust investigation of what factors and conditions encourage and can help sustain collaborative practices in Malaysia is required. They also believe that a new PLC model, adapted to the Malaysian context, needs to be designed by local researchers for its subsequent use by schools as a guide to the formation of a successful PLC. The strategy must be comprehended first before being used as a tool for professional development and school improvement in the Malaysian school settings (Ismail, Ishak & Kamaruddin, 2020).

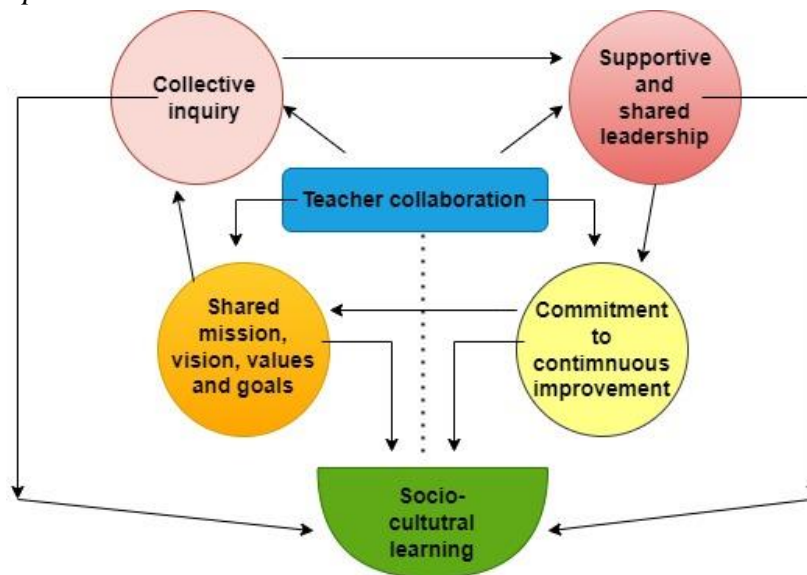
2.9 Conceptual Framework

I have chosen to use the PLC Theory (DuFour & Eaker, 1998) to devise my own conceptual framework of teacher collaboration to guide my study. In addition, the Socio-Cultural Learning Theory (Vygotsky, 1977) is also used to support the conceptual framework because, ultimately, most components in the diagram below depend on this theory for results.

My conceptual teacher collaboration framework (*see Figure 1*) presents five components, which are an integral part of collaboration among educators. They are shared mission, vision and values, collective inquiry, supportive and shared leadership, and commitment to continuous improvement. Because these components interact with each other

in a cyclical fashion, they eventually produce collaborative teams in which teachers effectively and consistently collaborate on school improvement projects, solving various educational problems and raising student achievement.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework



The first component is shared mission, vision, values and goals. These are essential for a fruitful and sustainable collaboration or PLC. They must continuously be articulated and referred to when making decisions about teaching and learning (Hord, 1997). I used this component to create themes during the analysis of the collected data.

The first component leads to the second one, which is collective inquiry. This is achieved by teachers' reflective dialogue and open communication. It becomes evident when teachers work together to solve educational problems, analyse their current practices regarding student results, test new practices and ask critical questions in an optimistic manner (Du Four & Eaker, 1998; Sparks, 2004). The collective inquiry is also rooted in the SCLT that revolves around social interactions for constructing new meanings and understanding (Nyikos & Hashimoto, 1997), which are then applied by teachers in their pedagogic practices.

Some of my interview questions may encourage the participants to give answers related to their present collective work. Besides, while observing, I could notice various collective inquiry patterns.

The third component is vital, and the effectiveness of collective inquiry depends on whether school leaders are supportive and leadership roles are equally shared among teachers. The strong school leader, who is also a friendly learner and understands that power must be shared among formal and informal leaders (Phillips, 2003), is important for creating favourable conditions for teachers' learning (Hord, 1997). In addition, respect, trust and openness should also be present (Kruse, Louis & Bryk, 1994). Again, some of my interview questions are devoted to the school leadership's support of the teachers' collaborative activities and whether certain interpersonal characteristics exist in their school and collaborative environments. Besides, I can observe how the teachers share leadership roles during one of their collaborative meetings.

The fourth component, which should be a natural progression, is the commitment to continuous improvement. I believe that if all the four components are in place, the last one can consolidate the collaborative school culture by making it an integral part of the school routine. This commitment becomes a sustainable, constantly practised, instrument (DuFour, 2003) that helps all the teaching staff realise the school's mission and vision (DuFour, 1998). Regarding the commitment to continuous improvement, I can also ascertain when interviewing the teachers and reading the teacher policy documents or collaboration records.

A meaningful interaction of the components can foster socio-cultural learning (SCL) which, in turn, serves as a binder to hold together the four components. In fact, the PLC and SCL become mutually supportive in creating a strong collaborative environment which can

act as continuous professional development. Such culture is usually methodical, goal-orientated and relies on research-based practices (Shellard, 2002; DuFour & Eaker, 1998), and responsibility is usually shared among teachers for the learning of students (Haar, 2003). Because the topic of my study is related to the factors that facilitate collaboration among teachers, I used this framework to guide my data collection and analysis procedures.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Research Design

In my study on the factors that influence private secondary school teachers to collaborate with their colleagues on school improvement projects in Sabah, Malaysia, I employed the qualitative multi-case study design (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

I have chosen the qualitative research method because it is more suitable for examining the central phenomenon thoroughly and studying behaviour from the perspective of my research participants in their natural environment (Johnson & Christensen, 2019). In addition, according to Johnson & Christensen (2019), the above method enables a researcher to collect data with semi or unstructured instruments, such as interviews, open-ended surveys, observation, documents and focus groups, which can produce findings that are not generalizable but explain the phenomenon in depth, based on the respondents' viewpoints and experiences in their unique contexts.

I also believe that qualitative research was the most appropriate method for conducting research on my topic because I wanted to employ an inductive approach which would allow me to explore and construct meaning based on the collected data in the field (Creswell, 2003, p. 9).

A case study as a research method "is a detailed examination of one setting, or a single subject [sic], or a single depository of documents, or one particular event" (Bogdan & Bicklen, 1998, p. 54) that enables to see the full picture of the analysed phenomenon despite it being bounded (Merriam, 1998). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2002) argued that these

boundaries can be temporary, restricted to a location, related to a particular organisation or institution. Details of the cases in my study are as under:

- The cases: Two private schools in Sabah, Malaysia
- The phenomenon: Factors influencing teachers' collaboration
- The units of analysis: Teachers' perceptions of teacher collaboration and enabling and impeding factors for collaboration on school improvement projects

The reason for settling on the multi-case study design is the complexity of the phenomenon whose process cannot properly be explained based on one case because, as described above, each case has different restrictions. Besides, I intended to analyse the similarities and differences between the cases (Yin 2003) to arrive at a reliable conclusion that would explain the phenomenon in depth.

3.2 Research Site and Rationale

I decided to choose one private international school and one private Chinese school for my research on teacher collaboration in Sabah, Malaysia. The first reason was that I work at one of the schools and knew that teachers do collaborate on school projects at this school. Besides, the so-called 'backyard' research could save me travelling time. The second reason was that I wanted the teachers to reflect on their collaborative activities as well as hoped to inspire them to continue collaborating with the results of my research which may include the neighbouring private school's collaborative experiences.

Another school is a private Chinese school where the teachers speak not only Chinese but also English and teach several core subjects in English to a group of IGCSE pupils. The reason for choosing this school was that its ethnic make-up is Chinese, so it

would therefore be interesting to investigate if ethnicity plays a role in collaboration, whether it encourages or inhibits collaboration among the teachers.

Because every school is different in terms of its vision and mission, management, student and teacher population and other conditions, selecting two schools helped me compare factors influencing collaboration at each school.

3.3 Sampling and Participants

Maximal variation sampling suited my study the most because it enables researchers to select a variety of secondary teachers (e.g., Maths, Science and English). I interviewed three teachers from each private school to gain diverse and unique insights or variations (Palinkas et al., 2015) that helped me explain the phenomenon in breadth.

The purposeful sampling strategy was used to select three teachers from each school who teach different subjects, are current collaborators and non-collaborators, are situated in two different contexts (private international and private local schools) and are at different stages of their career development. In the table below, I am presenting general information about my research participants: their codes and pseudonyms, teaching subject, gender, ethnicity, approximate age and years of teaching experience (Table 1). The demographic details could help the reader to gain more insights into the context of the study.

Table 1. Research Participants' Demographic Information

Participant's code and pseudonym	Subject	Gender	Ethnicity	Approximate age	Years of teaching experience

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE SECONDARY TEACHERS OF DIFFERENT SUBJECTS
TO COLLABORATE ON SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

Teacher 1, School A (Kathryn)	English Language	Female	Malay	mid-20s	1
Teacher 2, School A (Violet)	Science	Female	Native of Borneo	mid-20s	3
Teacher 3, School A (Benjamin)	Mathematics	Male	Chinese	mid-30s	13
Teacher 1, School B (Grace)	English Language	Female	Chinese	mid-50s	32
Teacher 2, School B (Carl)	Science	Male	Chinese	late 20s	3
Teacher 3, School B (Jeremy)	Mathematics	Male	Chinese	late 30s	11

In addition, to ascertain which teachers to invite to participate in my research and which are also eager to take part, I had an informal meeting with eight teachers from each school. After the teachers expressed their interest to participate in my study, I chose three from each school based on the above-described criteria.

3.4 Data Collection Tools

Firstly, I conducted a one-to-one semi-structured interview (Appendix D), which is considered a flexible form of interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2005), with the purposefully selected teachers. Interviewing not only analyses words and reports respondents' detailed answers, it also allows the interviewed to "speak in their own voice and express their own thoughts and feelings" (Berg, 2007, p. 96). Each interview gave me substantial answers on various aspects of collaboration: perceptions, initiation and strategies, motivating factors, challenges and components of successful collaboration.

Secondly, I was a non-participating observer (Yin, 1994) of collaborative and staff meetings. The focus of my observation was based on what teachers answered about collaboration in the interviews. The chosen teachers were requested to allow me access to one of their collaborative meetings on a school improvement or another collaborative project. The purpose of the observation was to see how they communicated, made shared decisions, built consensus, ensured equal participation, resolved issues and distributed roles and responsibilities. While watching and listening to their discussions, I was making notes in the specially designed observation form (Appendix E). Altogether, I conducted three observations of five teachers. The observations enabled me to compare what the participants said during the interviews with what I observed, determine what specific types of projects they collaborated and observe their collaborative tactics and communication in real time.

Lastly, I attempted to obtain the schools' documented records of school improvement projects conducted by teachers or teaching policy documents. I thought this data collection instrument could prove useful because it would allow me to compare the information received from the teachers with the recorded information in the documents. Besides, document analysis is mainly used as a complementary instrument (Bowen, 2009) to other data collection tools in the qualitative research method, primarily serving as a triangulation means in the study of the phenomenon (Denzin, 1970). Unfortunately, I received no access to the official documents. However, two teachers shared their meeting minutes of collaborative projects with me which helped to a certain extent with the analysis of the findings.

All three data collection instruments are different methods of collecting information, but they all equally helped me with cross-checking the validity and credibility of the collected information (Eisner, 1991). The use of these three methods also enabled me to triangulate the data which was necessary to validate the data.

