

Learning Communities in Schools: A Critical Review and Implementation at State Junior High School 2 Sragi

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ABSTRACT

This study critically examines the implementation of the "ESPERO SINAU" learning community at SMP Negeri 2 Sragi. We used a qualitative approach, employing document analysis, comparative studies, and critical reviews based on Olivier et al.'s (2020) four pillars of Professional Learning Communities (PLC): shared vision, collaborative mission, core values, and SMART goals. The research explores how learning communities address modern educational challenges like varying teacher quality, low student outcomes, and slow technology adoption. Our findings show that "ESPERO SINAU" has created a strong collaborative environment with clear structures, roles, and consistent activities. However, challenges persist, including inconsistent teacher engagement, lack of measurable impact evaluation, and insufficient support. The study emphasizes the need for continuous evaluation, active participation, and strong leadership to sustain these communities. We recommend role rotation, non-material incentives, better evaluation methods, and adopting a hybrid model. This research ultimately highlights learning communities' significant role in enhancing teacher professional development and student learning, while also identifying areas for improvement.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is a basic right that must be accessed by every individual (Rohmadi et al., 2024). The era of globalization and 4.0 Industrial Revolution has driven fundamental transformations in Indonesia's education system. The primary challenges faced include disparities in teacher quality, low student learning outcomes, and delays in the adoption of learning technologies (Rahmani, 2024) (Isnawan, M. G., Alsulami, N. M., Syarifuddin, Samsuriadi, Sukarma, 2024). These issues are further exacerbated by Indonesia's persistently low scores on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which reveal that many 15-year-olds experience functional illiteracy they can read texts but are unable to answer questions based on them (Bank, 2018) (Rakhmah, N. D., Sulistiani, I. R., Pramudya, 2023). These challenges demand the development of adaptive, collaborative, and 21st-century competency-oriented professional development models for educators.

Learning communities have emerged as a strategic solution to address these challenges. In the context of Indonesian education, a learning community is defined as a group of teachers committed to improving the quality of teaching through regular interaction, knowledge exchange, reflective

practice, and continuous professional development (Kemdikbudristek, 2023) (Giyanto, B., Sari, R. P., Hartono, 2023). The policy of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemdikbudristek) through the "Sekolah Penggerak" program and the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum further emphasizes the role of learning communities as the primary vehicle for achieving educational quality improvement (Isnawan, M. G., Alsulami, N. M., Syarifuddin, Samsuriadi, Sukarma, 2024) (Ritonga, M., Harahap, N., Hasibuan, 2023).

Conceptually, learning communities are expected to enhance teachers' pedagogical and professional competencies, encourage reflective teaching practices, and strengthen collaboration among teachers (Rahmani, 2024) (Cholivah, W., Suharno, S., Wahyuningsih, 2024). Research indicates that learning communities have a significant impact on improving the performance quality of teachers and educational staff, making teachers more confident in applying innovative, student-centered learning methods (Giyanto, B., Sari, R. P., Hartono, 2023). Moreover, the collaborative culture fostered within learning communities facilitates the sharing of best practices, increases a sense of ownership, and strengthens collective responsibility for student learning outcomes (Aisah, 2024).

However, the implementation of learning communities at the school level still faces various obstacles. Time constraints, lack of active participation, inadequate evaluation, and insufficient support from school principals are the main barriers to optimizing the role of learning communities (Kundiastuti, K., Nafi'a, I., Soedjono, 2024). Additionally, there are disparities in teachers' understanding and commitment to learning communities, so not all schools are able to fully realize their potential (Isnawan, M. G., Alsulami, N. M., Syarifuddin, Samsuriadi, Sukarma, 2024).

Previous studies have mostly discussed the effectiveness of learning communities in improving teacher competencies and student learning outcomes, but there is still limited critical examination of the implementation of learning communities in junior high schools (SMP) using participatory and locally needs-based approaches (Rahmani, 2024). Furthermore, few studies have evaluated the internal processes and specific challenges faced by learning communities in the context of public schools in regional areas, such as SMP Negeri 2 Sragi, and there is a lack of systematic, field-based recommendations for development.

