ZIMBABWEAN TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE HISTORY SUBJECT PANELS AS AN INNOVATION FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

By

GODWIN MUMHURE

Thesis Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

Philosophiae Doctor in Education

(PhD Education)

In the

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

at the

UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE

BLOEMFONTEIN

JANUARY 2017

PROMOTER: Prof LC JITA

CO-PROMOTER: Dr L. LETSIE

Declarations

Student Number: 2014175026

I, Godwin Mumhure, declare that the thesis entitled **ZIMBABWEAN TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON HISTORY SUBJECT PANELS AS AN INNOVATION FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT** is my own work and has not been submitted by me at any other University/Faculty. I cede copyright of this thesis in favour of the University of the Free State.

Signature.....DATE.....

Mr G. Mumhure

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my late father Nickel Nherera Mumhure

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First and foremost, I would like to thank the Almighty for giving me good health and strength to go through my study successfully. Secondly, my profound gratitude goes to my two dedicated supervisors, namely Prof L.C. Jita and Dr L. Letsie for their expert academic and professional guidance from the beginning to the end of this study. Your support and professional guidance will always be remembered. Once again, I thank you.

My gratitude also goes to Prof M.L. Mokhele for guiding us in proposal writing, Dr M. Tsakeni and Dr Akpo I thank you for teaching us how to analyse data. Your ideas helped me to grow academically.

I also want to thank my principal Mrs R. Chipato sincerely for her support and encouragement. You allowed me free access to Internet and typing facilities. My sincere gratitude also goes to my fellow workmates, Dr D. Zireva and Mr Jenjekwa for your insights and constructive criticisms of my work. Your advice and ideas are greatly appreciated.

My sincere gratitude also goes to my wife, Shumirai, children and family members for supporting me during the course of my study. You accepted my apologies for not attending many family gatherings. Thank you so much. Without such understanding, I would have found it difficult to continue with this research.

I would like to acknowledge the support given by the following from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education:

1. The Permanent Secretary for granting me permission to carry out the study.
2. The Provincial Education Director, for granting me permission to conduct the study in Masvingo province.
3. The District Education Officer for granting me permission to carry out the study in Masvingo district.
4. School heads for giving me access to ‘A’ level history teachers.
5. The Head-in-charge history subject panels for allowing me to observe history subject panels in session.

6. All ‘A’ level history teachers in the Masvingo district for giving me information about history subject panels as an innovation for their professional development.
7. The office of the SANRAL Chair in Mathematics, Science and Technology Education and the Research Directorate at the University of the Free State for financial support and guidance.

Last but not least, this thesis would not have been a joy to read had it not been for the sacrifice and commitment of Mr L. Gama, the language editor. Mr Gama, I salute you for your hard work, patience and commitment to duty.

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONOMYS USED IN THE THESIS

BA	Bachelor of Arts
BED	Bachelor of Education
BSPZ	Better Schools Programme (Zimbabwe)
CDU	Curriculum Development Unit
CRT	Cluster Resource Teacher
DEO	District Education Officer
DRT	District Resource Teacher
EFA	Education For All
GRAD-CE	Graduate Certificate in Education
HIC	Head-in-Charge
JICA	Japanese International Cooperation Agency
MED	Master of Education
NASH	National Association of Secondary School Heads
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
PED	Provincial Education Director
ZIMSEC	Zimbabwe Schools Examination Council

Zimbabwean teachers' perspectives on history subject panels as an innovation for professional development

Abstract

The purpose of the study was to establish, from the perspective of the teachers, the efficacy of history subject panels as an innovation for professional development. Specifically, the study focused on gaining insights into how teachers understand history subject panels and their role, the effectiveness of the activities teachers engage in during their meetings and whether history subject panels are an effective vehicle for teacher-learning. The study also focused on the challenges faced by those involved in history subject panels and how history subject panels can be improved to make them effective vehicles for teacher professional development in Zimbabwe. Despite their promise, the debate on the efficacy of subject panels as an innovation for improving teachers' instructional practices and student achievement is inconclusive. This study contributes new knowledge to this debate by using history subject panels as an example.

The study adopted a qualitative research approach and a case study research design to investigate teachers' perspectives on history subject panels as an innovation for professional development. Using purposive sampling, eight history teachers were selected for the study, five of whom were interviewed extensively individually, while all eight participated in one focus group discussion. Document analysis of the minutes of history subject panels and observations of four history subject panel meetings were conducted to add to the validity of the findings of this study.

The study established that the teachers understand history subject panels as a "group of teachers coming together" for the purposes of learning together. This suggests that teachers' understanding of history subject panels is shaped by what they benefit from participating in and their actual experiences.

History subject panels play five critical roles in the professional development of teachers, i.e. the provision of instructional leadership, development of teacher leadership, provision of space for teachers to engage in curriculum analysis, induction of new teachers into the teaching service and the creation of communities

of learning for students. It was concluded that the last two roles are unique in that they are rarely found in the literature on teacher professional development in most developing countries.

Teachers engage in a variety of job-related activities during their history subject panel meetings such as syllabus interpretation, drawing common schemes and tests for their students, development of essay writing and student assessment skills. These are critical as they focus on improving teachers' instructional practices and student achievement.

The teachers themselves select fellow teachers to organise and coordinate the history panel activities, which they then lead. The teachers determine the agendas and the selection of facilitators for their history subject panel meetings. In terms of structure, workshops for teachers only and seminars involving teachers and students are used. Interactions at history subject panel sessions take the form of candid dialogues. Involvement of teachers in directing their professional development activities increased teacher ownership and commitment to the professional development initiative. The study established that history subject panels are effective in improving teaching and learning in schools.

The challenges faced by teachers include inadequate funding of history subject panel activities, unreliable channels of communication, overcrowding at seminars and long distances rural teachers have to travel to workshop/seminar venues.

It is recommended that the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education fund history subject panels and come up with a legal framework to guide teacher professional development through history subject panels.

Further research is needed on policies to guide professional development using subject panels and how and whether subject panels can be deepened to increase student learning.

Keywords: Collaboration, continuing professional development, history subject panels, perspectives, professional development

Samevatting

Die doel van die studie was om vanuit die onderwysers se perspektief vas te stel wat die doeltreffendheid van geskiedenis onderwerp panele is as ’n vernuwing vir professionele ontwikkeling.Die studie het spesifiek daarop gefokus om insig te kry op hoe onderwysers geskiedenis onderwerp panele en hul rol verstaan, die doeltreffendheid van die aktiwiteite waarin onderwysers gedurende hul vergaderings betrokke raak en of geskiedenis onderwerp panele effektief is vir onderwyser-leer.Die studie het ook op die uitdagings gefokus wat diegene wat betrokke is in geskiedenis onderwerp panele tee kom asook hoe hierdie panele verbeter kan word om hulle doeltreffend te maak vir onderwysers se professionele ontwikkeling in Zimbabwe.Ten spyte van hul belofte, duur die debat oor die doeltreffendheid van onderwerp panele as ’n vernuwing om onderwysers se onderrigpraktyke en leerders se prestasie te verbeter voort.Hierdie studie dra nuwe kennis by tot hierdie debat deur geskiedenis onderwerp panele as 'n voorbeeld te gebruik.

Die studie het ’n kwalitatiewe navorsingsbenadering en ’n gevallestudie navorsingsontwerp gebruik om onderwysers se perspektiewe oor geskiedenis onderwerp panele as ’n vernuwing vir professionele ontwikkeling te ondersoek.Deur gebruik te maak van doelgerigte steekproefneming, is agt geskiedenis onderwysers vir die studie gekies. Daar is met vyf van die onderwysers afsonderlike, omvattende onderhoude gevoer terwyl al agt in een fokusgroepbespreking deelgeneem het.Die notules van geskiedenis onderwerp panele asook waarnemings van vier geskiedenis onderwerp paneel vergaderingsis deur middel van dokument analise geanaliseer om by te dra tot die geldigheid van hierdie studie se bevindings.

Die studie het vasgestel dat onderwysers geskiedenis onderwerp panele verstaan as ’n “groep onderwysers wat bymekaar kom” om saam te leer.Dit dui daarop dat die onderwysers se begrip van geskiedenis onderwerp panele gevorm word deur die voordeel wat hulle uit hul deelname trek asook hul werklike ervarings.

Geskiedenis onderwerp panele speel vyf kritieke rolle in onderwysers se professionele ontwikkeling, m.a.w. voorsiening van instruktiewe leierskap, ontwikkeling van onderwyser leierskap, voorsiening van ’n omgewing vir onderwysers om betrokke te raak in kurrikulum analise, induksie van nuwe onderwysers tot die onderrigdiens en die skepping van gemeenskappe van leer vir

studente.Dit is hierdie studie se gevolgtrekking dat die laaste twee rolle uniek is aangesien dit selde in die literatuur oor onderwyser professionele ontwikkeling in ontwikkelende lande gevind word.

Onderwysers raak betrokke in ’n verskeidenheid werksverwante aktiwiteite gedurende hul geskiedenis onderwerp paneel vergaderings, byvoorbeeld sillabus interpretasie,die teken van algemene skemas en toetse vir hul studente, ontwikkeling van opstelskryf- en leerder assesseringsvaardighede.Hierdie is van kritieke belang aangesien dit daarop fokus om die onderwysers se onderrig praktyke en leerders se prestasie te verbeter.