3.5 Data Collection Procedures

The data collection process was a set of steps, outlined by Creswell (2014) that should be followed to collect data seamlessly and efficiently. Before beginning my data collection, I developed all the necessary design protocols and instruments (interview questions, an observation form and invitation and informed consent letters).

The first step was to identify the influential *gatekeepers* who would allow me access to the research sites and interaction with potential participants (Hay, 2000). They usually were principals and vice-principals at the schools. I contacted them by telephone to arrange for a meeting to discuss my research and answer their questions. Showing them key

research information (e.g., the letter to gatekeepers and informed consent form) on paper helped them understand an overview of the study. Although most people in Malaysia can read, speak and write in English, I had all the letters translated into Chinese: the letter to gatekeepers, the letter of invitation and the informed consent letter.

Once I received the gatekeepers' permission (Appendix A) to conduct my research at their schools, the second step was to have an informal face-to-face dialogue with several teachers to identify the most suitable candidates for participating in my research. Having given them all the important information about my research, I explained some parts and answered their questions during the preliminary informal meeting. I then requested the most suitable teachers, who met the criteria, by the letter of invitation (Appendix B), to participate in my research voluntarily. According to Cambridge and Forrester-Jones (2003) it is called "individualized communication" (p. 8). After they agreed to participate in my study, they were asked to sign the informed consent form (Appendix C).

The third step was conducting a semi-structured interview with the teachers. Each interview lasted about 40 minutes in a quiet place, chosen by the teachers, on the school's premises. I was aware that their timetables were full, so I asked them for the most convenient day and time to meet. I also recorded the teachers' interviews using a voice recording application on my telephone or iPad after asking for their permission.

The next step was document analysis; the documents were related to collaborative projects and were in the form of meeting minutes. They were studied and evaluated (Bowen, 2009) after the interviews to compare the teachers' answers against the documented information.

The fifth step involved observing collaborative meetings on a project of five participants; for some unknown reason, one did not respond to my observation request. I observed each teacher once for about 15-30 minutes.

The final step involved contacting several teachers by WhatsApp to clarify their answers or ask additional questions. It was useful to contact them again because I obtained fuller answers which made my data analysis process smoother.

The data collection process took two months, from December 2021 to January 2022. I only had one delay with School B; the vice-principal contacted me a week later, although I was promised that the meeting would occur earlier.

In return, the participants learned more, by reading the research results first-hand, about the investigated phenomenon. I also explained that this study would add to the body of academic knowledge for Sabah and may attract the attention of policy-makers who in the future, could consider the study findings when, for example, designing professional development courses.

3.6 Data Analysis

Analysing the interview data is a complex process that requires the use of various strategies on the part of researchers (ten Have, 1999).

To record the interviews, I used a recording application on my iPad so that I did not have to write every teacher's answer on the interview form as they answered. Making important verbatim notes in the designated spaces on the form was the best strategy because it enabled me to maintain eye contact with the participants throughout our dialogue and observe their body gestures for more insights as well as have the exact information I needed

when analysing the data. The notes helped me with the processes of labelling, organising codes into categories and developing themes (Appendix F). To identify themes effectively, I thoroughly read and re-read the interview material (Huner et al., 2002).

I did my best to analyse and code the gathered data by hand (Burnard et al., 2008) because this approach allowed me to remain close to the collected data and I also made additional notes. I transcribed the six interviews myself.

During observations, a specially designed form was used with several sections that reflect what I needed to observe: collaboration topic, participants' composition, collaborative strategies, communication styles and body language.

As for the analysis of the meeting minutes on collaborative projects, I thoroughly read them twice, highlighted the information relevant to my phenomenon and then compared it with the answers given by the participants. The information obtained from the meeting minutes corroborated or refuted the teachers' answers. I thus had much more valid data for my findings section.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Every researcher should put ethical practices at the forefront before they even begin their research. Therefore, when conducting my study, I complied with the standards specified by the NU Institutional Research Ethics Committee.

The informed consent form included all the key information about the research: benefits, details about the study and interviews, a clear and informative introduction about the researcher and her contact details, contact details of the research supervisor and the NUGSE Ethics Committee, the assurance of confidentiality (use of unidentifiable pseudonyms for the

research sites and participants so that no one but myself knows about the place and the participants), the explanation of voluntary participation and withdrawal from the study at any time. Although it is almost impossible to guarantee anonymity and confidentiality in qualitative research, I took every possible measure to ensure the confidentiality of the teachers and research sites.

To ensure my participants' anonymity from others, I concealed their names and, to protect their confidentiality, they are unidentifiable in all reporting (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). For example, to ensure that nobody knows that they are participating in my research, pseudonyms were used throughout the study and the final paper. In addition, to protect the teachers' confidentiality, when transcribing the data, I assigned them numbers instead of using their names. Soft data was stored on my laptop computer in a password-protected folder, while the filled-in observation forms were locked away in my study desk drawer at home.

However, there is always the risk that the collected data can be lost, stolen or someone might access it without my permission. To prevent such adversities from occurring, I transferred all the recorded interviews to a password-protected folder on my personal computer so that I was the only person who had access to it. I also made a copy of the folder and kept it in Dropbox. The observation form and other papers with notes were kept in a safe place, a locked drawer of my desk.

Another risk could be that the teachers themselves decide to disclose their participation or information about the research to third parties. These acts would obviously break their anonymity and confidentiality. Therefore, when explaining the consent form and my research, I stressed the importance of remaining anonymous and keeping all the

information confidential if they wanted to avoid any negative consequences. While my study does not pose any threats to the teachers' reputations or employment, they could still face some psychological pressure, gossip, envy or unwanted, provocative questions from colleagues, being few examples.

As a researcher, I have the responsibility to report all my findings, positive and negative, honestly and objectively (Creswell, 2014). To accomplish this, I did not plagiarise or added any of my thoughts or opinions to the findings section. I was impartial throughout my study, did not disclose any information to anyone I knew, asking for their advice for example, and not build any personal relations with the participants. Besides, the participants had the right and freedom to withdraw from the study or from the interview at any time without giving a reason and it would not have any negative consequences for them. They could also skip answering the questions that made them feel uncomfortable.

Upon having analysed the data and written about the results, in accordance with the NU policy and international academic rules, I must retain the collected soft and hard data for a minimum of three years. In case of an official inspection, the data should be readily available.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this multi-case study was to explore six secondary Malaysian teachers' perceptions of collaboration, their methods of collaboration as well as the factors which impede or facilitate collaboration in their school settings and contexts. The researcher believed that a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of collaboration would give Malaysian and other teachers more insights into the factors affecting collaboration on school improvement projects in secondary schools. This chapter presents key findings obtained from six semi-structured interviews, observations of collaborative meetings and document analysis.

The following four categories have emerged from analysis of the data obtained for this study:

1. Perceptions of collaboration,
2. Motivation behind collaboration,
3. Components of successful collaboration and
4. Challenges of collaboration,

Each category has been further divided into themes which were meticulously analysed and interpreted, with the support of effective quotations, so that the reader can have a thorough understanding of the investigated phenomenon.

4.2 Perceptions of Collaboration

The first and second research questions in this study sought to determine the Malaysian secondary school teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards collaboration, its importance in their teaching context, and the methods they use to initiate it; therefore, they were asked a series of questions to explore their perceptions and methods of collaboration. As a result, their answers revealed the following four themes: 1) Teamwork; 2) Goal achievement; and 3) Sharing ideas and imparting knowledge.

4.2.1 Teamwork

The majority of participants stated that *working in a team and as a team* is one of the cornerstones of collaboration. According to their answers, the team spirit can act as a driving force to sustain any collaboration because it would inspire teachers of different subjects and backgrounds to feel more confident on their journey to achieving a common goal set at the beginning of a collaborative project. Teacher 2 from School B clearly stated, "Working in teams. Science teachers working together, different subject working together on some project. Something like that" (Carl, 18.9.2021). One possible explanation for his answer is that when collaborating, different subject teachers contribute their knowledge that can be beneficial to other collaborators during the process of collaboration. For example, every teacher usually knows only their subject content and therefore has one perspective on the discussed topic/issue, while another subject teacher might have a different perspective on the same topic/issue, based on the knowledge of their subject and experience. This may denote that different perspectives from different subject teachers, working as a team, can make a collaborative experience richer and more meaningful for all.

However, there is Teacher 1 from School B who does not find collaboration important or necessary due to many reasons: high teaching workload, long days, excessive paperwork and general disinterest in the concept of collaboration. This attitude, according to Teacher 1, is understandable because some teachers can really be buried in work and struggle to find any time for collaborative team activities, and, perhaps, they also prefer working alone either because they have an introverted personality or lack intrinsic motivation.

4.2.2 Goal achievement

The second theme that falls in the same category is *goal achievement*. It is something important for every collaboration as indicated by the participants during the interviews. They see no point in collaborating with colleagues if there is no clear goal to achieve at the end. Most participants hold the belief that every collaborative project should have not only one main goal but also objectives which help achieve that main goal. Teacher 2 from School A said this, “There should be the main goal. Other goals can be achieved too, but the main goal of collaboration must be achieved” (Violet, 19.9.2021). In addition, two participants indicated that, from their collaborative experience, setting main goal reminds them of the project purpose and simplifies the procedure of determining objectives.

Half the teachers shared about the goals that they had achieved during collaborative projects with colleagues. One complex project, involving many teachers, was an online graduation ceremony for year 11 students last year. Teacher 1 from School A said that the main goals were to engage as many teachers as possible to assist all students with creating impeccable videos as well as give the teachers a chance to learn the use of movie-making and editing skills.

4.2.3 Sharing ideas and imparting knowledge

The above theme leads me to discuss the last theme in the same category, which is sharing ideas and imparting knowledge.

According to the majority of the participants, without an idea there would most likely be no collaborative activity or goal achievement; it thus all begins with some idea for a project. This idea can be an issue that requires attention at the school, something beneficial to student learning or an event that needs to be organised to make the school a better place. Besides, while participants share ideas, they impart knowledge; in other words, they speak from their life and work experience. Teacher 2 from School B explained, “Because I don’t know everything and I also want to promote Science in XYZ (town)...” (Carl, 18.9.2021). From his statement it can be inferred that, although he is an experienced teacher who claimed to know plenty about his subject, it does not mean that only his ideas and knowledge matter. His desire to promote the subject depends on the collective effort and ideas of others. Alone, he may not be able to promote the subject successfully. The above can also be corroborated by what Teacher 2 from School A said, “Yes, I can get new insights and ideas. During collaboration, one can get more insights and ideas” (Violet, 19.9.2021). Her words imply that the more ideas are shared, the more collaborators can learn about a collaborative project and reasons for its importance.

Another participant, Teacher 3 from School A, replied the following to the question on the topic, “By communicating we share ideas, make joint decisions...but you also get to share your ideas and hear others’ ideas...” (Benjamin, 21.9.2021). He seems to think that, after everybody shares their ideas with colleagues, it is possible to make a good decision on which project to collaborate.

From this finding, it can be inferred that collaboration thrives on sharing ideas and knowledge, listening to others, discussions and suggestions.