This study provides a new contribution by critically examining the implementation of learning communities at SMP Negeri 2 Sragi through a participatory and locally needs-based approach. Additionally, this study evaluates internal processes, specific challenges, and best practices within the learning community "ESPERO SINAU," and offers development recommendations based on field study findings. Thus, this study is expected to serve as a reference for other schools in developing adaptive, collaborative, and sustainable learning communities focused on improving the quality of education.

A learning community (Professional Learning Community/PLC) is an important concept in teacher professional development, with a focus on student learning outcomes. Hord (1997) first introduced this term as a group of educators collectively committed to collaborative learning, with the main focus on improving student learning outcomes. In its development (Hord, 1997). DuFour, emphasized that effective PLCs must meet three main criteria: (1) a focus on learning outcomes, (2) a culture of collaboration, and (3) a commitment to continuous improvement. These criteria have become the main foundation for the practice of establishing learning communities in various countries, including Indonesia (DuFour, R., Eaker, R., DuFour, 2005). In Indonesia itself, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemdikbudristek, 2023) defines learning communities as a means of transforming learning within the Merdeka Curriculum, aiming to collectively enhance teacher competencies and the quality of teaching.

According to Komalasari (2010), learning communities are formed because of the individual or group need to intensively learn about something they want to know, either individually or collectively (Komalasari, 2010). The main objective of a learning community is to increase members' understanding of the material presented, which ultimately impacts learning outcomes. Learning communities are considered one of the innovations in learning a new strategy applied by educators to students during the learning process. This innovation is expected to improve student

achievement, shape character, and maximize the development of student skills (Yoyon, B., Suryono, 2016). This learning innovation can be applied in both formal and non-formal education, so learning communities are not limited to the school environment but can also develop outside of school. Learning communities are also seen as environments that enable teachers to share experiences, knowledge, and resources in order to improve the quality of teaching (Kiriana, 2022)(Pandiangan, 2019). Chapman, Ramondt, and Smiley, as cited by Sekar and Kamarubiani (2020), state that learning communities are also non-formal spaces that can be utilized to obtain additional learning (Sekar, R. Y., Kamarubiani, 2020). These communities are considered as associations where members share the same learning goals (Ritonga, M., Harahap, N., Hasibuan, 2023)(Fibrianto, A. S., Bakhri, 2018). In the Indonesian context, learning communities such as the National Mentors and Instructors Association for Early Childhood Education (NSIN TK) on the Merdeka Mengajar platform are concrete examples of how learning communities can provide support and guidance to teachers across various regions.

A study by Olivier (2020) identified four main pillars of learning communities: (1) a shared vision, (2) a collaborative mission, (3) core values such as professionalism and openness, and (4) SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) (Olivier, D. F., Hipp, K. K., Huffman, 2020). The shared vision serves as the primary foundation that guides all members of the learning community toward a common objective, for example, "Realizing innovative teachers based on the Merdeka Curriculum." The collaborative mission, such as "Sharing formative assessment practices," represents a concrete step toward achieving that vision. Core values, including professionalism and openness, are principles firmly upheld by all members in carrying out community activities. Meanwhile, SMART goals become the reference for designing programs and evaluating the success of the learning community. These pillars not only form the conceptual foundation but also serve as practical guidelines for the implementation of learning communities in schools. Ardhi (2024) emphasize that supportive and shared leadership is crucial in building effective learning communities in elementary schools. This shared leadership enables all members of the learning community, both teachers and school principals, to play an active role in determining the direction and development strategies of the community. Furthermore, shared values and vision act as a cohesive force that strengthens solidarity and commitment among members in achieving learning objectives (Ardhi, M. W., Praptiwi, E., Ernawati, 2024).

Research by Louis et al. (2010) demonstrates that learning communities provide significant benefits for enhancing teacher competencies and student learning outcomes. The study found that 77% of teacher respondents experienced increased competencies after joining a learning community. Additionally, data from Shanghai indicate that learning communities can reduce quality disparities between schools, resulting in more equitable student learning outcomes in schools that implement learning communities. These findings are reinforced by research from Azima (2019) and Permana and Sudarsyah (2016), which conclude that participation in learning communities has a significant impact on teachers' pedagogical abilities (Azima, 2019)(Permana, D., Sudarsyah, 2016). Learning communities have also been proven to strengthen teacher character, increase motivation to learn, and encourage the application of innovative teaching methods (Novita, R., Radiana, 2024)(Aisah, 2024). Within learning communities, teachers not only share experiences and knowledge but also support each other in developing teaching strategies relevant to student needs. The culture of reflection fostered in learning communities enables teachers to continuously improve their teaching practices, making learning more effective and meaningful.