Die onderwysers kies self ander onderwysers om die geskiedenis paneel aktiwiteite te organiseer en koördineer, daarna lei hulle dit dan ook self.Die onderwysers stel die agendas vas en kies die fasiliteerders vir hul geskiedenis onderwerp paneel vergaderings.In terme van struktuur, word werkswinkels alleenlik vir onderwysers gebruik terwyl seminare onderwysers en leerders betrek.Interaksies by geskiedenis onderwerp paneel sessies neem die vorm van openhartige dialoë.Die betrekking van die onderwysers in hul professionele ontwikkelsaktiwiteite het hul eienaarskap en hul toewyding tot die professionele ontwikkelsinisiatief vermeerder.Die studie het vasgestel dat geskiedenis onderwerp panele doeltreffend is in die verbetering van onderrig en leer in skole.

Die uitdagings wat onderwysers ondervind sluit in te min befondsing vir geskiedenis paneel aktiwiteite, onrealistiese kommunikasie kanale, oorvol seminare en lang afstande vir onderwysers van landelike gebiede om te reis om die werkswinkels/seminare by te woon.

Dit word aanbeveel dat die Ministerie van Primêre en Sekondêre Onderwys die geskiedenis onderwerp panele befonds asook met ’n regsraamwerk vorendag kom om onderwysers se professionele ontwikkeling by geskiedenis onderwerp panele te lei.

Verdere navorsing word benodig oor beleide wat professionele onwikkeling deur middel van onderwerp panele lei asook hoe/of onderwerp panele ontwikkel kan word om leerder se leer te verbeter.

Sleutelwoorde: Samewerking, voortgesette professionele ontwikkeling, geskiedenis onderwerp panele, perspektiewe, professionele ontwikkeling

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title page	Page
Declaration	i
Dedication	ii
Acknowledgement	iii
Abbreviations/Acronyms	v
Abstract	vi
Samevatting	viii
CHAPTER ONE: Orientation and background to the study	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Background	1
1.3 Problem statement	4
1.4 The central question	5
1.4.1 Research questions	6
1.5 Aim of the research	6
1.6 Research objectives	7
1.7 Summary of research methodology	7
1.8 Significance of the study	9
1.9 Limitations of the study	11
1.10 Delimitations of the study	12
1.11 Outline of theoretical framework	12
1.12 Feasibility of the study	13
1.13 Definition of key terms	13
1.14 Thesis outline	14
1.15 Chapter summary	15
CHAPTER TWO:	17
2.0 Literature review	17
2.1 Introduction	17
2.2 New perspectives on teacher professional development	17
2.3 Worldwide trends in teacher professional development: models and practices	20
2.3.1 Organisational/inter-institutional partnerships	20

2.3.2 Individual/small group models/techniques of professional development	22
2.3.2.1 Teacher workshops	22
2.3.2.2 Observation of excellent practice	24
2.3.2.3 Coaching/mentoring model	24
2.3.2.4 Cascade model	26
2.4 Trends in teacher professional development in Africa	27
2.5 Trends in teacher professional development in Zimbabwe	30
2.6 Teacher professional development approaches	34
2.6.1 Traditional approaches to teacher professional development	34
2.6.2 Alternative and innovative approaches to teacher professional development	37
2.7 Subject panels and teacher professional development	39
2.7.1 Origins and development of subject panels	39
2.8 Conceptualisation of subject panels	41
2.9 Role of subject panels in teacher professional development	47
2.10 History subject panel activities teachers engage in during meetings	51
2.11 History subject panels' professional development structure	55
2.12 Challenges faced in using history subject panels as vehicles for teacher professional learning	56
2.13 Characteristics of high quality professional development	59
2.13.1 Form of activity	60
2.13.2 Duration	61
2.13.3 Collective participation	62
2.13.4 Content focus	62
2.13.5 Active learning	63
2.13.6 Coherence	63
2.14 Theoretical framework	64
2.14 Chapter summary	67
3.0 CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	69
3.1 Introduction	69
3.2 Research questions	69

3.3 Research approach	71
3.4 Research design	72
3.5 Sampling procedure	75
3.5.1 Setting of the study	75
3.5.2 Selection of schools	79
3.5.3 Selection of participants	79
3.6 Data collection process	80
3.6.1 Instrumentation	80
3.6.2 Document analysis	81
3.6.3 Semi-structured interviews	82
3.6.4 Observations	85
3.6.5 Focus group discussions	89
3.7 Data analysis	91
3.8 Trustworthiness of the study	92
3.8.1 Credibility	93
3.8.2 Dependability	94
3.8.3 Transferability	95
3.8.4 Confirmability	95
3.9 Ethical issues	96
3.10 Chapter summary	100
4.0 CHAPTER FOUR: DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS	101
4.1 Introduction	100
4.2 Data presentation	101
4.3 Participants' demographic data	104
4.4 Overview of emerging themes	105
4.5 Theme 1: Teachers' understanding of history subject panels and their role in professional development	107
4.5.1 Teachers' understanding history subject panels	107
4.5.1.1 Sub-theme 1:Teacher understandings of history subject panels	107
4.5.1.2 Differences between history subject panels and other approaches to professional development	111

4.5.2 Role of subject panels in professional development	113
4.5.3 Theme 1: Discussion of the findings	115
4.6 Theme 2: Effectiveness of the history subject panel activities	118
4.6.1 Type of activities teachers engage in during history subject panel meetings	118
4.6.2 Selection of facilitators for history subject panel meetings	123
4.6.3 Agenda setting for history subject panels	125
4.7 Teacher assessment of the effectiveness of the history subject panel activities	127
4.7.1 History subject panel activities regarded as important by teachers	128
4.7.2 History subject panel activities regarded as less important by the teachers	130
4.7.3 Teachers' overall assessment of the effectiveness of the history subject panel activities	131
4.8 Theme 2: Discussion of findings	133
4.9 Theme 3: Effectiveness of the history subject panels as an innovation for teachers' professional development	136
4.9.1 Teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of history subject panels as an innovation for professional development	136
4.9.1.1 Evidence of effectiveness of history subject panels as an innovation for professional development	136
4.9..2 Evidence on the ineffectiveness of history subject panels as an innovation in professional development	139
4.9.3 Nature of the history subject panels professional development programme	141
4.9.3.1 Structure of professional development	141
4.9.3.2 Teacher collaboration	143
4.9.4 Theme 3: Discussion of findings	146
4.10 Theme 4: Challenges faced in using the history subject panels for professional development and suggestions for improvement	148
4.10.1 Organisation and effectiveness of the history subject panels	149
4.10.2 Challenges faced by teachers in using history subject panels in professional development	150

4.10.3 Suggestions for improvement of history subject panels as an innovation for professional development	153
4.10.4 Theme 4: Discussion of findings	155
4.11 Chapter summary	158
5.0 CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS	159
5.1 Introduction	159
5.2 Overview of the study	159
5.3 Main findings of the study	163
5.3.1 Teachers' understanding of history subject panels and their role in professional development	164
5.3.2 Effectiveness of the activities of history subject panel in professional development	169
5.4 Effectiveness of history subject panels as an innovation for teachers' professional development	173
5.5 Challenges faced in using history subject panels as an innovation for professional development and suggestions for improvement	179
5.6 Summary of main findings	181
5.7 Conclusions	183
5.8 Limitations of the study	185
5.9 Contribution of the study	186
5.10 Recommendations for practice and policy	188
5.10.1 Recommendations for practice	188
5.10.2 Recommendations for policy	190
5.11 Recommendations for further study	191
5.12 Final reflections on the study	191
References	193
Appendices	**210**
Appendix A: Interview invitation letter for participants and consent form	210
Appendix B: Interview protocol/schedule	212
Appendix C: Focus group discussion invitation letter for participants and consent form	216
Appendix D: Focus group discussion protocol/schedule	219

Appendix E: Observation protocol/schedule	221
Appendix F: Document analysis protocol/schedule	222
Appendix G: Application letter to carry out research	223
Appendix H: Ethical Clearance letter from the University of the Free State	225
Appendix I: Letter from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education granting permission to carry out the study	226
Appendix J: Letter from the Provincial Education Director (Masvingo Province) and Approval from the District Education Officer (Masvingo District) granting permission to carry out the study.	227

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 ORIENTATION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides the background, problem statement, research questions, aim and objectives, significance and limitations of the study: *Zimbabwean teachers' perspectives of the history subject panels as an innovation for professional development.* It also briefly discusses the methodology used to conduct the study and the theoretical framework underpinning it. Limitations and delimitations of the study are discussed, key terms used in the study are clarified and the organisation of the study presented. The chapter concludes with a presentation of a summary of the chapter.