From my observations of the collaborative meetings (Oserv. 5.12.2021), I detected one commonality; all the observed participants were active and responsive during their collaborative activities. They all asked and answered questions, gave suggestions, agreed and disagreed with ideas/suggestions, gave opinions and added details. The observation implies that once entered into a collaboration, teachers may suddenly realise that it is a good chance for their voice to be heard. Interestingly, one teacher who said that she deemed collaborative activities useless or had no time to collaborate was an eager collaborator herself during the meetings.

4.3 Motivating Factors

The third research question intended to analyse the factors which facilitate the secondary Malaysian teachers' collaboration on school improvement projects. As a result, three themes emerged based on the participants answers: 1) Collaboration as a tool; 2) Learning and environment; and 3) The role of leaders. The evidence and explanations below should help answer the question.

4.3.1 Collaboration as a tool to solve problems

According to the participants' views, there are sometimes specific reasons when they need to use collaboration as a tool. These could be to solve a problem, for student benefit or for school improvement.

Teacher 1 from School B, who in the past had student behaviour problems, needed to collaborate with another English teacher to help her solve various behavioural issues. Her

method was to approach the teacher and ask her for advice on how to handle the issue. The other teacher usually advised Grace on the student's patterns of behaviour and why they occurred. Grace then tested a different method to help the student change their behaviour.

This is what she said:

Sometimes there's a problem with a student, we also need to solve it... I approach the teacher who know the student well and ask for her advice on how to understand the student better and why his/her behaviour is the way it is. They usually suggest a method and I then try it on the student. (Grace, 18.9.2021)

From what the participant stated, it is possible that collaboration can sometimes be a useful instrument to solve student behaviour issues.

Another participant, Benjamin, from School A, used collaboration with former colleagues as a tool for the project that he believes has benefited his Year 11 students. Benjamin collaborated with a former co-worker from an A-level school to introduce his graduate class to a higher-level learning programme because he wanted to expose them to a further studying option. The following are his words regarding the above project, "I'd collaborate on projects that would help students develop research/independent learning skills" (Benjamin, 21.9.2021).

Teacher Violet, from School A, finds that she prefers collaborating with colleagues only if it benefits the whole school. In her opinion, teaching interactive and thinking-orientated subjects, for example Global Perspectives, helps grow not only her students but also the school. This is what she said, "Students are becoming more confident. Everybody must speak, have a chance to speak, during the GPs subject compared to other subject, where teachers mostly lead discussions instead of students" (Violet, 19.9.2021).

Although I have not received any recorded information about school improvement projects, being an English teacher at School A, I confirm that such projects occur in the form of Language Week, English Day, Science/Maths Week or internal competitions such as the story/comic-writing competition in English, with a preliminary training provided for the students, and the speech contest in three languages organised by the Malay, Chinese and English departments.

4.3.2 Learning and environment

It seems that collaboration can act as a conduit for learning where teachers learn about themselves, different skills and other unexpected knowledge.

Some teachers are motivated to learn intrinsically while others need an extrinsic influence, often an imposed one, to help them learn. This is what Teacher 3 from School B said, “So they’re reluctant to learn on their own. However, if someone organises a workshop and it’s compulsory, they’re willing to learn” (Jeremy, 22.9.2021). Naturally, teachers are supposed to seek learning because they are in the profession that requires continuous learning, considering the quick pace of the education development around the world. However, based on the teachers’ comments, the case is otherwise; teachers may need to be told when and what to learn, instead of their taking initiative.

Other participants indicated that they had learnt specific skills and practical knowledge during collaborations. For example, Teacher 2 from School A said, “What I’ve learnt is listening to ideas, be open to suggestions and solutions. And also have been learning to accept the ideas of others and how to communicate with others effectively” (Violet, 19.9.2021). The finding implies that the teacher has improved her communication skills in the process of collaboration. Another teacher from School 1 seems to have learnt to be more

meticulous and developed a rather determined approach to completion when organising collaborative projects. He said the following:

I learnt that it takes effort and time to do projects. It seems easy on surface to arrange for one, but it really is difficult. Attention to detail is needed. But the end result can be very enjoyable. Also, initiation isn't enough, one must see it through. (Benjamin, 21.9.2021)

Another teacher from School B has acquired new knowledge from experiments conducted by other science teachers with whom he was collaborating. In addition, he reported that he knew his colleagues better now and that communication amongst them had improved.

These are his words:

I learnt about different experiments from Biology, Physics and Chemistry teachers. That positive results from the project can motivate you to do more. To add, by looking at the Ss' work on the projects (findings) of Biology for example, I learnt a lot about the subject. I also got to know the teachers better and communication amongst us became better. (Carl, 18.9.2021)

The above finding demonstrates that collaborations among different subject teachers can lead to new learning and overall improvement of relationships.

Interestingly, Teacher 3 from School B said that collaboration can provide a cathartic release. These are his words:

I found that my colleagues were receptive and supportive, which helped me rid of all kinds of fears. I learnt that my colleagues were eager to collaborate and learn as well as were understanding. I encountered a positive attitude. (Jeremy, 22.9.2021)

The reason why this may happen during collaboration is because it is natural for humans to be afraid of what other people think of them or how others would react to their words or behaviour. Therefore, a positive and tactful attitude of colleagues can help all collaborators to feel confident and valued.

4.3.3 The role of school leaders

The support of collaboration by school leaders in different ways featured strongly in my participants' answers.

Most of them contended that principals and vice-principals should provide facilities, allocate time and funding, and encourage teachers to collaborate. The comment by Teacher 3 from School A explicitly corroborates the above, "They are supposed to provide facilities, funds, encourage teachers to collaborate" (Benjamin, 21.9.2021). His answer implies that the teachers at his school may not receive all the support they need to make collaborations part of school culture. In addition, school leaders should consider making the collaborating teachers' timetables more flexible, allowing them for the needed time for collaboration. Teacher 3 School B thus said, "Sometimes we need flexible timing, depending on the project, we may need some time off for meetings" (Jeremy, 22.9.2021). Indeed, finding time to collaborate is often difficult, if not impossible, and it pushes teachers to work overtime. That in turn makes collaboration a heavy burden that can only be done occasionally.

It is no surprise that a few teachers noted that receiving benefits for doing additional work, such as collaboration, would encourage them to collaborate more. The mentioned benefits are largely of a financial nature. Half the teachers, two from School B and one from School A stated that they would be more motivated to collaborate on projects with colleagues

if financial incentives were offered to them. These are the words of Teacher 1 from School B, “But they should also offer incentives, perhaps financial at the end of the year” (Grace, 18.9.2021). Another teacher from School A said this, “Having tangible benefits could encourage teachers to collaborate more” (Kathryn, 6.1.2022).

4.4. Components for successful collaboration

More themes pertaining to the third research question, which intended to investigate the factors which enable the secondary Malaysian teachers’ collaboration on school improvement projects, have been revealed. As a result, three themes emerged based on the participants answers: 1) Moral support and skills training; 2) Relevance and room for spontaneity; and 3) Structure, flexibility and pro-activity. The evidence and interpretations below should further answer the third question.

4.4.1 Moral support and skills training

Depending on the context and setting, components for successful collaboration may vary. The five components that my study on collaboration in two secondary Malaysian schools revealed are moral support and skills training, relevance, structure and flexibility, room for spontaneity and pro-activity.

One important component named by half the participants from School A and B are moral support and advice from leaders. Their belief is that the school leadership should be empathetic to teachers because empathy could encourage them to go the extra mile in integrating collaboration into the school culture. This is what one of the teachers said “Providing moral support and advice, help solve problems when they arise during collaborating projects” (Carl, 18.9.2021). Similarly, another teacher stated, “Providing

training on how to collaborate, giving moral support... Appreciation, incentives are very important” (Kathryn, 6.9.2022). A possible explanation for this finding could be that teachers are humans and, like any human, they long to be valued, recognised for their contributions and supported by people around them.

In addition, successful collaboration also requires collaborative and communication skills. Five out of six participants believe that teachers lack them and that school leaders should provide appropriate training either for collaboration leaders or all teachers. This is what Teacher 3 from School B said, “Perhaps arrange for some training for collaboration leaders” (Jeremy, 19.9.2021). Another teacher echoed that teacher saying, “It would be good to receive some training on collaboration too” (Grace, 18.9.2021). It can be concluded that this specific Malaysian context is new to the concept of collaboration because, despite understanding collaboration generally and participating in it, most teachers neither have relevant skills nor have been helped develop them.

4.4.2 Relevance and room for spontaneity

It seems that collaboration in the Malaysian context is mainly considered a chore, primarily because it is contrived; in other words, for most participants it is no pleasant spontaneous activity in which they are eager to engage willingly.

Most participants contend that collaborative activities should be relevant to their teaching, school improvement and meeting student needs. They in unison said that they would highly unlikely collaborate if a proposed collaboration bears no relevance to what they teach and the needs of their students. Here is what Teacher 3 from School A answered, ‘First, it’s beneficial to students’ (Benjamin, 21.9.2021). Another teacher from School B contended

saying “You see it isn’t related to the syllabus, so they think it is unnecessary work” (Carl, 18.9.2021). Teacher 1 from School A, who is intrinsically motivated to collaborate, said this, “Teachers should feel that what they do is important and helps improve the school” (Kathryn, 6.9.2022). Reading between the lines, she most probably refers to the ability of seeing the bigger picture when collaborating on school projects, which not many teachers can really do.

Two participants also noted that they prefer spontaneously organised collaborations, as the need arises at the school. It gives them a chance to decide on what collaboration is needed and this also may have to do with having a deeper understanding of the existing problems at the school. This is what Teacher 1 from School B said, “Maybe...personal responsibility, when we see something needs to be improved, we initiate a collaborative activity spontaneously” (Grace, 18.9.2021). Similarly, Teacher 3 from School B answered this, “As for other projects, we see what’s happening around the school and then discuss what needs to be improved. It can be spontaneous” (Jeremy, 19.9.2021). Thus, room for the situational collaborations can play an instrumental role in encouraging teachers to collaborate while helping them learn the essential skills.

4.4.3 Structure, flexibility and pro-activity

A collaboration can be considered a series of meetings and it therefore should have a structure: a leader, a clear timeframe, set dates for follow-up meetings, goals to be achieved and roles for all collaborators.

Several of my research participants asserted that collaborative meetings should be taken seriously by all participants. For example, the Science teacher from School A believes

that no goal can be achieved in one collaborative meeting; thus, it is important that a number of them take place. The same teacher also explained that each project must have a detailed timeline so that it is easier to plan the time and know the exact length of the project. Having a good leader throughout a collaborative project is also vital. This is what she said, “But the goal can only be achieved if a few meetings take place. With one meeting, it wouldn’t be possible... Giving the timeline of the project helps me stay motivated... You need a good leader and enough time” (Violet, 22.9.2021). Another participant, Teacher 1 from School B, believes that during the first meeting of a collaborative project the roles and responsibilities must be clearly defined. This is what she said, “We had a meeting during which we divided the roles and responsibilities” (Grace, 18.9.2021).