In addition to benefits for teachers, learning communities also have positive impacts on member self-development. A study by Sekar and Kamarubiani (2020) found that the main motivations for students to join learning communities are interest, learning content, and career relevance. Learning communities serve as platforms for members' personal development in terms of relationships with others, acquisition of new knowledge, skill development, self-confidence, and networking. The results of this study show that all respondents gained new friends through learning communities, with seven even stating that their closest friends are from their community. Eight students reported that learning communities helped them develop their skills, while five felt that learning communities supported their academic development (Sekar, R. Y., Kamarubiani, 2020).

According to Bruce Tuckman, as cited by Francesca (2010), the stages of learning community development consist of four phases: forming, storming, norming, and performing (Francesca, D., Marco, G., Angelo, R., Giuseppina, 2010). In the forming phase, the learning community is established based on enthusiasm and initial relationships among members. The storming phase is marked by conflicts in defining roles and responsibilities. During the norming phase, community members begin to establish mutually agreed-upon rules. The final phase, performing, is when community members interact optimally to share knowledge and make collective decisions. Self-development within learning communities, according to Herrera (2015), includes increased knowledge, awareness, self-confidence, and empowerment (Herrera, L., Brown, M., Portlock, 2015). Brown (2018) add that learning communities facilitate members in acquiring new knowledge through interaction with others or through self-education (Brown, A., Dunlop, M., Scally, 2018). Lieberman and Miller, as cited in Tannehill (2016), argue that learning communities provide a context in which new ideas and strategies are developed through collaboration and communal interaction (Tannehill, 2016). This interaction is crucial as it opens opportunities for members to respect each other's opinions and build supportive friendships that enhance the learning process.

Despite the many benefits of learning communities, their implementation in schools often faces various challenges. A study by Vescio (2008) revealed that the main challenges faced by learning communities are time constraints (58% of cases) and resistance to change (23% of cases) (Vescio, V., Ross, D., Adams, 2008). Time constraints are the primary obstacle because teachers often have heavy workloads, making it difficult to allocate specific time for learning community activities. Resistance to change is also a challenge, especially in schools with an individualistic work culture or those less open to innovation. Research by Rakhmah (2023) and Kundastuti (2024) reinforce these findings, stating that the implementation of learning communities in schools often encounters obstacles such as time constraints, lack of active participation, inadequate evaluation, and insufficient support from school principals (Rakhmah, N. D., Sulistiani, I. R., Pramudya, 2023)(Kundastuti, K., Nafi'a, I., Soedjono, 2024). In addition, there are still disparities in teachers' understanding and commitment to learning communities, so not all schools can fully optimize the potential of learning communities (Meuthia, 2023). Another challenge is the lack of mentoring and training for teachers in managing learning communities. Meuthia (2023) emphasizes the importance of mentoring strategies for learning communities in utilizing the Merdeka Mengajar platform for implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. This mentoring is necessary so that teachers can understand the benefits and optimal functioning of learning communities. Furthermore, measurable and continuous evaluation is also key to the success of learning communities, so that every program implemented can be periodically evaluated and improved (Meuthia, 2023).

In Indonesia, learning communities are classified into three types: (1) intra-school, (2) inter-school (MGMP/KKG), and (3) online (Merdeka Mengajar Platform). Intra-school learning communities, such as "ESPERO SINAU" at SMP Negeri 2 Sragi, represent concrete and systematic efforts to build a collaborative learning ecosystem. Inter-school learning communities, such as MGMP (Subject Teacher Consultation) and KKG (Teacher Working Group), serve as forums for teachers from various schools to share experiences and knowledge. Meanwhile, online learning communities through the Merdeka Mengajar platform enable teachers from different regions to interact and collaborate virtually. The guidelines from Kemdikbudristek and Director General of GTK Regulation No. 1/2023 serve as the main reference for designing and managing learning communities in schools. These guidelines emphasize the important role of school principals as facilitators and motivators in the development of learning communities. Furthermore, these guidelines also regulate the mechanisms for the formation, implementation, and evaluation of learning communities, allowing each school to develop learning communities according to its needs and characteristics.