1.2 BACKGROUND

The dawn of the new millennium witnessed unprecedented reforms in education systems around the world (Villegas-Reimers, 2003) but these can only be successful if the teachers responsible for implementing them at school and classroom level possess the requisite skills. One approach for ensuring that reforms achieve their intended goals is through providing the teachers with relevant professional development programmes (Guskey, 2002; Musanti & Pence, 2010). International studies suggest that the tradition of artisan teaching, which characterises teachers' work in solo classrooms should be replaced by school cultures that support collaborative professional development for teachers (Bray, 1987; Fulton & Britton, 2011). Whether the introduction of History subject panels in Zimbabwe can be a panacea to the problem of improving teachers' instructional practices and student achievement remains an open question.

Whilst history subject panels appear to be a solution to the challenges of providing high quality education, little is known about how the teachers experience these new forms of professional development (Jita & Mokhele, 2014), how they are implemented and the accompanying challenges teachers face (Jita & Mokhele, 2012; Mokhele, 2013). Little research has been conducted, from the perspective of teachers, about the effectiveness of this non-traditional approach to teacher

development (Mokhele, 2011). This study seeks to contribute insights into the efficacy of history subject panels as an innovation for teacher professional development in Zimbabwe.

International studies on teachers' professional development suggest that most of the traditional one-time workshops, seminars and/or conferences are not effective in bringing about the desired improvements in teachers' instructional practices and student achievement (Kennedy, 2014; De Clercq & Phiri, 2013; Kennedy, 2011; Levine & Marcus, 2010). Similarly, specific studies on the cascade approach to teacher professional development have found the approach to be insufficient and its outcomes disappointing (Bett, 2016; Dichaba & Mokhele, 2012; Gatawa, 1998; Kafyulilo, 2013). The main criticism against this approach is that information may be distorted or misinterpreted by the time it reaches the second generation of teachers (Dichaba & Mokhele, 20112). In light of the evidence about the shortcomings of the dominant models of professional development, calls for a paradigm shift to more collaborative forms of teacher development have been made (Chong & Kong, 2012; De Luca *et al.*, 2014; Kennedy, 2011; Selemani-Meke, 2013).The call for teachers to work together in solving challenges they encounter in the course of duty is based on the assumption that learning is more effective when it is socially situated and context specific (Maphosa *et al.*, 2013; Vescio, Ross & Adams, 2008). The workshop or conference type of professional development does not offer teachers many opportunities for discussions and co-construction of meanings about issues pertaining to their craft (Garet *et al.*, 2001). Generally, the role of teachers in most workshop-types of professional development is that teachers are assigned a passive role and are rarely given opportunities for active participation (Villegas-Reimers, 2003). The question that this research aims to answer is whether history subject panels are effective in providing an alternative and effective way for the professional development of teachers.

The provision of teacher professional development through subject panels or teacher clusters is not a new phenomenon in various parts of the world such as the United States of America (USA), Europe, Latin America, India, South Africa, Namibia and Kenya (Delport & Makaye, 2009; Dittmar, Mendleson & Ward, 2002; Giordano, 2008). Zimbabwe is one such country where there has been widespread use of subject panels and/or clusters as an innovation for teachers' professional

development (Chikoko, 2007). In spite of their promise, not much research has been conducted on how the beneficiaries understand the subject panels, what activities are involved and how effective they are as an innovation for professional development (Jita & Mokhele, 2012; Jita & Ndlalane, 2009). There is not enough research on subject-based teacher professional development using subject panels in Zimbabwe. In part, this study attempts to contribute insights to the literature on professional development by using history subject panels in Zimbabwe as a case study.

Responding to societal demands for quality education in the country, the governments of Zimbabwe and the Netherlands launched a 'Better School Programme (Zimbabwe)' in 1993 (Chikoko, 2007). This marked the introduction of school clusters and/or subject panels as vehicles for teacher professional development. Donor funding for teacher professional development, however, ended in 2010 when the National Association of Secondary School Heads (NASH) took over. From 1993 to date, there has been no large scale research on the efficacy of subject panels as an innovation for teachers' professional development. Most of the available studies in Zimbabwe tend to focus on primary school teacher professional development through clusters, neglecting the secondary school subject panels (Chikoko, 2007; Delport & Makaye, 2009; Maphosa *et al.*, 2013; Mavesera *et al.*, 1998) The study by Gwekwerere e*t al.*, (2013) comes close but focuses more on teacher professional development in secondary school science and mathematics (Science In-Service Teacher Training Project in Zimbabwe [SEITT]). This is a different teacher-led professional development initiative that is not linked to subject panels. There is thus a gap in terms of research on subject panels in Zimbabwe, especially after the withdrawal of donor funding in 2010.

Subject panels involve the coming together of teachers from different schools who teach the same subject and level for purposes of learning from each other about their craft (Ministry of Education, 2000). In this study, "subject panels", "clusters", "networks" and "professional learning communities" are referred to interchangeably since they share similar characteristics with very slight differences depending on context (Bray, 1987; Chikoko, 2007; Delport & Makaye, 2009; Giordano, 2008; Kennedy, 2014; Ministry of Education, 2000; Watson, 2013). Several studies seem to point to the benefits of clusters in improving school and student achievement.

Findings from these studies suggest that clusters have several advantages such as breaking teacher isolation, teachers sharing experiences, expertise and practices that work, promoting decentralised decision-making, and forging collegial relationships among teachers (Hord, 1997; Jita & Ndlalane, 2009; Maphahlele, 2012; Kennedy, 2011; Pomuti & Weber, 2012). Whilst these are encouraging findings, it remains to be seen whether using history subject panels as a vehicle for professional development in the Zimbabwean context produces similar benefits.

Studies conducted by various scholars on the use of teacher clusters for teacher professional development found that they are dogged by challenges. In a study conducted by Pomuti and Weber (2012) in Namibia, it was established that clusters were unable to attain their intended goals of improving teachers' instructional practices and student achievement because of inadequate funding. A similar study by Jita and Mokhele (2012) of teacher clusters in South Africa found that teacher clusters were diverted from their role of improving teachers' instructional practices and student achievement. The education authorities converted them into administrative conduits rather than vehicles for teacher professional development. In Zimbabwe, studies of primary school clusters by Chikoko (2007), Delport and Makaye (2009), and Maphosa et al. (2013) established that school heads do not fully fund and support teachers' professional development activities. In some cases, teachers were expected to use their own resources to attend professional development workshops. The above challenges made it difficult for the primary school clusters to achieve their intended goals of improving teachers' instructional practices and student achievement (Delport & Makaye, 2009). There are no studies in Zimbabwe that I am aware of that have focused on high school teachers' experiences of subject panels. This study attempts to fill this gap by investigating high school teachers' perspectives on history subject panels as an innovation for their professional development in Zimbabwe.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The use of subject panels and/or clusters for the purposes of teacher professional development has a long history, starting from the 1940s in Bolivia and has now spread to cover most parts of the globe (Giordano, 2008). The main purpose of subject panels was to improve teachers' instructional practices and student

achievement in schools. Studies on subject panels/clusters established that they are beneficial to the teachers as they help to counter teacher isolation, reduce stress (Muijs, 2008) and provide teachers with a unique instructional guidance system (Jita & Mokhele, 2014). It is unknown whether teachers using history subject panels as an innovation for professional development in Zimbabwe are experiencing similar benefits.

Despite the widespread use of subject panels/clusters as an innovation for teacher professional development, not much efficacy is documented about their achieving intended instructional goals (Jita & Mokhele, 2014; Jita & Ndlalane, 2009). In addition, while a number of studies have been conducted in Zimbabwe on teacher professional development, they focus more on clusters for primary school teachers and heads with nothing on high school teachers (Chikoko, 2007; Delport & Makaye, 2009; Maphosa *et al.*, 2013). These studies have established that teachers encounter a barrage of challenges including a lack of support from school heads and poor funding for professional development activities. The studies have been useful only in the sense that they provide a basis for further research on the issues but they have not yielded conclusive findings on the specifics of the various innovations or approaches to teacher professional development in the country. The present study sought to find out from the participating teachers what challenges they were facing in using history subject panels as vehicles for their professional development and how these can be addressed. Equally important is the fact that there is not enough evidence on how teachers understand the role of history subject panels, what activities teachers engage in during their meetings and whether history subject panels are an effective innovation for teachers' professional development. In my review of the existing literature, I did not find any study in Zimbabwe on the efficacy and effectiveness of history subject panels as an innovation for teacher professional development. In this study, I investigated the teachers' perspectives on history subject panels as an innovation for professional development.

1.4 THE CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTION

The central research question for this study is, "*What are the teachers' perspectives of history subject panels as an innovation for professional development?"*

1.4.1 Research questions

To answer the above central research question, the following sub-questions were proposed:

1) *What are the teachers' understanding of history subject panels and their role in professional development?*

2) *How effective are history subject panels' activities for teacher professional development?*

3) *How viable are the history subject panels as an innovation for professional development?*

4) *What suggestions and recommendations can be made for the improvement on the structure and function of history subject panels for them to serve better as vehicles for teacher professional development in Zimbabwe?*

1.5 AIM OF THE RESEARCH

This study sought to investigate teachers' perspectives on history subject panels as an innovation for professional development. More specifically, this study aims at discovering history teachers' understanding of the world around them and how they construct meanings of their experiences of history subject panels as a collaborative structure for their professional development. Creswell (2007) argues that the aim of qualitative case studies is to collect rich descriptive data for the purposes of understanding the stories of the people involved, from their perspective.