Another factor that could help collaborations be successful is flexibility, specifically flexible means of communication and timing. The former refers to the use of communications technology for collaboration such as Telegram, WhatsApp and e-mail, whereas the latter implies that not every collaboration should always have a set time and date, perhaps they should depend on the availability of all participants. Besides, for some collaborative projects it is necessary to relieve teachers of their teaching duties so that they can focus on making them happen. Here is what Teacher 3 from School B said, “...we had to use technology such as Google Classroom, Telegram, WhatsApp, e-mail, etc. We were pushing the use of Telegram instead of WhatsApp as it offers more functions”, “Sometimes we need flexible timing, depending on the project, we may need some time off for meetings” (Jeremy, 19.9.2021). Although this factor was not mentioned by the majority of the participants, it can still be considered important because collaboration and time are interdependent.

The last significant factor which can make a collaboration more successful is pro-activity. According to the answers of most participants, they are reluctant to participate in collaborative projects for various reasons and that can stall projects or put too much responsibility on few teachers who collaborate. They therefore believe that teachers should be more enthusiastic, try to change their current mindset to a more collaborative one and be more open to new ideas and forms of working. This is what Teacher 2 from School A said to corroborate the above, “But I have one suggestion that, when the project is initiated, more teachers should participate... I guess another one is willingness to participate/collaborate” (Violet, 22.9.2021). Similarly, Teacher 3 from School B affirmed, “It’d also help if teachers were more open-minded and initiative” (Jeremy, 19.9.2021).

4.5 Challenges of Collaboration

The fourth research question intended to determine the factors that impede the secondary Malaysian teachers’ collaboration on school improvement projects. Thus, three themes emerged based on the participants answers: 1) Work pressures/demands; 2) Communication and language; and 3) Indifference and lack of motivation. Below I am presenting the evidence for the findings.

4.5.1 Work pressures

Teaching, according to the participants, is a demanding profession and not in vain. Educators are required to teach long hours, multi-task, juggle time, maintain relationships with different stakeholders, and complete an insurmountable load of paperwork often set with deadlines. The daily pressures obviously impact teachers’ attitudes to additional responsibilities, with one being collaboration.

Most participants stated that high workload and a lack of time discourage them from collaborating. The following quoted words by Teacher 3 from School B explain the main hindering factors: “Workload, long working hours. Lack of time, especially during the exam time” (Benjamin, 21.9.2021). The above statement is echoed by Teacher 2 from School B: “Yes, the decreased teaching workload gives more time for planning collaborative activities” (Carl, 18.9.2021). According to him, the school principal decreased his teaching workload to enable him to engage in internal and external collaborations.

Having pressure to collaborate from school leaders is another factor that ‘puts off’ several teachers from participating in collaborations. Their response was that they saw no point in collaborating on certain projects; however, they were given no choice but collaborate because, if they did not, there would more likely be some sort of negative consequences, evidently unspoken of. Teacher 1 from School B said this: “Unnecessary paperwork, pressure from leadership, deadlines of all kinds” (Grace, 18.9.2021). It seems that the teacher finds it challenging to cope with the daily demands of her profession, and collaboration is unequivocally the last thing she desires to do, unless it is imposed by the principal. According to Teacher 1, she teaches 25 lessons a week to five different secondary classes in addition to writing lesson plans, marking homework and tests, devising tests and helping the low-achieving students. Hence, the heavy workload probably leaves Grace with limited time to collaborate with colleagues on projects.

4.5.2 Communication and language

Communication and the use of language is another important theme that emerged under the category of challenges. Humans are social beings who usually work in groups; therefore, daily verbal communication is inevitable.

All the research participants acknowledged the difficulties with communication with their co-workers during collaborations. They are especially concerned with their poor communication skills. To give an example, Teacher 1 from School A said the following, “...and poor communication skill that can prevent teachers from collaborating with each other” (Kathryn, 6.1.2022). It is possible that they were referring to their colleagues’ abruptness, inability to argue intelligently and accept others’ opinions and miscommunications which occur when another language is spoken during a collaborative activity. In Malaysia, three languages are spoken: Malay, Chinese and English. Therefore, it is common to hear people switching from one language to another. This could certainly sometimes cause misunderstandings and miscommunications.

Two teachers also named language barrier as an inhibiting factor for collaboration. According to three participants, not understanding the language spoken during collaboration can be frustrating because, firstly, it is considered poor work ethic and, secondly, it can cause collaborators not to voice their opinions or ideas because they lack confidence to speak the language in which collaboration is conducted. Teacher 2 from School A stated, “Language barrier not only for foreigners but also with some local teachers” (Violet, 22.9.2021). In addition, this educator refers to encountering language barrier with locals too. A possible explanation for this could be that, although most teachers are able to communicate in three languages, there are some local teachers, primarily Malays, who lack a certain language skill, for example Chinese, and this inability can consequently prevent them from collaborating with their co-workers.

When observing one inter-ethnic staff meeting, I noticed that the Malays were all sitting on one side and keeping quiet for the most part whereas the Chinese and foreign

teachers were actively making comments or asking questions (Observ. 15.12.2021). In my personal experiences of working with teachers of different ethnicities, such behaviour during meetings could be attributed to the cultural differences in communication and the degree of confidence in speaking a certain language, in this case English. However, there could be other explanations for this phenomenon such as personality type, school culture, domination of specific ethnicity, among others.

4.5.3 Indifference and lack of motivation

The next important theme relates to the teachers' indifferent attitude and their lack of motivation to collaboration. In my own observation and experience, these two factors are quite common in my teaching context because most teachers see no benefit in collaboration and receive little support and reward from school leaders. Thus, one teacher indicated, with four others contending, that their colleagues or they are not interested in collaborative activities due to different reasons such as additional work, a lack of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and being content with what they know, so they have no interest in learning anything new. One of the answers to the relevant questions from Teacher 2 from School B was the following, "It's extra work and they don't really want to do it" (Carl, 18.9.2021). At present, as reported by Teacher 1 from School A, her colleagues receive no financial incentives or additional professional development for participating in collaboration; they are only verbally praised. Two other teachers from Schools A and B reiterated the above. Their answers suggest that school leaders need to think of the effective methods of different forms to engage more teachers in collaborations.

4.5.4 Skills and character traits

The ability to collaborate successfully requires key skills and specific character traits. The good news is that the skills can be developed provided a proper training is given.

Most participants said that communication skill is key should a collaboration go smoothly and be fruitful. One reason for it might be that in any collaboration people need to speak, take turn to speak, offer their opinions/ideas, answer/ask questions and agree/disagree with what is said. Teacher 3 from School B stated, “Developing teachers’ communication skills is critical” (Benjamin, 21.9.2021). His reply indicates that communication skills must be developed before teachers can successfully collaborate.

Besides, two teachers also contend that people need to possess certain character traits and have specific personalities to be able to participate in collaborative activities. According to my participants’ answers, they should be open-minded, initiative and extroverted. These are the words of Teacher 2 from School A “Second one is being open to different ideas and points of view” (Violet, 22.9.2021). Teacher 3 from School B said the following, “And also the quieter, more introverted or less communicative types, tend not to collaborate, especially initiate a collaborative activity” (Jeremy, 19.9.2021). While learning to be more open-minded and initiative is possible, changing the personality type may be an insurmountable task, which implies the latter can be the deciding factor that prevents a teacher from participating in collaboration.

4.6 Summary

In this chapter, the findings from semi-structured interviews, collaborative meeting observations and documents analysis have been presented. The first section described the findings related to the secondary teachers' understanding of collaboration and its importance. The second discussed the strategies and reasons for collaborating with colleagues. The third section described the findings on the factors which motivate the teachers to collaborate with each other. And the last one focused on the factors that prevent the teachers from collaborating as well as the challenges that they encounter in collaboration. In the next chapter I intend to discuss the main findings that answer my research questions and corroborate them with the findings from relevant studies and literature.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I shall be discussing my study's main findings under the following themes: 1) Participants' notions of collaboration; 2) Purposes collaboration can serve; 3) Factors influencing collaboration; and 4) Challenges of collaboration. These themes together with their findings have emerged during the data analysis of the present research which aimed at investigating the factors that enable or impede private secondary teachers in Malaysia to collaborate on a school improvement project. My study was guided by the theoretical framework derived from the PLC Theory (DuFour & Eaker, 1998) and the Socio-Cultural Learning Theory (Vygotsky, 1977). Thus, in this chapter I intend to interpret and synthesise the findings described in the previous chapter in relation to the reviewed literature in Chapter Two, other relevant literature as well as the research questions.

5.2 Participants' Notions of Collaboration

As the findings in the previous chapter revealed, the participants have developed personal understanding, beliefs and views on what collaboration is and the purposes it can serve. Based on their understanding of collaboration, they have developed certain strategies and methods to foster collaboration at their schools.

5.2.1 Teamwork

Most of my research participants contended that working as a team in collaborations is vital. In their understanding, teamwork promotes learning, builds relationships, helps solve problems and achieve goals.

The above finding can refer to the concept of group cohesion (Meirink et al., 2009), which is deemed important by several researchers. For example, Evans (1991) and Forte and Flores (2014) identified it as one of the most important factors influencing teacher collaboration, whereas Little (2003) and Shaw (1981) argued that the presence of cohesion in teams can create a peaceful collaborative environment where goals are achieved and problems are solved almost effortlessly. Besides, Stoll and Louis (2007) insisted that for a PLC to be effective, group cohesion is essential; not only it enables teachers to communicate openly, it also leads to improvement of their teaching practices.

5.2.2 Goal achievement

One key value named by most teachers is goal achievement. They believe that there is no use in collaborating on something that has no clear common goal and objectives. In other words, when teachers see a common goal and purpose of collaboration, they are motivated to collaborate and make collective efforts to achieve the common goal.

Friend (2000) names shared goals as a key characteristic of teacher collaboration. Besides, many other researchers contended that it is essential to have common goals in collaboration for the benefit of an organisation and the participants (Cook & Friend, 1991; Welch & Sheridan, 1995; West, 1990). In addition, they stated that the goals should be set by the collaborators themselves because then, during collaborations, teachers would feel more committed to achieving the goals. Little (1990) argued that for the aims to be achieved, it is necessary that all collaborators share responsibility.

As a researcher and an English Language teacher from School A, I believe that the statements above make perfect sense. A collaborative activity should have an action plan, just like a life plan that people create for themselves, that has the principal aim and

objectives. The latter can always be played with, modified or eliminated, depending on the progress of collaboration, but the former should be defined at an early stage so that all collaborators know exactly what should be achieved and by when. Such a strategy may serve as insurance for teachers' motivation, active participation and contribution.

5.2.3 Sharing ideas and imparting knowledge

The participants strongly believe that without an idea there would be no collaboration and that sharing their knowledge during collaboration must take place for it to continue and prosper. This finding is relevant because the whole idea of collaboration is built upon the ideas of the contributors. In addition, the exchange of ideas leads to imparting or sharing knowledge, whether intentionally or not.

To support the above finding, Fullan and Hargreaves (1991) called collaboration a working environment in which teachers share ideas as well as an important activity in their teaching routine. Besides, Rozenholtz (1989) identified knowledge-sharing as the key value in collaboration explaining that collaboration promotes life-long learning and improves pedagogical skills; in other words, practical learning could help teachers become more competent teachers.

One of my research participants specified that collaborating, especially with different subject teachers, can help teachers learn new knowledge and skills encouraging them to apply the learnt in their teaching. This response makes the finding significant because it relates to the teachers' professional development and coincides with the findings of Kafyulilo (2013) and Lumpe (2007) who discovered that the knowledge gained by teachers

during collaboration was usually used in their teaching practices; therefore, collaboration can be an effective professional development tool.