Learning communities not only enhance the individual competencies of teachers but also establish a solid collective framework, enabling each member to play an active role in creating excellent schools (Sugrah, 2019). Research by Sugrah (2019) shows that learning communities serve as platforms for teacher professional development, where teachers can learn from each other and

improve their teaching practices. Arifin and Hanif (2024) add that communities of practice form the basis for learning communities, allowing each member to share experiences and knowledge to improve the quality of teaching (Arifin, Z., Hanif, 2024). Strategies for strengthening learning communities include training, intensive mentoring, periodic evaluation, and the application of technology-based innovations (Meuthia, 2023)(Ritonga, M., Harahap, N., Hasibuan, 2023). Training and mentoring are necessary so that teachers can understand the benefits and optimal functioning of learning communities. Periodic evaluation is key to the success of learning communities, ensuring that each program implemented can be regularly evaluated and improved. In addition, the application of technology-based innovations, such as the Merdeka Mengajar platform, enables teachers to collaborate and share knowledge virtually, making the learning process more effective and efficient. Supportive leadership, appropriate policies, and adequate facilities are crucial factors for the success of learning communities (Susetyarini, E., Rofieq, A., Latifa, 2021)(Ferayanti, M., Nissa, 2023). The school principal, as the educational leader, plays a vital role in motivating and facilitating the development of learning communities. School policies that support learning communities, such as the allocation of special time and adequate facilities, are also main supporting factors for the success of learning communities.

International research shows that professional learning communities (PLCs) play an important role in teacher professional development and the improvement of student learning outcomes. DuFour (2004) emphasizes that effective PLCs must focus on learning outcomes, a culture of collaboration, and continuous improvement. PLCs provide a platform for teachers to collaborate, share knowledge, and develop effective teaching strategies (Chuang, N. C., Ting, 2021)(Shah, M. A., Malik, 2024). Studies in Malaysia and Taiwan confirm that PLCs enhance teachers' skills in curriculum design, reflective practice, and student-centered pedagogy (Tai, K. W. H., Omar, 2019). Moreover, PLCs also strengthen shared leadership, build a collaborative culture, and encourage continuous improvement. Harris and Jones (2010) add that PLCs are key to improving education systems, as they enable teachers to learn from each other and collectively improve teaching practices (Harris, A., Jones, 2010).

Based on the various studies above, it can be concluded that learning communities are an important strategy for teacher professional development and for improving the quality of teaching in schools. Learning communities offer many benefits, such as enhancing teacher competencies, developing character, increasing learning motivation, and supporting member self-development. However, the implementation of learning communities in schools also faces various challenges, such as time constraints, resistance to change, lack of active participation, and insufficient support from school principals. Strategies for strengthening learning communities include training, intensive mentoring, periodic evaluation, and the application of technology-based innovations. Supportive leadership, appropriate policies, and adequate facilities are crucial factors for the success of learning communities. International studies also confirm the importance of learning communities in teacher professional development and the improvement of student learning outcomes. Therefore, learning communities have become one of the main strategies in supporting educational transformation in Indonesia, especially in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of the implementation of learning communities at SMP Negeri 2 Sragi. The qualitative approach was chosen because it can reveal social phenomena holistically and contextually, allowing the researcher to explore the meanings, experiences, and dynamics occurring within the learning community environment in depth (Rahmani, 2024)(Wibisono, 2019). Furthermore, this approach enables critical analysis of existing policies and practices in the field, so that the research findings can provide relevant recommendations for the development of learning communities in schools.