In this study, I specifically focused on history teachers' perspectives because I was interested in their experiences of history subject panels and the meanings they ascribed to those experiences. Therefore, the history subject panels provided me with the context in which I investigated and described how teachers constructed meanings and understandings of their experiences.

1.6 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study were to:

- Examine how teachers understand history subject panels and their role as an innovation for professional development.
- Assess the effectiveness of history subject panels' activities for teacher professional development.
- Assess the viability of history subject panels as an innovation for professional development.
- Suggest how the structure and function of history subject panels can be improved to make them serve well as a vehicle for teacher professional development in Zimbabwe.

The objectives, as stated above, were addressed through an investigation of teachers' experiences of history subject panels as an innovation for professional development. The teachers discussed in detail their experiences, opinions and understanding of history subject panels including their perceived successes, challenges and what they thought should be done to address the challenges thereof. It was critical to focus on teachers' experiences and opinions of professional development through history subject panels because they are the direct beneficiaries of this innovation.

1.7 SUMMARY OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To conduct this study entitled *Zimbabwean teachers' perspectives of history subject panels as an innovation for professional development;* I adopted a qualitative research approach and specifically, a case study research design. This was deemed appropriate because I wanted to collect rich descriptive data on teachers' views and experiences of history subject panels as an innovation for teachers' professional development (Creswell, 2014). I wanted to understand history subject panels as an innovation for teachers' professional development from the perspective of the teachers who are the direct beneficiaries of this innovation in professional development. The choice of this approach was also informed by Mead's (1863-1931) symbolic interactionism theory, which underpinned the theoretical framework of this study. The theory holds that people construct meanings through interaction. Understanding how teachers co-construct meanings during history subject panel

meetings can be best solicited through qualitative and not quantitative approaches (Berg, 2014).

I purposively sampled the setting and participants for this study. According to Patton (2002) purposive sampling is used to select information rich participants about a particular phenomenon. Masvingo district was selected as the setting for this study because it was deemed to have the most active subject panels out of the seven districts in Masvingo province. Eight schools and eight teachers from each of these schools were selected because they were deemed to have the information I needed to answer this study's critical questions.

The instruments used to collect qualitative data to answer the research questions for this study included interviews, focus group discussions, observation and document analysis (Ritchie & Lewis, 2013). Five participants were interviewed and all eight participants were involved in one focus group discussion held at one school in Masvingo town. The interviews and focus group discussions were important for providing detailed qualitative data about how participants understood history subject panels, their role in professional development, activities of history subject panel meetings and the effectiveness of history subject panels as a professional development innovation. It also assisted in obtaining information regarding the challenges faced by participants attending history subject panel meetings and how the structure and function of subject panels can be improved (research questions 1 to 4). Four observations of history subject panel activities provided the researcher with first-hand information on how participants interacted, on what issues they focused and who facilitated history subject panel sessions. This information was critical for the purposes of triangulation. Document analysis (minutes of history subject panel meetings) helped to provide data on the agendas, activities, facilitators and attendance at history subject panel meetings (research questions 1 to 3).

The qualitative data generated for this study were transcribed, coded, analysed and presented as an integrated whole in chapter 4. Thick descriptions were provided to authenticate participants' views. Details about the methodology for this study, including all ethical issues are discussed in chapter 3.

1.8 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

My personal motivation to conduct this study stemmed from my past experiences. Firstly, as a high school history teacher for seventeen years, a member of the Gutu district history subject panel, a Gutu District Resource Teacher (DRT) in-charge of secondary school subject panels and primary school clusters, a member and key facilitator of the National History Panel involved in history syllabus development. Owing to this background, I developed a passion for the professional development of teachers in general and of history teachers in particular. Secondly, I am especially interested in curriculum studies as a field of academic research and wanted to explore the teaching and learning of history in schools.

As a history teacher in a number of high schools in Zimbabwe, I participated in several professional development workshops run by the Ministry of Education's Curriculum Development Unit (CDU) division and the University of Zimbabwe's Faculty of Education (Department of Curriculum and Arts Education). From a personal point of view, many of these staff development programmes did not help me much as a history teacher, partly because they tended to be generic and were not relevant to my work. They were not properly aligned to the realities and challenges teachers faced in the implementation of the required approaches and the new socialist thrust that the new government had adopted for history at independence in 1980. Upon reflection, I realised that I did not change the way I presented lessons to my students upon return from these workshops. The thought about the apparent waste of time and resources on these workshops continued to bother me and prompted my investigation of teachers' perspectives of history subject panels as an innovation for professional development. My aim was to provide insights on how teachers define these structures and how they might be improved to serve better as vehicles of professional development in Zimbabwe. Mokhele (2013) strongly argues that most of the teacher professional development endeavours around the world seem to be of little value in as far as improving teachers' instructional practices and student achievement is concerned. If this were true, then there is cause for concern given the resources that are usually spent on such professional development in many countries. Researchers argue that teachers are rarely given opportunities to discuss relevant issues that affect them directly in schools and in their teaching (Mokhele, 2011; 2013) of history for example. As a

teacher, I had always looked forward to a situation where history teachers would be given opportunities to collaborate with peers in determining what they wished to share concerning their own experiences and devising their own solutions to problems in the classroom.

An opportunity arose in 1996 when government realised that the quality of education was in decline and citizens were becoming discontented (Gatawa, 1998). The introduction of subject panels was a welcome move and, as history teachers, we were very excited to be given such a platform to determine what we wanted to do concerning our teaching. This early phase of the inception of secondary school subject panels coincided with my move to the position of DRT based at the Better Schools Programme (Zimbabwe) district resource centre. With passion and determination, I promoted the formation of all subject panels and clusters supported by an army of enthusiastic Education Officers from the Regional and District Offices. I engaged in that work for four years from 2004 until my departure in 2007. It was also during this period that I was involved as a member of the National History Panel and participated in the development of the new Ordinary ('O' level) and Advanced ('A' level) history syllabi. My passion for the professional development of history teachers continued as we worked on content and pedagogical skills required by history teachers in order to meet the new challenges. From the time I left BSPZ in 2007, until the time of this study, there has been no systematic research conducted, especially from the perspective of history teachers themselves, about the utility of these new and non-traditional teacher professional development innovations. The present study thus becomes more important as policy makers and other interested stakeholders may read publications informed by this study. I hope that this may help them make decisions to improve the structure and function of history subject panels as an innovation for teacher professional development.

The use of subject panels and school clusters are not only a new phenomenon in Southern Africa but very little has been documented about their effectiveness in bringing about the much acknowledged benefits they provide in terms of raising the quality of education and student achievement across the world (Jita & Mokhele, 2014; Jita & Ndlalane, 2009; Kafyulilo, 2013; Maphosa *et al.*, 2013; Mokhele, 2013). As part of their recommendations in their study, Jita and Mokhele (2014:13) wrote,

> While we are better informed about the phenomenon of teacher leadership and how it operates in a school setting, we are yet to understand teacher leadership as it is practiced outside the formal school structures. This is especially so if such leadership is subject-based and designed to influence teaching and learning in schools and district.

This study was intended to partly address the above recommendation and for history teachers to give us a verdict on the effectiveness of history subject panels as an innovation for professional development in Zimbabwe specifically.

Such a verdict by history teachers themselves on history subject panels as an innovation for professional development will help, not only policy makers in Zimbabwe but also other researchers in the field of teacher professional development the world over, on the merits of innovative forms of professional development that rely on teacher collaboration. This makes this study very important as a contribution to knowledge on the current phenomenon. The study also draws the attention of researchers to a subject area that is often neglected in favour of the more 'economically justifiable' learning areas, such as mathematics and sciences, for which most of the recent research into teachers' professional development seems to have focused.

1.9 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study was confined to history subject panels in the Masvingo district of Zimbabwe. The study sample comprised eight high schools which included three rural high schools, one high school situated in a growth point, and three urban high schools. Eight 'A' level history teachers participated in this study, one from each school. The study excluded high school teachers in other subject panels in the Masvingo district. The selection of the schools provided a fair representation of their geographical demarcations within the Masvingo district. The teachers were purposively sampled to include only those who were experienced and had been actively involved in history subject panels for a minimum of three years. The reason for this was that I wanted information rich participants (Creswell, 2014).

1.10 DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study was limited to eight high schools in the Masvingo district of Zimbabwe, comprising eight secondary schools which included three rural high schools, one high school situated in a growth point, and three urban high schools. A total of eight 'A' Level History teachers participated in this study, one 'A' Level History teacher from each school. The selection of these schools provided a fair representation of their geographical demarcations within Masvingo district. The teachers were purposively sampled to include only those who were experienced and had been actively involved in History subject panels for a minimum of three years. The reason for this was that I wanted information rich participants (Creswell, 2014). Teachers from other subjects were not included in this study of History subject panels.

Five of the participants were interviewed once and each interview lasted for about 30-40 minutes. I also attended four History subject panels' meetings in order to observe and experience first-hand the activities in which History teachers were engaged and how these were organised. I closely observed History subject panel meetings, taking down detailed field notes about how teachers were interacting. I was also able to discuss various issues with teachers concerning how they perceived History subject panels as an innovation for their professional development. This enabled me to have a clear understanding of various activities in which teachers engaged and how they exchanged and shared ideas about their craft.