5.3 Purposes Collaboration Can Serve

The participants believed that collaboration among teachers on a school improvement project serves many purposes, including the following.

5.3.1 Collaboration as a tool to solve problems

Several teachers reported that they use collaboration as a tool to solve different problems, specifically student behaviour or the problems occurring among teachers. The finding is interesting because it indicates that teachers collaborate in their settings, whether it is obligatory or voluntary. In other words, they always have opportunities to work together and most importantly, in demanding circumstances, they need to initiate a collaboration with stakeholders of different ranks to solve a problem before it is inflated.

Being able to solve problems productively should be the goal of any organization, according to Hill and Guthrie (1999). They claimed that schools which managed to solve problems effectively had strong “integrative capital” (p. 515); the capital acts as glue that keeps schools together using many other capitals such as human, intellectual, social and social.

Because schools are considered learning entities, Senge et al. (2000) and Tschannen-Moran, Uline, Hoy and Mackley (2000) argued that by solving problems collectively, learning often takes place. Thus, Tschannen-Moran et al. (2000) identified two methods that encourage schools to adopt continuous learning: one is collaboration among teachers and another collaboration between teachers and school leaders. The researchers

stated that the use of the above methods could increase a school's capacity to solve problems in a constantly changing educational environment and simultaneously improve student achievement.

5.3.2 Learning from collaboration

During the semi-structured interviews, my research participants explained that collaboration must be orientated at improving teaching skills and student achievement. Similarly, the collaborative meeting minutes reflected the projects above. All the teachers regard collaboration as unimportant if it is for other reasons. As a teacher, I agree with their answers and believe that it is vital that collaboration in some aspect enhances teachers' knowledge that in turn supports students' academic accomplishments. Besides, it is natural that teachers expect to improve their teaching skills during collaboration because, while they interact and exchange ideas/knowledge, learning and meanings are constructed (Nyikos & Hashimoto, 1997).

According to Shah (2012), collaboration is a form of professional development that offers teachers opportunities to acquire knowledge and learn new skills. Several participants mentioned that they sometimes were astonished with the 'aha' moments, they were experiencing during collaborations with their colleagues: in particular, with other subject teachers or when collaborating on a long-term project. This echoes the findings of Kaplan (2015) who discovered that the more teachers pour their hearts and souls into collaborations, the more they tend to reflect on their teaching practice thereby improving it. It appears that learning from peers in collaborations can be an effective professional development instrument.

Besides, most participants contended that collaborations should bear relevance to students and some aspects of their learning. This finding can be supported by Johnson and Johnson's (1990) study which suggested that teachers are willing to collaborate with their co-workers on topics which interest students or on something students need to learn. The study conducted by Goddard, Goddard and Tshannen-Moran (2007) revealed that elementary school teachers who had been collaborating increased their students' level of achievement. Further research on this correlation demonstrated that the frequency of collaboration among teachers may be a good reason for the students' increased performance. Other researchers discovered that teachers' collaborative practices encourage them to implement new methods of teaching in their classroom resulting in improving student learning (Almog & Shecktman, 2007; Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2004). However, should secondary schools want collaboration to improve student learning in the long term, school leaders are advised to cultivate quality collaboration by implementing specific models of supervision, assessment and professional development (Pappano, 2007).

5.4 Factors Influencing Collaboration

As discussed in the findings chapter, collaboration does not occur automatically at a school context. The school leadership, teachers and other actors need to initiate collaboration and be committed to make it a success. According to the participants, there are several factors that support or inhibit collaboration at schools. Thus, some of those factors are discussed below.

5.4.1 Role of leadership

Half the participants said that having a good leader is essential for initiating and sustaining a collaboration; one reason for it is that the leader reminds the participants of the importance of the collaboration, its mission and goals, and another is that a capable leader organises follow-up meetings and monitors the time within which the goals of collaboration must be achieved. Three of my research participants prefer to be led during collaborations; the same I observed in the collaborative meetings I attended. Three other participants, however, initiate collaboration regularly by making contact first, arranging for a meeting to discuss the idea and thereafter maintaining consecutive meetings. They also stated that they have been learning new skills and knowledge and making astonishing discoveries while collaborating.

According to the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO, 2011), taking initiative to lead plays an instrumental role in collaboration; by taking the risk in initiating collaboration may lead to improved teaching and learning and interactions among teachers. Fullan and Hargreaves (1992) claimed that by taking risks, school leaders and teachers can create new learning opportunities which then motivate them to initiate collaboration as well as advise colleagues on how to do it. Other researchers, Alvarez & Anderson-Ketchmark (2011), compared being initiative to wearing a leadership cap that promotes professional learning. All in all, the main benefit of initiating collaboration appears to be fostering of professional learning in schools. My conceptual framework (Figure 1) contains a component that refers to the importance of school leadership. Phillips (2003) claimed that strong leaders are friendly learners who understand that the power must be shared, and that they are also vital for creating a conducive-to-learning environment for teachers (Hord, 1997).

5.4.2 Moral support

All the participants referred to certain forms of support from school leadership as important. One was conducive-to-collaboration environment and another provision of various forms of support by school leaders. It is understandable why the teachers reported that these factors enable collaboration. Firstly, a favourable environment for collaboration can be a place where teachers gain insights and form mutually beneficial relationships with each other. Secondly, if different forms of support are provided by school leaders, teachers may be more eager to find time for collaboration outside the working hours, engage more colleagues and follow through with collaborations.

Positive conditions for collaboration at school, according to Hord (2004), can help teachers to develop a feeling of solidarity, feel more inspired and more confident in their skills and knowledge. For example, cultivating a team spirit among teachers by arranging seminars or workshops, lesson planning meetings and/or organising various school events, could signal to teachers that the environment for collaboration is favourable. Besides, such activities as co-teaching and joint lesson planning with an inspiring teacher can motivate other teachers not only to interact but also create a conducive-to-learning environment (Nias, Southworth & Yeomans, 1989). Thus, several Malaysian researchers indicated that continuous support from school leaders, who are aware of the collaboration mechanics, is essential for establishing an effective collaborative culture (Chuan et al., 2013).

Receiving various forms of support during collaborations from school leaders refers to a more democratic attitude to collaboration, specifically the moving mosaic model (Hargreaves, 1994). In this model, teachers are given freedom and flexibility, when, where, how and with whom to collaborate and are considered equal professionals, while they are

being provided with professional development opportunities by school leaders (Hargreaves, 1994).

5.4.3 Relevance and flexibility

The findings of my study indicate that most participants prefer participating in collaborations which are relevant to their daily work. According to their answers, when they collaborate on the topics related to their teaching, they feel that they not only learn new skills or knowledge but also help their students achieve greater heights.

The above can be corroborated by the finding of Wlodkowski (2003) who discovered that teachers' interest in the collaborative process increases when they know that the collaboration has value to them, in terms of being relevant to their teaching practices. Besides, relevance motivates them to initiate and sustain professional collaborations (Wlodkowski, 2003).

In addition, relevance can be connected to voluntary collaboration, which as opposed to mandatory collaboration, may encourage teachers to take initiative as necessary, making it flexible, and participate in collaboration without pressure from superiors (Friend, 2000). In other words, when teachers identify the need to act, for example, to solve a problem relevant to them or their students, they are more likely to initiate a collaborative activity. Baumi's (2016) research revealed that voluntary collaboration is ideal because it usually inspires teachers to collaborate with co-workers on topics that interest them or to solve problems.

5.4.4 Communication

All the participants agreed that good communication and having specific traits of character are essential for collaboration. Two main traits were named by the participants:

an open mind and a positive attitude to teaching and learning. A possible explanation for this finding is that collaboration implies the working together of people from diverse ethnic and educational backgrounds as well as of different ages and from different belief systems; this means that the above character traits are useful in collaborations.

According to Peterson (1994), professional collaboration implies being in constant dialogue with colleagues by regularly sharing ideas and knowledge as well as solving problems, so the ability to communicate well is important for collaboration. Besides, Friend (2000) contended that one of the pivotal characteristics of collaboration is good communication skills and insisted that positive interactions are necessary for maintaining equality among all collaborators. The positive interactions can be non-verbal: a smile or waving gesture at each other throughout the day, according to Nias, Southworth and Yeomans (1989); they indicated that such body language inspires a positive attitude and openness.

A study by Nias, Southworth and Yeomans (1989) identified an open mind as one of the driving forces of collaboration; in addition, entering into a collaboration with an open mind creates a safe environment for all participants where they feel secure and respected. According to Smylie (1994), open communication enables collaborating participants to learn and develop. In addition, Bauwens and Hourcade (1995) claimed that students can only be helped to realise their full potential if teachers are open to learning and employing innovative teaching and learning methods, with collaboration being one of them. According to Deal and Peterson (2009), openness is capable of removing barriers as well as building bridges.

Another research by Pianta (1999) and Watson (2003) discovered that teachers' positive attitude to teaching and learning favourably influences collaborative relationships

among teachers, making them mutually beneficial. The studies conducted by the Malaysian researchers also confirmed the importance of a positive attitude to teachers' daily work for initiating and sustaining PLC (Abdulla et al., 2017).

5.5 Challenges of Collaboration

Because a school is a place where teachers and other stakeholders gather to work together, it is natural for them to encounter various challenges during collaborations. In the findings chapter, I presented the factors that prevent my research participants from collaborating. Thus, the main challenges are discussed below.

5.5.1 Increasing workload and time issue

All the teachers reported work pressure as the main impediment for participating in collaboration. Specifically, most of them referred to a lack of time and high workload. It is understandable why they named these factors as impeding; firstly, high teaching load is common in Malaysia, it could be over 20 hours a week, excluding other mandatory paperwork, and secondly, long working days result in the teachers' inability to spare time for collaboration.

Forte and Flores' studies (2014) discovered that teachers, although willing to explore collaborations, had difficulty finding time for them. According to the authors' research participants, having free time is essential for discussions and reflections with colleagues. School leaders and heads of departments could solve this problem by making teachers' workload more reasonable, perhaps by dividing bureaucratic tasks among teachers equally and setting them as group tasks as opposed to individual. For example, joint lesson planning by the same stage subject teachers would save teachers time so that they could focus

on other collaborative activities. Lack of time was also reported by the Malaysian researchers to be a considerable obstacle for forming PLCs at schools (Daud et al., 2014; Rahim et al., 2015; Thang et al., 2010).

In addition to being overwhelmed with paperwork, the teachers also must deal with high teaching load and attend compulsory formal meetings. Consequently, they grapple with finding time to collaborate with colleagues (Leithwood, Leonard & Sharratt, 1998). Several Malaysian researchers also confirmed it as an impeding factor for implementing a PLC (Keong et al., 2018; Saad et al., 2017; Rahim et al., 2015 & Yaakob et al., 2017). Harris and Jones (2018) highlighted that the problem of high work pressure is usually caused by local policies; therefore, their suggestion was to adapt anything borrowed from abroad, for example, a PLC model, to the local context and setting.