There are three main methods used in this study: (1) Document Analysis. Document analysis was conducted on official materials from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemdikbudristek) related to learning communities and internal documents of the

“ESPERO SINAU” learning community program at SMP Negeri 2 Sragi. This analysis aims to understand the policy foundations, structure, and objectives of establishing the learning community at the school. Document analysis also includes tracing agendas, meeting minutes, and activity reports conducted by the learning community (Rakhmah, N. D., Sulistiani, I. R., Pramudya, 2023). This method allows the researcher to obtain accurate and relevant secondary data for analysis. (2) Comparative Study. The comparative study is used to compare theories and concepts of learning communities found in the literature with the actual implementation at SMP Negeri 2 Sragi. The comparative study enables the identification of gaps, challenges, and opportunities in the implementation of learning communities in schools (Assyakurrohim, D., Khumaedi, M., Nugroho, 2023). This approach also helps validate research findings and provide evidence-based recommendations. (3) Critical Review Based on the 4 Pillars of PLC. The critical review employs the four pillars of Professional Learning Community (PLC) indicators developed by Olivier (2020), namely: (1) shared vision, (2) collaborative mission, (3) core values, and (4) SMART goals (Olivier, D. F., Hipp, K. K., Huffman, 2020). This review aims to evaluate the extent to which the implementation of the learning community at SMP Negeri 2 Sragi meets the criteria of an effective learning community. The critical review is conducted through direct observation, in-depth interviews with teachers and learning community administrators, and focused group discussions (Kundiastuti, K., Nafi'a, I., Soedjono, 2024). The data obtained are analyzed thematically to identify patterns, obstacles, and best practices in the implementation of the learning community.

Data collection techniques include semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. Interviews are conducted with teachers, the principal, and learning community administrators to obtain data regarding perceptions, experiences, and challenges in implementing the learning community. Participatory observation is carried out to observe the dynamics of interaction and learning processes within the learning community. Document analysis is used to complement the primary data obtained from interviews and observations (Rahmani, 2024). Data analysis is performed inductively by identifying main themes emerging from interviews, observations, and document analysis. The collected data are categorized, coded, and mapped to gain a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of the learning community at SMP Negeri 2 Sragi. This analysis also utilizes data triangulation techniques to ensure the validity and reliability of the research findings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The “ESPERO SINAU” learning community program at SMP Negeri 2 Sragi has generally fulfilled the basic principles of learning communities according to the Kemdikbudristek guidelines (2023), albeit with several contextual adaptations that strengthen its effectiveness at the school level. The organizational structure of the learning community consists of a supervisor (the principal), a chairperson (the curriculum deputy), a secretary, a treasurer, and subject coordinators. The core team formed is responsible for coordinating activities, in line with Kemdikbudristek’s recommendations regarding the importance of community catalysts, such as principals or senior teachers.

The uniqueness of the implementation at SMP Negeri 2 Sragi lies in the specific division of roles, such as facilitators, documenters, and evaluators, which are not detailed in the national guidelines. This division of roles strengthens accountability and the active involvement of learning community members. Additionally, the schedule of learning community activities is arranged regularly: school-level meetings are held once a month, while subject group meetings are held every two weeks. This frequency is more intensive than the national recommendation, which only suggests “regular meetings” without specifying a particular timeframe. The integration of learning community activities with the MGMP schedule is also considered a good practice, as it leverages existing timeframes without adding to teachers’ workloads.

SMP Negeri 2 Sragi implements a “model teacher” system, in which certain teachers practice new methods in the classroom and are observed by their peers. This practice is consistent with the findings of Louis (2010) regarding the effectiveness of observational learning in improving teachers’ instructional skills (Louis, K. S., Marks, H. M., Kruse, 2010). The results of each learning community

meeting are recorded, including challenges faced, such as difficulties in integrating technology into teaching. This documentation serves as material for ongoing reflection and improvement, so that the learning community not only functions as a discussion forum but also as a systematic vehicle for teacher professional development.

Although the implementation of the learning community at SMP Negeri 2 Sragi has been running well, there are still challenges to be addressed. Interview data indicate that only about 30% of teachers actively contribute, while the rest tend to be passive. This uneven participation can hinder the optimization of the learning community's benefits. Furthermore, there is no measurable evaluation mechanism to assess the impact of the learning community on student learning outcomes. Recommendations that can be implemented include role rotation (every teacher is required to lead a discussion at least once per semester), non-material incentives such as certificates of appreciation, and strengthening evaluation through classroom observation rubrics and comparison of student scores before and after implementing strategies from the learning community.