One focus group discussion was conducted with the eight teachers for purposes of gaining a fuller understanding of various issues concerning how teachers perceived History subject panels as an innovation for professional development.

1.11 OUTLINE OF THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Mead's (1863-1931) interactionism theory informed this study, with three main principles namely meaning, language and thought (Aldiabat & Navenec, 2011). The theory states that meanings arise out of the "process of interaction between people" (Mackinnon, 2005:89) in social settings and the actions of others are instrumental in the formation of meaning for any individual and with regard to any specific object (Mackinnon, 2005). According to Aldiabat and Navenec (2011), there are seven assumptions of symbolic interactionism. These assumptions include, that people live

in a symbolic world of ‘learned meanings’, people’s behaviour towards symbols is determined by the meanings those symbols have for them and the meanings of objects or situations emerge out of interaction between people .Furthermore, society has a relationship of freedom and constraints, the meanings of things in the people’s symbolic world are generated through the interpretive process, self is a social construct that develops through social interaction with others and self-concept provides the motive for behaviour. These assumptions are incorporated in this study since the study’s focus is on tapping meanings teachers construct of the role of history subject panels in continuing professional development.

Central to the symbolic interactionism theory is the assumption that people construct meanings in their social settings through interaction with others (Blasé &Blasé, 2000).This assumption provides opportunities for the researcher to investigate teachers’ perspectives of history subject panels as an innovation for professional development. Through interaction, teachers constructed meanings of what history subject panels are, their role in professional development and their effectiveness in improving their instructional practices and student achievement. In addition, teachers constructed meanings of history subject panels as a professional development innovation and how their structure and function can be improved.

The study is thus interested in investigating teachers’ understandings of history subject panels and their role in professional development, their effectiveness, how teachers regard their viability as a professional development innovation and how their structure and function could be improved in order to serve as a vehicle for teacher professional development in Zimbabwe and elsewhere.

1.12 FEASIBILITY OF THE STUDY

History subject panels are under the control of NASH and have a programme of activities. Teachers from all high schools in the district are expected to attend the history subject panels’ activities and each provides travel and subsistence for their teachers. History teachers decide on how and what they want to discuss, including the selection of facilitators. This made it very easy for the researcher to find teachers

to interview and invite to the focus group discussion. I was also able to attend and observe four history subject panel meetings without facing any challenges.

1.13 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

The following key terms used in this study have the following intended meanings:

1) *Collaboration:* This refers to the history teachers working together, interdependently for the purposes of sharing knowledge about the teaching and learning of history in their respective schools. These teachers are driven together by their common goal of improving their individual and collective instructional practices and student achievement (Guskey, 2003).

2) *Continuing professional development (CPD):* This refers to ongoing skilling of history teachers already at work in the schools. CPD, as understood in this study, includes the following characteristics of high quality professional development gleaned from literature ongoing, supportive, job-embedded, instructional focus and collaboration (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Mokhele, 2013).
3) *History subject panel:* Refers to an organisational structure comprising history teachers from different schools engaging in collaborative learning, sharing skills and resources in a supportive environment. History subject panels have attributes of a professional learning community, shared values and vision, supportive and shared leadership, collective learning, supportive conditions and shared practice (Hord, 1997). History subject panels, clusters and networks are related concepts (Delport & Makaye, 2009).

4) *Perspectives:* These refer to history teachers' views, opinions and understandings, beliefs and attitudes about history subject panels. These also include teachers' perceived successes and challenges of history subject panels and what they think could be done to improve its structure and function as a vehicle for their continuing professional development.

5) *Seminars:* These refer to history subject panel meetings attended by teachers and their 'A' level history students.

1.14 THESIS OUTLINE

This thesis is divided into five chapters.

Chapter 1: This chapter presents the orientation and background to the study. It specifically provides an introduction, background of the study, problem statement, significance of the study, research questions, aim and objectives of the study and a chapter summary.

Chapter 2

This chapter provides a detailed review of related literature on teacher professional development. Specifically, it focuses on the discussion of relevant definitions and Mead's social interaction theory that is utilised to understand teachers' perspectives about the role of history subject panels in continuing professional development. The various models or approaches to teacher professional development used in various countries are also explored.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 provides the research methodology used to conduct this study. It focuses on the research approach, design, instrumentation and sampling procedures. Furthermore, data collection procedures and the manner in which data will be managed and presented are provided. The ethical considerations used to protect the privacy of participants including ethical clearance procedures are explained.

Chapter 4

This chapter presents the qualitative analysis of data generated in Masvingo district from the ten history teachers who participated in this study. The data is presented in the form of thick descriptive summaries. An outline of the major themes emerging from the data are also presented and explained.

Chapter 5

The chapter provides the findings and conclusions of this study. Their implications for policy and practice are discussed. The relevance to teacher professional development in general is also explored in Zimbabwe and other third world countries in particular. Areas for further research are also presented.

1.15 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter provided an orientation and background to the study, focusing on professional development and its importance to the success of educational innovations. I argue that teacher professional development is a key to the success of educational reforms and provision of high quality education for all learners, reflected in high achievement. Furthermore, I also argue that there is a gap in the scholarship on teacher professional development using history subject panels. Most of the literature available focuses on primary teacher clusters or on more economically viable subjects such as mathematics and science, excluding history subject panels. It was also argued that this study contributes knowledge in the use of history subject panels as an innovation for professional development. The research aim, objectives and summary of the research methodology were provided. The study adopted a qualitative research approach and a case study research design. This was deemed appropriate as the study was intended to generate qualitative data about the teachers' experiences of history subject panels as an innovation for their professional development. The limitations and delimitations of the study are discussed in detail. The chapter also discussed the theoretical framework utilised as a lens for the study. Key terms used in the study have been clarified and the organisation of the thesis provided. The next chapter presents the literature reviewed for this study.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a discussion of related literature on teacher professional development locally and internationally. Specifically, the chapter discusses the various perspectives on teacher professional development. This includes worldwide trends in teacher professional development and trends in teacher professional development in Africa and Zimbabwe. Furthermore, the chapter discusses traditional and alternative innovative approaches to teacher professional development and the two main approaches to teacher professional development. The chapter traces the origins of subject panels, examines the manner in which subject panels are conceptualised and their role in the professional development of teachers. This chapter also deliberates on activities teachers engage in during their meetings and challenges faced in using subject panels as an innovation for teacher professional development. Additionally, the chapter provides the conceptual framework used to understand the effectiveness of history subject panels and elaborates on the theoretical framework used as a lens to understand teachers' perspectives on the history subject panels as an innovation for their professional development. The chapter concludes with a chapter summary.

2.2 NEW PERSPECTIVES ON TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Glatthorn (19995:41) posits that, "teacher development is the professional growth a teacher achieves as a result of gaining increased experience and examining his or her teaching systematically". Teacher professional development encompasses formal (such as attending professional meetings and workshops) and informal experiences (such as reading professional publications) (Villegas-Reimers, 2003). According to Glatthorn (1995), such a conceptualisation of professional development is broader than career development, which refers to the growth of a teacher throughout his/her professional career cycle. Professional development is also viewed as broader than staff development, which is referred to as the provision of organised in-service programmes aimed at fostering growth of a group of teachers. Staff development is regarded as one of the many systematic interventions utilised

for teacher development (Villegas-Reimers, 2003). Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2001) argue that it is critical to pay special attention to the content of professional development experiences, the process through which it occurs and the context in which it takes place. Scholars on teacher professional development established that the most common type of professional development offered to teachers is staff development or in-service training. This form of professional development is largely characterised by workshops in the form of short-term courses intended to provide teachers with the latest information on particular aspects of their work (Bett, 2016; Mulkeen, 2010). Several studies point to the ineffectiveness of such approaches to teacher professional development, as they are usually not connected to the realities of the teachers' classroom situations (Craig, Kraft & Du Plessis 1998; Wei *et al.*, 2009). A paradigm shift took place in the last few decades in the way teacher professional development is conceptualised. Villegas-Reimers (2003: 12) describes this change as a "new image" of teacher learning.

The new perspective of teacher professional development is anchored on constructivism and not a transmission-oriented model (Villegas-Reimers, 2003). Teachers are viewed as active learners, engaged in concrete tasks of teaching, assessment, observation and reflection (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Garet *et al*., 2001). Guskey and Yoon (2009) argue that teachers should be active learners rather than recipients of other people's truths during professional development sessions.

Professional development is conceived of as a long-term process and not an event. The new perspective acknowledges that teachers learn over time (Lieberman, 1990). In order to achieve the maximum benefit for the teachers it is critical that they are provided with a series of related experiences rather than one-off presentations. Cohen (1990) argues that this provides teachers with adequate time to relate their prior knowledge to the new experiences. Guskey and Yoon (2009) argue that there should be follow-ups to support teachers trying new approaches to speed up the change process.

The new perspective of teacher professional development does not only view it as a process but that it takes place within particular contexts (Villegas-Reimers, 2003). This suggests that professional development should be closely aligned to teachers'

daily work with students in their classrooms. Hord, (1997) suggests that schools be transformed into communities of learners or professional communities. The emphasis is on-the-job learning activities for teachers in the form of action research or study groups (Blazer, 2005).