5.5.2 Communication across the board

Most interviewed teachers indicated that a lack of collaborative and communication skills also pose challenges for collaboration. According to their responses, principals and managers ought to provide relevant training so that all the teachers can learn to collaborate with each other professionally. The ability to communicate professionally and appropriately during collaboration is a necessary skill. As reported by the participants, some of their colleagues are unable to accept other teachers' ideas or opinions, resulting in the creation of an environment fraught with conflict. The above can also depend on the cultural norms of communication; several participants reported that the language barrier also prevented them from collaborating with some colleagues.

McManus and Kauffman (1991) explained that teachers lack collaborative skills because they worked in isolation for many years and argued that appropriate collaborative skills are needed for successful interactions with co-workers. The same factor was also reflected in the studies of Friend (2000) who insisted that collaborative skills can be developed should school leaders be willing to learn. The Malaysian researchers, Mohamad et al. (2015), suggested that the MoE provide initial proper training for school leaders on how to initiate, establish and sustain a PLC.

As far as communication skills are concerned, Friend (2000) claimed that poor communication may be the main reason of a dysfunctional collaboration. McCormick, Noonan, Ogata and Heck (2001) agreed with the above author stating that specialised training for teachers is essential to help them interact with peers successfully. Thus, Peterson (1994) contended adding that effective communication skills are especially vital for a leader of collaboration because they can help solve problems, plan and make decisions. In fact, one of my research participants from School B mentioned the importance of initial collaborative skills training for leaders. Two other researchers, Rhodes and Beneicke (2002) concluded that, both, higher-order traits and communication skills are imperative for collaborative activities.

In addition, the cultural barrier seems to be a significant factor that may create tension during collaborations making it an uncomfortable experience for some participants. The Malaysian researchers stated that in western cultures teachers are often used to sharing their practices regardless of age and teaching experience, while in eastern cultures, senior teachers tend not to share their knowledge and skills with younger teachers because they wish to protect their superiority or seniority (Khalid et al., 2014; Murugaiah et al., 2012).

Consequently, more experienced teachers may not accept criticism well from less experienced teachers. Abdullah et al. (2017) and Zawawi (2008) found that senior teachers' expectation is that junior teachers respect and listen to them. It appears the Malay community uses the sugar-coated language which indicates that the cultural communication norms of Malaysia differ from those in the west (Zawawi, 2008). Furthermore, several Chinese researchers have added the cultural barrier as one of the characteristics to the PLC conceptual model (Zhang & Sun, 2018).

5.5.3 Indifferent attitude of teachers

Two of my study participants, one being a partially retired teacher and another an introverted teacher, answered that they lack interest in collaboration because they do not consider it important or they are satisfied with where they are at on their teaching journey. This may mean that they mainly work on their own during the day. There are however several dangers associated with working solitarily.

Hargreaves (1993) argued that sometimes teachers' fears of appearing incompetent or preference for working in isolation can prevent them from collaborating with colleagues. It is possible that disguising the above as an indifferent attitude may help them avoid participating in collaborations and answering undesirable questions. Shapiro's (1984) study revealed that teachers do not try to seek help and support because they do not want to be considered failures. In addition, Hargreaves (1994) stated that the loss of creativity results should teachers work in isolation for a long time.

Besides, deliberate seclusion can stagnate teachers' professional development without their realising it (Smith & Scott, 1990). Furthermore, teachers who work in isolation

usually resist adopting new methods of teaching that educational reforms attempt to introduce (Shaw & Jacobowski, 1991); this means that their teaching practices may be outdated. It can be concluded that collaborative activities with other teachers are useful not only for providing collegial support but also for instilling a conducive-to-sharing and learning environment which can help address various professional issues and encourage adopting the practice of innovative teaching methods.

5.6 Summary

In this chapter I discussed my study's most important findings by interpreting, synthesising and analysing the academic literature available on the subject of teacher collaboration and my insights.

Firstly, I discussed why teamwork, goal achievement and sharing ideas as well as imparting knowledge are important in collaboration. The findings revealed that the selected Malaysian secondary teachers consider these aspects crucial for collaboration. Secondly, my findings on how and why the teachers collaborate unveiled that any collaboration should be led by a capable leader and aim at improving teaching skills and student learning. Thirdly, I discussed the factors that enable the teachers to collaborate on a school improvement project. According to the participants' answers, specific traits of character as well as support from school leaders is necessary. Finally, the factors that inhibit teacher collaboration were examined and the findings revealed the following: the teachers reported work demands and a lack of collaborative/communication skills as the key challenges.

All in all, it appears that for a PLC to be practised successfully and fruitfully at secondary schools, teachers must not only possess specific character qualities/personalities

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE SECONDARY TEACHERS OF DIFFERENT SUBJECTS
TO COLLABORATE ON SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

75

but also develop the necessary collaborative skills and be constantly supported by school
leaders.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

In the previous five chapters, I introduced the topic with its background and significance, critically reviewed the literature related to collaboration at schools, elaborated on the chosen research method and justified the choice, described the key findings obtained from my study and discussed them through the analytical and interpretive lens while corroborating them with relevant academic literature and insights.

In this culminating chapter, I shall be answering the research questions set at the beginning of my study, explaining the implications, giving several recommendations to the potential beneficiaries and outlining the limitations of my study.

6.2 Research Questions, Implications and Recommendations

6.2.1 What do secondary school teachers understand by collaboration and its importance in their work at the school?

The question was meant to explore the teachers' attitudes to collaboration and their thoughts on its importance in their work. It was important to ask because, without understanding what collaboration is and why it is needed, it would be difficult for the researcher to obtain full answers to further questions from the participants.

Most participants expressed a positive attitude to collaboration stating that it often provides them with learning experiences which not only enrich their professional repertoires but it can also ultimately benefit students (Hourcade, 1995; Pianata, 1999). Half of them understand collaboration as a teamwork activity implying that group cohesion or the 'getting-on' of all members with one another is imperative (Merinik et al., 2009; Pennington, 2002),

while the other half finds it a useful gathering during which ideas and insights can be shared as well as knowledge imparted.

As far as the importance of collaboration is concerned, most the teachers asserted that setting goals and achieving them, after a series of collaborative meetings, is essential; otherwise, according to them, collaboration poses no interest to them. Besides, collaboration acts as a tool to solve problems which often cannot be solved by one teacher (Little, 2003; Shaw, 1981). The two problems my participants referred to were student behaviour and communication issues occurring among teachers. In such cases, teachers have no choice but collaborate with colleagues to solve the problems.

Learning was named as another important purpose of collaboration. All the participants expect to learn new skills or knowledge that could improve their teaching practices and student learning experiences. Because being a teacher also means being a learner, it is vital that collaborative activities create positive conversations and learning experiences for all teachers (Southworth, 2009; Bryk, 1995).

One teacher, however, perceives collaboration as something that is imposed by the principal and has strict deadlines. This may mean that the teacher does not benefit to a full extent from collaborations considering them a burden (Little, 1990). In general, this attitude could lead teachers to be passive participants during collaborations or to developing a balkanised type of collaboration, which is built on fierce competition and favouritism.

In conclusion, collaboration seems to be part of the teachers' daily work, either imposed or spontaneous, and most participants considered it as an effective instrument that encourages communication, sharing, problem-solving and learning. It is clear that if

collaboration is initiated by the teachers themselves, it is likely to last longer and bring more positive outcomes, related to teachers' professional learning and students' improved learning. Thus, if such collaborative culture is promoted and sustained, it can lead to the development of professional learning communities at schools (Smith, Wilson & Corbett, 2009; DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

6.2.2 What factors enable teachers to collaborate?

This question was meant to determine what motivates and inspires teachers to collaborate with colleagues. The factors were important to investigate because they constitute my primary research question, which intends to discover the factors that encourage teachers to collaborate with each other.

Most research participants stated that the main factors that enable them to collaborate with colleagues are a sensible workload with the minimum paperwork, incentives, school leaders' moral support, a learning environment, flexibility and relevance to their teaching and student learning.

Half the participants reported that having additional time for collaborations is essential because each collaborative project often requires several consecutive meetings for which sufficient time must be allocated. Besides, most participants only collaborate if collaborations are relevant to their teaching and their students' learning. They explained that there must be learning involved for them, such as improving their teaching practices in some aspect which ultimately benefits their students (Watson, 2003). Otherwise, the teachers may be reluctant to collaborate or do poor work.

In addition, two teachers underlined the importance of flexible collaborations, for example using interactive platforms and having the power to choose collaborators and determine topics. They seem to favour voluntary (Keltchermans, 2006) and cohesive collaborations (Stoll & Louis, 2007).

Most participants indicated that school leaders' various forms of support, specifically financial incentives and praise, are all necessary motivators. Without them, they participate in collaborations reluctantly and often look for excuses not to get involved in collaborations or attend meetings. This implies that my research participants have been receiving no or few incentives that would motivate them to collaborate or support their collaborations.

In conclusion, the teachers need an all-around conducive-to-collaboration environment primarily organised by school leaders to participate in collaborations and thrive on them. The role of leadership in cultivating a collaborative culture at schools is critically important. The leader can create an enabling environment in which teachers feel secure (Nias et al., 1989) and motivated to work as a team instead of competing, like in a balkanised type of collaboration (Hargreaves, 1994). There must be incentives for teachers to collaborate. For example, teachers' own professional development, rewards for collective work, choices for when and with whom to collaborate, and fair and equal distribution of workload should be an integral part of a collaborative project.

6.2.3 What factors impede collaboration?

The question was meant to determine the factors that prevent my research participants from collaborating with co-workers on projects. The factors were important to investigate because they would explain why teachers refuse or are unwilling to collaborate.

The main impeding factors, according to the participants, are a lack of time, the inability to communicate professionally, specific personality types and an indifferent attitude to collaboration.

All the participants find it challenging to find time for collaborations because their days contain many teaching hours, at least five hours on average. In addition to classroom teaching, they need to prepare for their lessons to ensure quality teaching and learning. This challenge is the most common and demands of all school stakeholders and policy-makers to work together to solve it.

Most participants reported that certain personalities and a lack of collaborative skills prevent them from collaborating with colleagues. In particular, they mentioned that the co-workers who are unable to communicate with others, often due to the language barrier and a lack of effective communication skills or are introverted, feel uncomfortable and are passive during collaborations. It implies that without good communication skills, positive collaborative experiences at schools may not be possible, which means that all school members need to prioritise the learning and applying of effective professional communication skills (Rosenholtz, 1989).

Two participants, however, stated that they feel unmotivated to collaborate with colleagues on projects because they may be partially retired or prefer working in isolation.

This appears to be either their choice or implies a lack of confidence (Mazlan & Mahamod, 2016; Keong et al., 2018) or concealing incompetence (Hargreaves, 1993). Therefore, a positive attitude to teaching and learning is essential for successful collaborations (Smith, Wilson & Corbett, 2009).

In conclusion, there are many barriers that prevent teachers from collaborating, but most of them, however insurmountable they may seem, can be gradually removed should school leaders set the goal of making collaboration an important learning tool beneficial to teachers, students and the school's reputation.

6.3 Recommendations

6.3.1 Recommendations for school leaders

Because learning was named an important purpose of collaboration, school leaders should observe teachers to know their learning needs and survey them to learn more about their learning needs; the factors, such as context, teachers' personal characteristics, level of engagement in collegial collaboration and where each teacher is at on their learning journey differ and therefore need to be taken into consideration when assessing teachers' learning needs (de Jong, Meirink & Admiraal, 2019). Subsequently, such analyses can result in organising useful, based on data analysis, collaborations for all staff members.