The implementation of the learning community at SMP Negeri 2 Sragi is assessed based on the four PLC pillars developed by Olivier (2020): (1) shared vision, (2) collaborative mission, (3) core values, and (4) SMART goals (Olivier, D. F., Hipp, K. K., Huffman, 2020). The shared vision is realized in the commitment to improving the quality of teaching and teacher professional development. The collaborative mission is reflected in the practice of "model teachers" and regular discussions involving all community members. Core values, such as professionalism and openness, are maintained through clear role assignments and documentation of meeting outcomes. SMART goals are executed through structured activity scheduling and periodic evaluations to ensure the achievement of set targets.

The main strengths of the learning community implementation at SMP Negeri 2 Sragi are intensive inter-teacher collaboration and systematic documentation. This collaboration creates a dynamic learning environment in which teachers are not only content providers but also facilitators who guide students in understanding material and developing critical and creative thinking skills. Learning innovations, such as the use of project-based learning under the Merdeka Curriculum, are also adopted through joint discussions and reflections within the learning community.

The main challenges faced are uneven participation and the lack of a measurable impact evaluation mechanism. To increase participation, the school can implement role rotation and provide non-material incentives. Strengthening evaluation can be achieved through classroom observation rubrics and comparison of student scores before and after implementing strategies from the learning community. These strategies are in line with previous research findings that emphasize the importance of ongoing evaluation and active participation in learning communities for improving the quality of teaching.

Online learning communities facilitated by Kemdikbudristek through the Merdeka Mengajar Platform offer national webinars and discussion forums, but the interactions tend to be one-directional. The advantage of the "ESPERO SINAU" learning community lies in its face-to-face discussions, which are more contextual and interactive. Inter-school learning communities such as KKG/MGMP usually focus on the preparation of teaching materials, while "ESPERO SINAU" emphasizes daily practice reflection and the continuous professional development of teachers.

The implementation of the "ESPERO SINAU" learning community at SMP Negeri 2 Sragi demonstrates alignment with the conceptual framework developed by Kemdikbudristek (2023), although there are contextual adaptations that strengthen its effectiveness at the school level. The organizational structure of the learning community, consisting of a supervisor (the principal), a chairperson (the curriculum deputy), a secretary, a treasurer, and subject coordinators, ensures the presence of a core team responsible for coordinating activities, as recommended by Kemdikbudristek (2023) regarding the importance of community catalysts such as principals or senior teachers (Kemdikbudristek, 2023).

The uniqueness of the implementation at SMP Negeri 2 Sragi lies in the more specific division of roles, such as facilitators, documenters, and evaluators, which are not detailed in the national guidelines. This division of roles strengthens accountability and the active involvement of learning

community members (Kundiastuti, K., Nafi'a, I., Soedjono, 2024). The regular scheduling of learning community activities (once a month at the school level and every two weeks at the subject group level) demonstrates a higher intensity compared to the national recommendation, which only suggests "regular meetings" without specifying a particular timeframe. The integration of learning community activities with the MGMP schedule is also considered a good practice that can be replicated in other schools, as revealed by Guyanto, who state that integrating learning community activities with school agendas can improve time efficiency and teacher participation (Guyanto, B., Sari, R. P., Hartono, 2023).

SMP Negeri 2 Sragi implements a "model teacher" system, in which certain teachers practice new methods in the classroom and are observed by their peers. This practice is consistent with the findings of Louis (2010) regarding the effectiveness of observational learning in improving teachers' instructional skills (Louis, K. S., Marks, H. M., Kruse, 2010). The outcomes of each learning community meeting are recorded, including challenges faced, such as difficulties in integrating technology into teaching. This documentation serves as material for ongoing reflection and improvement, so that the learning community not only functions as a discussion forum but also as a systematic vehicle for teacher professional development (Rakhmah, N. D., Sulistiani, I. R., Pramudya, 2023).