According to Guskey (2002) the new perspective underscores the need for teacher professional development to be closely aligned to school reform efforts. Teacher professional development is now regarded as a process of culture building, hence the need for it to be in tandem with school programmes. For professional development to be successful according to the new perspective, teachers need to be empowered professionals (Mokhele, 2013; Villegas-Reimers, 2003).

Teachers are conceived of as reflective practitioners who enter the profession with a certain knowledge base. They acquire new knowledge based on their prior knowledge (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001).Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) argue that the role of professional development should be that of aiding teachers in the construction of new pedagogical theories and practices.

The new perspective conceives professional development as a collaborative process (Hargreaves *et al.*, 2013; Picower, 2015). This perspective acknowledges that teachers may have opportunities to engage in isolated work and reflection but the most effective form of professional development is that which is characterised by meaningful interactions not only among teachers themselves but also between teachers and administrators and other members of the community (Frost, (2013).

Teacher professional development looks different in diverse settings or contexts. Scribner (1999) advises that teachers and other stakeholders engaged in professional development activities need to adapt their programmes to suit their unique contexts. Guskey (2002) emphasises the importance of paying special attention to context if optimal results are to be achieved. The focus on context is critical as it allows for the provision of professional development that is relevant to the needs of the teachers. The current study sought to determine whether history subject panels as an innovation for teacher professional development has all or most of the above features espoused by the new perspectives on teacher professional development.

2.3 WORLDWIDE TRENDS IN TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: MODELS AND PRACTICES

Several models have been developed and are being implemented in different countries throughout the world to promote and support teacher learning from the time they join service until retirement. Villegas-Reimers (2003) divided these models into two broad categories.

2.3.1 Organisational/inter-institutional partnerships

This category comprises several models. Firstly, there are *professional development schools* (PDSs). These are partnerships between teachers, administrators and university faculty members created to improve teaching and learning for their respective students and to marry educational theory and practice (Villegas-Reimers, 2003). Although the model involves and requires substantial institutional support, it has the capacity to provide teachers with opportunities for professional development from the beginning to the end of their career. Chance (2000) argues that in spite of their differences, PDSs have similar goals of providing professional development to pre-service and in-service teachers in school settings. Villegas-Reimers (2003) found that evaluations of PDSs have been positive. Firstly, learners improved their achievement in mathematics and writing skills after the implementation of the interventions devised by teachers in "elementary school and implemented by pre-service teachers within the PDS" (Knight, Wiseman & Cooner, 2000:35). Secondly, in-service teachers benefitted by keeping themselves informed of the latest research and theories in teaching because of their connections with universities (Villegas-Reimers, 2003). The university/college faculty also benefitted as they had opportunities for being informed about the realities of teachers' practices and situations faced in classrooms (*ibid*).

Secondly, other forms of *school/university partnerships* take the form of networks as they link practitioners with similar interests and concerns about education and are mostly located in schools and institutions of higher learning (Miller, 2001).Schools and universities that have partnerships in most cases are situated close-by though there are others that cross boundaries. Villegas-Reimers (2003) established that school-university partnerships have been successful in providing teachers with effective professional development.

Thirdly, there are other *inter-institutional collaborations* in many different countries throughout the world, which offer programmes of in-service education and teacher professional development. These largely come about as a result of collaboration between institutions complementing the work of university-school partnerships (Villegas-Reimers, 2003). In a number of countries, universities work together with ministries of education and local school districts to provide teachers with regionalised continuous workshops focused on curriculum implementation (Wideen & Holborn, 1990). Penny and Harley (1995) report of a programme in South Africa, where pre-service graduate teachers from one university were sent into different industrial, commercial and social enterprises as part of their one-year diploma course. The programme was intended to familiarise student teachers with the skills required in those settings so that teachers could identify aspects they needed to develop in their own students (Villegas-Reimers, 2003).

The fourth are *school networks* aimed at supporting the ongoing professional development of teachers, school change and educational reforms. Day and Sachs (2004) and Villegas-Reimers (2003) cite the example of the Australian National School Network (NSN), which was used as a National Action Research project aimed at identifying challenges preventing schools from implementing ideas on improving teaching and learning. This project has been credited for providing support to over 400 Australian schools linking ongoing professional development with ongoing school-based research initiatives. Another example cited by Villegas-Reimers (2003) is the Innovative Links Project involving a partnership between universities and schools in Australia. Universities staff and teachers conducted research and implemented practices that promoted the professional development of teachers and university lecturers. It is reported that teachers associated with the project developed skills and competences that improved their professional development in terms of learning, participation, collaboration, cooperation, activism and research (Day &Sachs, 2004).

The fifth category involves the creation of *teacher networks* where teachers from the same or different schools come together to address common problems they encounter in their work. This helps to promote their professional development as individuals and as a group (Lieberman, 1995).In the United Kingdom (UK) and other European countries, networks, federations, zones and clusters are regarded as

related concepts (Delport & Makaye, 2009). Networks can be formed relatively informally, through regular meetings between teachers or formally by institutionalising the relationships (Lieberman, 1999). Huberman (2001) posits that teacher networks are important as vehicles for teacher professional development, especially if they involve teachers at the same or at different schools who share a common grade level in disciplines, subject matter or activity to be worked on. Huberman (2001) argues that teachers should be responsible for managing networks themselves. In Zimbabwe, subject panels represent a form of teacher network. However, it is unclear whether the teachers are in full control of their professional development through this innovation.

Lastly, *distance education* has been and still is being used as a form of teacher professional development in most countries throughout the world. Miller, Smith and Tilstone (1998) found that distance education as a vehicle for teacher professional development is being provided in various countries using a variety of means such as radio, television, telephone, written and recorded material and electronic communications. Distance education has provided opportunities for many teachers, especially in developing countries, to acquire higher qualifications in various educational fields. In Jamaica, distance education is used to prepare primary school teachers; while in Ghana, Gambia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone distance education is being used to enable teachers to attain higher qualifications (Villegas-Reimers, 2003). In Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe Open University is playing a pivotal role in providing opportunities for teachers to upgrade their qualifications (Zvobgo, 1998).

2.3.2 Individual or small group models or techniques of professional development

2. 3.2.1 Teacher workshops

In-service staff training is one of the most common forms of teacher professional development in many countries throughout the world. This form of teacher professional development usually involves the use of workshops, short courses and seminars (Bett, 2016). In Zimbabwe, the attainment of independence in 1980 was accompanied by several changes in the school curricula and the main vehicles for teacher professional development were seminars, workshops and conferences (Gatawa, 1998). Personnel from the Ministry of Education's Curriculum Unit Division

and the University of Zimbabwe designed and facilitated the workshops that were aimed at aligning and improving teachers' instructional practices in line with the new socialist philosophy expressed in the national syllabus documents (*ibid*).

However, teacher workshops, seminars and conferences have been criticised by several scholars as ineffective in terms of improving teachers' instructional practices and student achievement (Bett, 2016; Levine & Marcus, 2010).Workshops are criticised because most of them offer single experiences that are fragmented, incoherent and disconnected from the realities of the classrooms (Kennedy, 2014). Fullan (1999:315) argues that,

> Nothing has promised so much and has been so frustratingly wasteful as the thousands of workshops and conferences that led to no significant change in practice when the teachers returned to their classroom.

Workshops as a form of teacher professional development are effective if they are used in combination with other approaches. In a study by Cutler and Ruopp (1999), it was found that the Education Centre in the USA, which adopted a workshop-style professional development entitled 'the Middle School Mathematics Project', was successful in improving teachers' instructional practices. Teachers from the Boston area met twice a month for a period of two years in half-day workshops intended to address issues related to the teaching and learning of mathematics. Some of the workshops focused on content, others focused on pedagogical knowledge and practice. Teachers were also urged to carry out small research studies aimed at identifying variables that could assist them in explaining the low level of achievement of some of their learners. Teachers involved in this project reported significant improvements in their teaching practices. Cutler and Ruopp (1999) also report that the participating teachers appreciated the benefits of creating a network of colleagues and the development of new skills, which included time management, resource management and risk-taking abilities.

Zeegers (1995) also report another successful workshop-style professional development initiative in New Zealand. In this project, teachers were offered a series of three one-day workshops during the first phase of the professional development initiative designed to prepare teachers to teach under the new national science curriculum. The workshop facilitators made follow-ups helping teachers to implement

the new curriculum and the results of the programme were reportedly positive. Villegas-Reimers (2003) cites another example where the workshop-style professional development programme was successful. The North Carolina Teacher Academy (USA) offered 40 one-week summer seminars for teachers. The seminars were reported as successful largely because teachers were involved in proposing and deciding the topics of the workshops based on their experiences, visions and needs.