One of the teachers sees collaboration as something that is imposed by the principal and has strict deadlines. Therefore, school leaders are advised to create a good balance between contrived and naturally arisen collaborations. In conjunction with heads of departments, they need to analyse the advantages and disadvantages of both to create that kind of balance.

It is also important that collaborations are flexible and sometimes take place online. Thus, school leaders are advised to consider having the Internet connection throughout schools and provide teachers with the training on digital skills so that they can use a range of communication platforms confidently.

A lack of time was reported as the main problem that impedes the teachers' collaboration with colleagues. School leaders are recommended to revise teachers' timetables to include collaboration as a useful learning activity that aims to instil in teachers the desire to hone their teaching skills continuously.

Most participants indicated that school leaders' various forms of support, specifically financial incentives and praise, are all necessary motivators. Therefore, school leaders should consider rewarding teachers, by providing continuous moral support and performance bonuses, to ensure their long-term motivation. They are also recommended to make collaboration part of teachers' annual appraisal, which is self-reflective in nature.

Lastly, most participants reported that certain personalities and a lack of collaborative skills prevent them from collaborating. Thus, school leaders are advised to provide the training on professional communication skills, especially for collaboration leaders who can then inspire their colleagues to collaborate, and perhaps arrange for some team-building activities during which teachers could see value in collaboration and eventually feel comfortable in their colleagues' company. To break the language barrier, school leaders are advised to organise language courses for the teachers who do not speak a local language.

6.3.2 Recommendations for teachers

As one of my participants indicated that every teacher must develop a collaborative mindset, it is recommended that teachers should develop an intrinsic motivation, trying to see the bigger picture behind every collaboration and learn to be more empathetic, putting themselves in other people's shoes.

Two teachers underlined the importance of flexible collaborations, for example using interactive online platforms and having the power to choose collaborators and determine topics. Thus, teachers ought to be given options on how, what and with whom to collaborate to make a collaborative activity a fruitful experience during which goals are achieved and problems are solved (Little, 2003; Shaw, 1981). However, they are also advised to verbalise their preferences to colleagues so that their requests and preferences are accommodated.

Over half the teachers reported that the language barrier often negatively affects their collaborations. Besides, not understanding the language can lead to misinterpretation of certain cultural norms. Although in Malaysia, three languages are spoken at work, Malay, Chinese and English, it does not imply that all teachers have a good command of them. Teachers are therefore advised to make effort to learn the language from colleagues informally together with the cultural peculiarities or use a language that can be competently spoken by all.

Two participants stated that they feel unmotivated to collaborate with colleagues on projects because they may be partially retired or prefer working in isolation. This may also be connected to a lack of confidence or incompetence. Teachers are therefore encouraged to

seek help, academic or moral, from more knowledgeable and confident co-workers, instead of fighting their insecurities solitarily.

6.3.3 Recommendations for policy-makers

Building a PLC (Professional Learning Community) at schools, especially in Malaysia where the concept has not been comprehended or practised to a full extent by principals and teachers, is clearly a complex process that requires time, knowledge, skills, facilities, resources and various support from school leaders. Therefore, education officials and policy-makers are recommended to establish more direct and frequent communication channels with principals where both could have open discussions concerning the issues of PLC.

To know more about the teachers' learning needs and how collaboration can help address them, policy-makers are advised to instruct principals to conduct annual surveys and interviews with teachers and send the collected data to them for further analysis. Based on the analysis and conclusions, the policy-makers should make recommendations to education officials on the future, relevant-to-collaboration types of professional development.

6.5 Limitations of the Study

Firstly, the present study was conducted only on the sample of six secondary teachers of three subjects in two private schools in a small town in Sabah, Malaysia. This indicates that the context is specific, only the teachers of the secondary teaching stage were studied and their number is insufficient to draw a definite conclusion on what factors exactly facilitate teachers' collaboration on a school improvement project. Secondly, the study's findings and conclusions may not be representative of the Malaysian schools, especially public. I would suggest doing a mixed-methods research on inter- and mono-ethnic

collaborations at schools because some findings revealed that cultural and language peculiarities can have a profound effect on collaboration among teachers. Thirdly, except for semi-structured interviews, I had observations of collaborative meetings and document analysis as my other data collection instruments. However, I only observed the five participants' collaborative meetings, and few meetings were long enough to record the necessary information in my observation form. As far as the document analysis is concerned, I received only two, one-page long documented meeting minutes from my participants, which was insufficient to draw any definite conclusions. Lastly, I expected to gain access to teacher policy documents with the information on professional development, but the schools do not have any. Thus, the study could not generate sufficient documentary data for analysis.

6.4 Reflection on the Thesis and Research

Writing this thesis and conducting this study on teacher collaboration was a major learning curve which has taught me to read critically, select carefully, write academically, evaluate with evidence, ask substantial questions, speak with empathy, explain with ethics in mind, report impartially, synthesise logically and use authorial voice throughout my writing. In addition, I have learnt new, interesting concepts which added to my knowledge on the topic of collaboration and teacher leadership.

I particularly enjoyed doing the practical part, conducting semi-structured interviews and observing my participants' meetings. These experiences with the teachers did not only enable me to obtain my participants' unique insights and learn about their personal experiences of collaborations but also allowed me the opportunity to connect with the like-minded colleagues who have devoted their lives to educating the younger generation and advancing their learning using a plethora of culturally and contextually diverse methods. I

have also discovered more about external collaborative activities which gave me further ideas for my future collaborations and research.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Letter to Gatekeepers

Dear _____

My name is Galina Fryshko and I am about to begin a research project for my MSc in Educational Leadership Programme at the Graduate School of Education, Nazarbayev University. I have already received approval from the NU Research Ethics Committee, this project will be a qualitative study aimed at investigating the phenomenon of teacher collaboration at private secondary schools. This study is relevant for Malaysian schools because the MoE has been working on improving teaching competences and student

achievement since 2013 (MEB, 2013-2023), and much focus has been on training school teachers to form professional learning communities (PLCs) which are often emerged from collaborations of teachers on various projects.

I am writing to ask your permission to be allowed access to your school and the documented records of teacher collaboration on school improvement projects as well as seek research participants for interviews. In addition, one observation of a collaborative meeting will be conducted. I would like to select three secondary subject teachers (English, Maths and Science) from your school.

The data collection process should take no longer than two months, with several days in Nov 2021 and Dec 2021, and will be conducted at a convenient time and date for the teachers.

All the interview answers and the collected data will be kept strictly confidential and the teachers' names will be unidentifiable throughout the research paper. The results will be reported in a research paper available to all participants upon completion.

If this is possible, please email me at galina.fryshko@nu.edu.kz or call at +60128155629 to confirm that you are willing to allow access to your school, documents and teachers providing they agree and are happy to take part.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely

Galina Fryshko, 2nd-year MSc student at NUGSE

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE SECONDARY TEACHERS OF DIFFERENT SUBJECTS
TO COLLABORATE ON SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

Appendix A : Letter to Gatekeepers in Chinese

亲 _____

我的名字是 Galina Fryshko, 我即将在纳扎尔巴耶夫大学教育研究生院开始我的教育领导力硕士项目的研究项目。我已经得到了NU研究伦理委员会的批准, 这个项目将是一项定性研究, 旨在调查私立中学教师合作的现象。这项研究与马来西亚学校有关, 因为教育部自 2013 年以来一直致力于提高教学能力和学生成绩 (MEB, 2013-2023), 并且非常注重培训学校教师以形成专业学习社区 (PLC), 这通常是来自教师在各种项目上的合作。

我写这封信是为了请求您允许访问您的学校和教师在学校改进项目或教学政策文件中合作的书面记录, 并寻求研究参与者进行采访。我想从贵校挑选三位中学教师 (英语、数学和科学)。

数据收集过程应不超过两个月, 2021 年 11 月和 2022 年 12 月为几天, 并将在教师方便的时间和日期进行。

所有采访答案和收集到的数据都将严格保密, 并且在整个研究论文中都无法识别教师的姓名。结果将在完成后以研究论文的形式报告给所有参与者。

如果可能, 请发送电子邮件至 galina.fryshko@nu.edu.kz 或致电 +60128155629 以确认您愿意允许访问您的学校、文件和教师, 前提是他们同意并乐于参与。

感谢您抽出宝贵时间, 我期待很快收到您的来信。

此致

Galina Fryshko, NUGSE 的二年级硕士生

Appendix B: Letter of Invitation

I cordially invite you to participate in a research study conducted by me, Galina Fryshko, a 2nd-year master's student at the Graduate School of Education, Nazarbayev University. My research supervisor is Dr Mir Afzal Tajik, Associate Professor, NUGSE.

The purpose of this study is to examine teachers' collaboration on school improvement projects at private secondary schools in Sabah, Malaysia. You are eligible to participate in this study if you are a secondary teacher of any ethnicity, gender, level and subject. I shall ask you to answer my questions during two (a second one may not be necessary) interviews, conducted at a time convenient for you at your school or on an online platform (Zoom, Skype) in Nov 2021 and Dec 2021. All interview questions will be related to teacher collaboration on school improvement projects. Your responses will be unidentifiable in my research paper (pseudonyms will be used) and kept in strict confidentiality. One observation will be conducted during one of your collaborative meetings where I shall be a non-participating observer. Finally, I shall request you to share with me your collaborative meeting notes/minutes or WhatsApp messages.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate, you may choose to discontinue participation at any time and you may also choose not to answer some interview questions.

Please feel free to contact me at galina.fryshko@nu.edu.kz or call at +60128155629 if you have questions. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Galina Fryshko, 2nd-year MSc student at NUGSE

Appendix B: Letter of Invitation in Chinese

日期： _____

亲 _____

我诚挚地邀请您参加由我，纳扎尔巴耶夫大学教育研究生院 2 年级硕士生 Galina Fryshko 进行的一项研究。我的研究主管是 NUGSE 副教授 Mir Afzal Tajik 博士。

本研究的目的是检查教师在马来西亚沙巴私立中学的学校改进项目中的合作。如果您是任何种族、性别、水平和学科的中学教师，您就有资格参与这项研究。我将请您在 2021 年 11 月和 2022 年 12 月在您方便的时间在您的学校或在线平台（Zoom、Skype）进行的两次面试中回答我的问题。所有面试问题都将与学校教师合作有关改进项目。您的回答在我的研究论文中将无法识别（将使用化名）并严格保密。

您参与本研究完全是自愿的。如果您选择参加，您可以随时选择停止参加，也可以选择 not 回答某些面试问题。

如果您有任何疑问，请随时通过 galina.fryshko@nu.edu.kz 与我联系或致电 +60128155629。我期待着您的回音。

此致

Galina Fryshko,

NUGSE 的二年级硕士生

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

Dear _____

My name is Galina Fryshko and I am a 2nd-year master's student on the Educational Leadership programme at the Graduate School of Education, Nazarbayev University (NUGSE). As a part of my master programme, I am conducting a study titled "Factors that influence teachers to collaborate with their colleagues on school improvement projects in two private secondary schools: A case of Sabah".