Although the implementation of the learning community at SMP Negeri 2 Sragi has been running well, there are still challenges to be addressed. Interview data indicate that only about 30% of teachers actively contribute, while the rest tend to be passive. This uneven participation can hinder the optimization of the learning community's benefits, as highlighted by Kusumaningrum et al. (2024), who assert that teacher motivation and active participation are key to the success of learning communities. Furthermore, there is no measurable evaluation mechanism to assess the impact of the learning community on student learning outcomes. Recommendations that can be implemented include role rotation (every teacher must lead a discussion at least once per semester), non-material incentives such as certificates of appreciation, and strengthening evaluation through classroom observation rubrics and comparison of student scores before and after implementing strategies from the learning community (Novita, R., Radiana, 2024).

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A comparison with online learning communities facilitated by Kemdikbudristek through the Merdeka Mengajar Platform shows that the advantage of the "ESPERO SINAU" learning community lies in its more contextual and interactive face-to-face discussions. Inter-school learning communities such as KKG/MGMP usually focus on the preparation of teaching materials, while "ESPERO SINAU" emphasizes daily practice reflection and the continuous professional development of teachers (Yunita & Setiawan, 2024). These findings reinforce DuFour's (2005) theory that effective learning communities have specific goals and clear reflection mechanisms (DuFour, R., Eaker, R., DuFour, 2005).

Practically, other schools can adopt a hybrid model (face-to-face and online) to overcome time constraints and increase teacher participation. The hybrid model also enables integration between intra-school and inter-school learning communities, thereby expanding collaboration networks and teacher professional development, as highlighted by Ardhi (2024) in their research on PLC exploration in elementary schools (Ardhi, M. W., Praptiwi, E., Ernawati, 2024).

The role of the principal is crucial in building and empowering learning communities. The principal acts as a facilitator and motivator, designs the implementation of learning community activities, and creates an environment conducive to teacher professional development (Kundiaستuti, K., Nafi'a, I., Soedjono, 2024). Supportive school policies, such as adequate time allocation and facilities, are also key factors for the success of learning communities (Suryanto, A., Prasetyo, 2023)(Cholivah, W., Suharno, S., Wahyuningsih, 2024). Ongoing evaluation through the SMART model is essential to ensure the effectiveness and impact of learning communities. This evaluation enables schools to measure goal achievement, objectives, and the effectiveness of learning community activities, as well as to implement continuous improvements (Harris, A., Jones, 2010). Thus, the learning community at SMP Negeri 2 Sragi has made a significant contribution to improving teaching quality and teacher professional development, although there is still room for further improvement and innovation.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings and discussions, it's clear that the implementation of the "ESPERO SINAU" learning community at SMP Negeri 2 Sragi has been quite effective and aligns well with Kemdikbudristek's (2023) conceptual framework. This community successfully built a collaborative ecosystem among teachers, encouraged reflection on teaching practices, and strengthened a shared commitment to improving teaching quality and student learning outcomes. A clear organizational structure, specific role assignments, and a regular activity schedule are crucial factors supporting the learning community's sustainability at the school. However, the study also identified challenges like uneven teacher participation, the absence of measurable impact evaluation, and the need for stronger support and motivation from school administration. These findings are consistent with previous research emphasizing the importance of continuous evaluation, active participation, and leadership support in developing learning communities. Thus, the learning community at SMP Negeri 2 Sragi has positively contributed to enhancing teacher competencies and student learning outcomes, though there's still room for further improvement and innovation.

To further develop the learning community at SMP Negeri 2 Sragi and other schools, several recommendations should be considered. To boost teacher participation, we suggest implementing a role rotation system and providing non-material incentives like certificates of appreciation. Strengthening evaluation and monitoring is also crucial through developing measurable and continuous evaluation mechanisms that focus on the impact on student learning outcomes and teacher professional development. Leadership support from principals and other leaders needs to be optimized with adequate time allocation, facilities, and encouraging policies. Additionally, developing a hybrid model (face-to-face and online) can expand participation and inter-school collaboration networks. Lastly, fostering a sustained culture of collaboration and reflection through regular discussions and sharing best practices will ensure the community remains focused on student learning, builds team capacity, and provides systematic interventions. This research contributes by strengthening our understanding of learning communities' effectiveness as a strategy

for educational quality improvement. For future studies, we recommend empirically testing the effectiveness of these suggested recommendations and exploring the factors influencing the sustainability of learning communities in diverse school contexts.

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