2.3.2.2 Observation of excellent practice

As a professional development model, it involves programmes that provide teachers with opportunities of observing colleagues recognised for their expertise and excellence in teaching. Less knowledgeable teachers "learn and reflect on the knowledge, skills and attitudes that excellent teachers implement in the classroom" (Villegas-Reimers, 2003:101). As examples, Villegas-Reimers (2003) cites, firstly, the Teachers International Professional Development Programme, implemented by the British Council, sponsors teachers in the UK to visit different schools in various countries and contexts to observe first-hand aspects of teaching and teachers' work and are expected to share their experiences with peers in their schools upon their return. Secondly, the Chilean government sponsors teachers to visit countries deemed to offer exemplary programmes in the teachers' area of specialisation for a period of up to two years, another example is the United Kingdom/Australia Fellowship Scheme for Teachers of Science. The governments of the UK and Australia fund their teachers to spend several weeks in the other country, observing excellent practice, taking part in research projects, workshops and discussions with colleagues in the host country. In their qualitative case study of the Mpumalanga clusters in South Africa, Mokhele and Jita, (2010; 2012) found that some South African teachers of science were sent to Japan to learn and observe first-hand how Japanese experts teach science. This model of teacher professional development is not used in Zimbabwe.

2.3.2.3 Coaching/mentoring model

The coaching/mentoring model takes various forms in numerous contexts throughout the world. Kennedy (2014) identifies a minor difference between coaching and mentoring. He argues that coaching is more skills-based whilst mentoring involves

an element of counselling and professional friendship. Villegas-Reimers (2003:116) describes coaching as a process involving two people, one who is a "critical listener/observer asks questions, makes observations and offers suggestions that help a teacher grow and reflect and produce different decisions". The coaching process can be short term or long term. Mentoring on the other hand is a form of coaching that can be short term and can be used to induct a novice teacher or someone who is new at a school/school system. Villegas-Reimers (2003) contends that coaching is a learned skill; hence, it is critical that coaches and mentors be trained. Kennedy (2014) argues that the defining characteristic of the coaching/mentoring model is the one-to-one relationship between two teachers designed to support professional development. In a mentoring relationship, one partner is an inexperienced teacher and the other a more competent colleague. Kennedy (2014), in his qualitative case study of professional development in Scotland, found that a mentoring/coaching relationship can be collegiate as in peer-coaching or hierarchical, as when a mentee is being inducted into the job. One critical feature of the coaching/mentoring model is that it is situated within the school context and can be enhanced by sharing with colleagues.

In her review of literature on professional development, Villegas-Reimers (2003:117) identifies three forms of the coaching/mentoring relationship. First is *the apprenticeship* model where the mentor is the master-teacher who must be emulated, second is *the competence model* in which the mentor relates training and assessment to predetermined standards. Finally, in the reflective model, the mentor adopts the role of critical friend who assists in the evaluation of teaching. Kennedy (2014) argues that the coaching/mentoring model can either support a transmission view of professional development, wherein the novice is introduced into the status quo by the mentor or a transformative view whereby the relationship can provide a supportive and yet challenging space for intellectual and effective interrogation of practice. Villegas-Reimers (2003) cites two examples of a successful coaching/mentoring model in the USA wherein the relationship involved peer coaching. The mentor and mentees shared information, the provision of access to resources, role modelling and counselling, coaching, reflection, advice in career moves and support. Kennedy (2014) found the coaching/mentoring model quite popular in Scotland, especially with the newly introduced induction procedures

whereby all new teachers are attached to experienced and competent teachers. The mentors are also responsible for assessing the new teachers' competences against the Standards for Full Registration (*ibid*). This form of professional development is not practised in Zimbabwe.

2.3.2.4 The cascade model

The cascade model is also known as the training the trainer model and it involves experts training the first generation of teachers on a particular topic, aspect of teaching or subject matter and once they have developed expertise they become trainers of the second generation (Ono & Ferreira, 2010). In a qualitative case study on professional development, Bett (2016) found that the cascade model is popular in Kenya but is also quite common in many developing countries. Villegas-Reimers (2003) found that the model is also popular in most developing countries. In a review of literature on teacher professional development, Rose (2011) found that the cascade model is preferred in most countries because it is relatively cheap in terms of resources and that new information can quickly reach a large population of teachers in the shortest possible time. Dichaba and Mokhele (2012) found that the cascade model is inadequate in delivering effective professional development for teachers. The cascade model has been criticised for negating the principles of effective provision of teacher professional development such as participation, collaboration and programme ownership by the teachers (Kennedy, 2014), with high chances that critical information may be lost or misinterpreted during the transmission process (Bett, 2016).

In their study of the Mpumalanga Secondary Science Initiative (MSSI) project in South Africa, in which experts trained curriculum implementers who, after becoming proficient trained cluster leaders, in turn trained the teachers, Dichaba and Mokhele (2012) found that the cascade model failed to improve the mathematics and science teachers' instructional practices and student achievement. There was no follow-up support for the struggling teachers who were expected to implement the new educational reforms. Referring to the same project Ono and Ferreira (2010) report that even the district trainers did not properly understand the new curriculum. Mokhele and Jita, (2012) report that the cascade model was abandoned in favour of the cluster approach to teacher professional development. Kennedy (2014) argues

that the major weakness of the cascade model is that it focuses on skills and knowledge but rarely on values. In addition, Bett (2016) criticises the cascade model for its focus on the 'what' and 'how' at the expense of the 'why' components of professional development.

Villegas-Reimers (2003) argues that the cascade model can be successful as a teacher professional development if it is accompanied by follow-up and support for the teachers. She reports of how the cascade model was successful in Chile where the Institutes of Teacher Preparation used the model to improve teachers' knowledge and skills in teaching mathematics, reading and writing to primary school children from poor rural areas in the country.

2.4 TRENDS IN TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

This section situates teacher professional development in an African context in order to have a broader understanding of developments that had an influence on the development of subject panels in Zimbabwe. In their studies on teacher professional development in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), Mulkeen (2010) and Junaid and Maka (2014) established that most countries in the 1990s focused on initial teacher training. This was in line with the declaration of Education for All (EFA) and the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs). These scholars established that most countries in SSA adopted the policy of Universal Basic Education (UBE). The focus was on expanding the primary education sector in order to provide access to all children. The opening up of more schools and increases in enrolments for the primary school sector resulted in a critical shortage of qualified teachers in most countries in SSA (Schwille, Dembele & Schumbert, 2007). This necessitated the recruitment of unqualified personnel to fill the gaps. In terms of teacher professional development, Mulkeen (2010) found that the focus for many countries was on initial teacher training and continuing professional development was not a priority for most countries. As Mulkeen *et al*. (2007:1) report,

> Over the last two decades, national governments have invested heavily in improving access to and quantity of primary education, and in developing strong networks of colleges and universities. The secondary level, while not forgotten, has been given lower priority and has received less attention. Governments and

> international assistance organizations have largely neglected secondary in favour of investment in primary education.

The Lauwerier and Akkari (2015) reports that the increasing number of students from the expanded primary education sector in most SSA countries necessitated a shift in terms of focus, from primary to secondary education. The expanded secondary education sector created new demands, as most countries faced a critical shortage of qualified teachers. Studies by Mulkeen *et al.* (2007) revealed that most countries in SSA resorted to hiring expatriates or moved qualified primary school teachers into the secondary education sector. Moons (2007) reports that a study of 11 Eastern and Southern African countries in SSA found that a third of the primary school teachers were untrained. In another study by Lauwerier and Akkari (2015) on teachers and the quality of basic education in SSA established that in Chad, only 27% of secondary school teachers were trained whilst Madagascar and Togo had 36% and 37% respectively. The critical shortage of teachers in the primary and secondary education sectors resulted in three forms of teacher professional development, namely initial training for the untrained teachers in service, in-service upgrading for qualified teachers and continuing professional development for the qualified teachers (Mulkeen, 2010). This study focuses on continuing professional development of the qualified teachers.

In-service professional development for unqualified teachers already employed takes various forms in most countries in SSA. A study by Mulkeen (2010) revealed that in Eritrea, Gambia, Liberia, Malawi, Uganda, Zambia and Zanzibar initial training took the form of short courses offered by teachers' colleges and universities (award-bearing model). The study further revealed that the professional development of untrained teachers was characterised by face-to-face contact with lecturers during school holidays, self-study and printed materials, with durations ranging from two to four years. However, several studies point to the inadequacies of initial teacher professional development (Dembele & Miaro, 2003; Moons, 2007). Lauwerier and Akkari (2015:1) argue that, "both their pre-service and in-service training are superficial and inadequate and thus have little bearing on classroom practice". This makes this study appropriate, as it investigated teacher professional development after certification in order to find out how gaps in teachers' instructional practices were being attended to.

In-service upgrading courses for the primary school teachers in the secondary school sector was mainly offered through a mix of residential training and self-study modules. Mulkeen (2010:96) found that in Eritrea, Malawi and Zambia, “the upgrading was primarily to address the needs of primary teachers teaching in the secondary-level classes” in programmes intended to improve service delivery.

In their study on teacher professional development in SSA, Desta, Chilchisa and Lemma (2013) found that in most countries continuing professional development of qualified teachers was offered by governments, international donors and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as in Liberia, Malawi, Zambia, Guinea, Mozambique and Ethiopia. A number of studies on teacher CPD in SSA established that professional development for qualified teachers was provided in form of workshops, seminars or conferences (Bett, 2016; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Moon, 2007). Schwille *et al.* (2007) established that CPD for teachers offered by several governments in SSA took the form of one-time workshops, seminars or conferences led by outside experts. Feiman-Nemser (2001:1041) argues that,

> Teachers have little say about the content of [such] sessions. There are limited opportunities for meaningful interaction and follow-up. Teachers may go home with a new idea, but the design of these sessions makes it unlikely that teachers’ practice will change in any significant way.