You are kindly invited to participate in this research which will include two individual interviews and an outside-the-classroom observation. Your participation is voluntary. The purpose of the interviews is to explore the factors that influence and impede the teachers' collaboration on school improvement projects. Each interview will take no longer than 60 minutes and take place at the most convenient time for you. The interviews will be audio-recorded with your permission; the recordings are needed for the final stage of data analysis. The interview recordings and transcriptions will be available only to me and my thesis supervisor. Afterwards, they and other paper forms with notes (e.g., observation form) will be destroyed. The purpose of the observation beyond the classroom is to understand the general setting, work environment and record its daily activities related to collaboration among teachers.

To protect the participants' names and identities, I will use pseudonyms (unreal names) and ensure confidentiality of all received information by using the codes and safeguarding the data.

There are some benefits connected with the study. The participating teachers will receive the results first-hand and have a chance to reflect on their practice of collaboration with co-workers on school improvement projects. Besides, it is my hope that they deepen their interest in fruitful collaborative activities. There is the possibility that the research findings may be used by education policy-makers to improve teacher collaboration and training programmes.

If you have read this form and decided to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. The alternative is not to participate. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. The results of this research study may be presented at scientific or professional meetings or published in scientific journals.

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this research, its procedures, risks and benefits, contact me or my advisor:

Researcher: Galina Fryshko, 2nd-year student of the MSc in Education Leadership programme, Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education

galina.fryshko@nu.edu.kz

Research supervisor: Afzal Mir, Associate Professor, Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education, afzal.mir@nu.edu.kz

Furthermore, if you are not satisfied with how this study is being conducted, or if you have any concerns, complaints, general questions about the research or your rights as a participant, please contact the NUGSE Research Committee at

gse_researchcommittee@nu.edu.kz.

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE SECONDARY TEACHERS OF DIFFERENT SUBJECTS
TO COLLABORATE ON SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

113

Please sign this consent form if you agree to participate in this study.

- I have carefully read the information provided;
- I have been given full information regarding the purpose and procedures of the study;
- I understand how the collected data will be used and that any confidential information will be seen only by the researchers and will not be revealed to anyone else;
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason;
- With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C : Informed Consent Form in Chinese

亲 _____

我的名字是 Galina Fryshko, 我是纳扎尔巴耶夫大学 (NUGSE) 教育研究生院教育领导力项目的二年级硕士生。作为我硕士课程的一部分, 我正在进行一项题为“影响教师与同事在两所私立中学开展学校改进项目的因素: 沙巴的案例”的研究。

诚挚邀请您参与这项研究, 其中包括两次个人访谈和一次课外观察。您的参与是自愿的。访谈的目的是探讨影响和阻碍教师在学校改进项目中合作的因素。每次面谈时间不超过 60 分钟, 并在您最方便的时间进行。在您允许的情况下, 访谈将被录音; 数据分析的最后阶段需要记录。访谈录音和转录内容仅供我和我的论文导师使用。之后, 它们和其他带有注释的纸质表格 (例如, 观察表) 将被销毁。课堂外观察的目的是了解一般环境、工作环境并记录其与教师协作相关的日常活动。

为了保护参与者的姓名和身份, 我将使用化名 (假名) 并通过使用代码和保护数据来确保所有收到的信息的机密性。

这项研究有一些好处。参与的教师将获得第一手的成果, 并有机会反思他们与同事合作开展学校改善项目的实践。此外, 我希望他们加深对富有成效的合作活动的兴趣。研究结果有可能被教育政策制定者用来改进教师合作和培训计划。

如果您已阅读此表格并决定参与此项目, 请理解您的参与是自愿的, 您有权随时撤回您的同意或停止参与, 而不会受到处罚或失去您有权获得的利益。另一种选择是不参与。您有权拒绝回答特定问题。这项研究的结果可能会在科学或专业会议上发表或发表在科学期刊上。

如果您对本研究、其程序、风险和益处有任何问题、疑虑或投诉, 请联系我或我的顾问:

研究员：Galina Fryshko，纳扎尔巴耶夫大学教育研究生院教育领导力硕士项目二年级
学生 galina.fryshko@nu.edu.kz

研究导师：Afzal Mir，纳扎尔巴耶夫大学教育研究生院副教授，afzal.mir@nu.edu.kz

此外，如果您对本研究的进行方式不满意，或者您对研究或您作为参与者的权利有任何疑虑、投诉、一般问题，请通过 gse_researchcommittee@nu.edu.kz 联系
NUGSE 研究委员会。

如果您同意参与本研究，请签署此同意书。

- 我已仔细阅读所提供的信息；
- 我已获得有关研究目的和程序的完整信息；
- 我了解收集到的数据将如何使用，任何机密信息都只会被研究人员看到，不会透露给任何其他人；
- 我明白我可以随时退出研究而无需说明理由；
- 在充分了解上述所有内容的前提下，我自愿同意参与本研究。

签名：_____ 日期：_____

Appendix D: Interview Questions

1. How long have you been a secondary teacher and what subject do you teach?
2. How do you understand collaboration?
3. Why is it important to you or not to collaborate with colleagues on school projects?
Give reasons.
4. Could you tell me if you have worked with your colleagues on any collaborative project?
5. Could you also describe in what ways you collaborate with your colleagues?
6. Can you give examples of when you initiated a collaborative school project with your colleague(s)?
7. What motivated/influenced you to initiate that project?
8. Would you describe that experience in as much detail as you can?
9. How did you enjoy it? Give reasons.
10. What were you responsible for in the project?
11. What did you learn from that collaboration?
12. Was your project a success or failure? Give reasons.
13. Did your project improve anything at the school? Give details.
14. If you had a chance to initiate another collaborative project, how would you do it?
15. What factors do you think influence teachers to collaborate with other teachers on school projects?
16. What is the most influential factor(s) that make teachers collaborate on school projects?

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE SECONDARY TEACHERS OF DIFFERENT SUBJECTS
TO COLLABORATE ON SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

117

17. In your opinion, what role does school leadership play in motivating teachers to collaborate?
18. What factors improve teacher collaboration? Give examples.
19. What factors impede teacher collaboration? Give examples.
20. How and why would you collaborate with other teachers in the future?

Appendix E: Observation Form

Observed activities	Notes
School environment and the setting	
The number of participants in the collaborative meeting and its stages	
The teachers' make-up (by subject, ethnicity, age and experience) in the collaborative meeting	
The topic/project of collaboration, the reason for collaborating on it and by who it was initiated	

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE SECONDARY TEACHERS OF DIFFERENT SUBJECTS TO COLLABORATE ON SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

The teacher's attitudes during the collaboration	
The teacher's non-verbal communication during the collaboration	
The teacher's verbal communication patterns during the collaboration	
The teacher's responses to the proposed activities/solutions during the collaboration	
The teacher's collaboration strategies during the meeting	

Appendix F: A Coded Excerpt from the Interview Transcript

Excerpt from Interview Transcript	Code
<p>R: Let’s now talk about collaboration among teachers. How do you understand the term?</p>	
<p>P3: Working in teams. Science teachers working together, different subject working together on some project. Something like that.</p>	<p>Disciplinary and inter-disciplinary collaboration (perception)</p>
<p>R: Is collaboration important to you or not? Why?</p>	
<p>P3: I think it’s important because we can set a good example for students. They can see it and try to work collaboratively too. Teamwork is important in their future life. One person can do so much. So if all teachers were involved in the same project, we would move towards a successful achievement of the common goal. After all, we’re all moving in the same direction.</p>	<p>Collaboration is teamwork (perception)</p> <p>Collaboration and common goals (perception)</p>

R: Excellent! So what have you been working on?

P3: T: Because we moved to the **online mode of teaching**, we had to use technology such as **Google Classroom, telegram, WhatsApp, e-mail**, etc. We were pushing the use of **telegram** instead of WhatsApp as it offers more functions.

Online platforms for collaboration (collaboration strategy)

R: The project was on upgrading the teachers' online/social technology skills. Good, thank you. Could you also describe in what way do you collaborate with colleagues?

P3: Firstly, I looked for the teachers who are **like-minded** and about the same age. If you collaborate with the teachers who think alike and are peers, it means the goals are likely the same. For example, the younger teachers understand technology a little better.

Collaboration of the like-minded teachers (personal characteristic, enabling factor)

As for other projects, we see what's happening around the school and then discuss what needs to be improved. **It can be spontaneous**. During the online teaching we used WhatsApp for collaborating.

Spontaneous collaboration (type, enabling factor)

R: So did you initiate that project?

P3: Yes, I suggested the principal to upgrade and then initiated the workshop.

Collaboration leadership (strategy to initiate and lead collaboration)

R: What motivated you initiate this project?

P3: I prefer to have a system in place that's simple and clear. Therefore, I initiated this project to ensure that everyone is on the same page. Confusing students which platform to use every lesson is a bad idea. I also wanted to add features to GoogleMeet which aren't only useful but also affordable for the school.

Challenges of online work and collaboration (impeding factor)

R: Could you please describe the project in more detail? How did you enjoy it?

P3: T: I enjoyed it very much because the introduction courses went very well. I also learnt new things during the planning stage. Technology is my cup of tea and I found that all the colleagues learnt new skills and are more confident using an online communication technology. If teachers' skills are improved, students stand a chance to learn more and perhaps have a smoother, more enjoyable, learning experience. Apart from that, teachers can also challenge themselves during the times

Collaboration encourages teacher and student learning (perception)

of difficulty by finding ways to solve problems. So I enjoyed that too.

Collaboration for solving problems (perception)

R: What factors do you think influence other teachers to collaborate with their colleagues?

P3: T: I think mainly the time. If the time suits them or they have it, then they will collaborate. Another factor is when. For example during exams and grand school celebrations, teachers won't usually collaborate as they're very busy helping or organising something.

Collaboration requires time (enabling factor)

Flexible time for collaboration (enabling factor)

R: Okay. What about the most influential factors that facilitate collaboration among teachers?

P3: If somebody initiates it and they know that the topic is relevant to them and their teaching, they'll be eager to collaborate. Again, if they don't have any time to spare, they won't collaborate.

Collaboration leader (enabling factor)

Relevant topics to teachers' teaching and learning (enabling factor)

Lack of time (impeding factor)

R: What are the factors that impede teacher collaboration?

P3: Mainly the generation gap because we collaborate on technology-related project. The senior teachers to be less open-minded to new ideas as in their time of studies, they had no technology and many facilities. So they're reluctant to learn on their own. However, if someone organises a workshop and it's compulsory, they're willing to learn. Too much collaboration can also put them off. Or, if there's too much external training, they don't really want to learn anything from school collaborations. Also, a lack of time and

Not open-minded (impeding factor)

No motivation to learn (impeding factor)

Imposed collaboration (enabling factor)

Excessive external training (impeding factor)

high workload prevent them from collaborating.

Lack of time and high workload (impeding factors)

R: Do you think teachers' personalities can prevent them from collaborating?

P3: Sometimes, yes. If they're content with their knowledge. And also the quieter, more introverted or less communicative types, tend not to collaborate, especially initiate a collaborative activity.

Indifferent attitude to collaboration (impeding factor)

Introverted personality and communication problems (impeding factors)

The highlighted parts of the transcript are the replies of the research participants.

R = Researcher, P3 = Participant 3