Schwille *et al.* (2007) also established that donor funded professional development programmes in most SSA countries only cover one or two regions leaving out the rest of the teachers in other areas. In countries where they are intended to reach many teachers, the cascade model is adopted. Several studies point to the ineffectiveness of the cascade model of teacher professional development (Bett, 2016; Dichaba & Mokhele, 2012; Fieman-Nemser, 2001). Some of the criticisms levelled against the multiplier approach to professional development are that the professional development sessions are fragmented, unrelated to what happens in the classrooms and the lack of intensity and follow-up needed to support struggling teachers (Schwille *et al.*, 2007; Moon, 2007). Studies on teacher professional development in SSA by Mulkeen *et al.* (2007), established that CPD offered by NGOs usually covered small areas/regions in a country and in most cases the CPD projects ended with the withdrawal of donor funds.

Despite the seemingly deplorable nature of CPD practices in most countries in SSA, there are relatively new initiatives that have developed and that are being implemented in a few countries, which appear to be of the reform type. In most SSA countries, international donor agencies, such as the USAID, helped set up cluster-based professional development programmes (Mulkeen, 2010). This marked a paradigm shift in terms of teacher professional development in Africa. Details on the origins and development of subject panels in Africa and Zimbabwe in particular are discussed in more detail below. The following section discusses trends in professional development in Zimbabwe leading to the establishment of subject panels.

2.5 TRENDS IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN ZIMBABWE

Trends in teacher professional development in Zimbabwe followed almost a similar path to those of other African countries. The inception of independence in 1980 saw the new government adopting education as a basic human right (Nziramasanga, 1999). There was a phenomenal increase in the number of primary and secondary schools. Student enrolments also soared and this led to a critical shortage of qualified teachers for the primary and secondary school education sectors. This forced the government to recruit temporary teachers (Gatawa, 1998; Zvobgo, 1998). In a mixed methods study by Nyagura (1993: 34) on the quality of education in Zimbabwe, it was found that, “the quantitative expansion in the education sector was not matched by qualitative efforts”. Nyagura attributed the decline in educational quality to several factors. These factors include the increase in access to secondary education, which permitted students of low academic ability to enter secondary education, shortages of qualified teachers and teaching-learning resources, staff turnover due to poor working conditions, poor supervision by education officers and a textbook driven curriculum.

In order to address the problem of falling pass rates and the poor quality of teachers in the primary and secondary education sectors, the government embarked on a massive teacher education programme aimed at providing teachers with initial training (Nyagura & Reece, 1989). The number of teacher training colleges was increased from seven to 15. Of these 15, five are secondary school teachers’ colleges (*ibid*). The focus was mainly on pre-service teacher professional

development while continuing professional development for qualified teachers was not a priority. Nyagura and Reece (1989:322) found that,

> Evidence obtained in this study shows that minimal in-service training is done in secondary schools. Only 39.5% of the secondary heads stated their teachers had participated in half-day in-service seminars and workshops during school terms over a period of two tears.

A second strategy to curb the problem of teacher shortages was to hire expatriate teachers for English, mathematics and science from Britain and Mauritius (Gatawa, 1998; Kanyongo, 2005).

Similar to most developing countries, in-service training for qualified teachers was largely offered by education officers (top-down and expert-driven) in the form of workshops and short courses, largely facilitated by staff from the University of Zimbabwe (Zvobgo, 1998). The cascade system was the dominant model of teacher professional development, regarded then as more appropriate since most of the teachers were under-qualified and the government saw itself as better placed and resourced in that field (Zvobgo, 1998). Scholars established that the cascade model of professional development is ineffective in improving teachers' instructional practices (Bett, 2016; Dichaba & Mokhele, 2012). The downward trend in student pass rates especially at 'O' level continued as shown by the statistics from the Ministry of Education and Culture Statistics below:

Table 1: Percentage and number of students achieving passes in five or more subjects in the 'O' level examinations from 1980-1988

Year	Number of candidates	% Achieving five + passes	Number of students
1980	6012	66.6	4008
1981	10396	57.1	5932
1982	13733	59.2	8134
1983	21733	54.6	11872
1984	73724	20.6	15159
1985	112881	13.0	14760
1986	127265	11.4	14566
1987	152181	11.9	18124
1988	183753	12.4	22786

(Source: Zimbabwe Ministry of Education and Culture Statistics1980-1988)

Gatawa (1998) argues that a focus on increasing access to the African majority, including casualties of the war, by removing age restrictions was achieved for a decade partly at the expense of quality. The deteriorating quality of education and diminishing resources, accompanied by research findings and international conventions such as the one reached at the World Conference on Education held in Jomtein in 1990, forced governments around the world to devise concrete plans to improve the quality of education in their respective countries (Chikoko, 2007). It became clear to the government of Zimbabwe that teachers needed regular in servicing to keep them well informed of developments in education (Gatawa, 1998; Nyagura, 1993; Nyagura & Reece, 1989; Zvobgo, 1998).

The Ministry of Education (1995: ii) reports that in October 1990 the Commonwealth Ministers and the Commonwealth Secretariat (COMSEC) spearheaded a programme targeted at the professional development of school heads "as it was felt

that the head carried the prime responsibility for creating an effective educational environment". The COMSEC Training and Support Programme for School Heads was born out of these concerns and Zimbabwe launched its own chapter in 1993 (*ibid*). The programme resulted in the birth of school clusters throughout the country as a national strategy to improve the quality of education in the country. This enabled school heads to offer each other support and to study through distance education what had previously been discussed on a small scale during formal workshops. Whilst this was a noble and progressive move, the programme failed to improve teachers' instructional practices especially in the secondary school education sector. In an earlier study, Nyagura (1993) found that most school heads in the secondary education sector had low qualifications, were inexperienced and not effectively executing their instructional leadership roles in their schools. Most of these heads were found to be overwhelmed by heavy teaching loads as well. In addition, subject specialists of which school heads were only specialists in one or two subjects, staff secondary schools. They could not help teachers in areas in which they are not conversant. The Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture (2000: i) reports that, "it was realised that the development of school heads' leadership and administrative skills would not automatically result in the provision of quality education. It was imperative that teachers and other stakeholders be taken on board".

In 1996, the joint governments of Zimbabwe and the Netherlands launched the second phase of the BSPZ (Delport & Makaye, 2009). It was from this period that teachers became active in clusters (for primary schoolteachers and primary and secondary school heads) and subject panels for the professional development of secondary school teachers. Subject panels are considered an alternative approach to teacher professional development and a distinction between the two is critical for showing the paradigm shift that took place in most countries that adopted subject panels as a professional development innovation. This study investigates the teachers' perceptions of the history subject panels after the withdrawal of donor funds from 2010. From their inception in 1996, under the direction of the BSPZ, to date there is no study that has explored the efficacy of subject panels in professional development, a gap that this study filled. The following section discusses two distinct approaches to teacher professional development namely traditional and alternative approaches.

2.6 TEACHER DEVELOPMENT APPROACHES

This section focuses on teacher development approaches that have been developed and are currently being practised in most countries throughout the world to improve teachers' instructional practices and student achievement. This helps to understand how they influenced current teacher professional development practices in Zimbabwe. The division of this section into two distinct categories of teacher professional development was deemed critical in order to demonstrate the paradigm shift that took place worldwide leading to the inception of history subject panels in Zimbabwe. I discussed the two approaches separately for the purposes of clarity, namely the traditional approaches to teacher professional development and the alternative and innovative approaches to teacher professional development.

2.6.1 Traditional approaches to teacher professional development

Most studies conducted throughout the world established that the majority of the approaches used to improve teachers' instructional practices and student achievement had minimal to disappointing results (Bett, 2016; Campbell, Lieberman & Yashkina, 2016; Mansfield & Thompson, 2016; Villegas-Reimers, 2003). Reviews of the literature on different approaches implemented in different contexts throughout the world reveal that they were largely based on a top-down approach. This approach emphasised a close linkage between teacher professional development and the overall planning processes of school management (Villegas-Reimers, 2003). The following description by Blazer (2005:1) correctly captures how the traditional approaches to teacher professional development were enacted.

> In the past, professional development consisted of teachers attending one or two workshops on the latest instructional practices. Participants listened passively to outside experts and then encouraged to apply the new strategies in their own classrooms. New professional development programs were introduced with no attempt to connect to the past training.

Emerging from the above quote is that teacher professional development was mostly 'expert-driven', delivered through a few workshops aimed at just training teachers to implement a new instructional practice. Teachers were therefore not actively

involved in their learning though they were expected to implement the new changes in their classrooms. Numerous studies on teacher professional development criticised this approach because it was usually disconnected from teachers' daily practices of teaching and were generic and unrelated to specific instructional problems teachers were encountering. They were also infrequent and implemented as one-time events. The experts or external consultants disappeared after the workshops and there were no plans for follow-ups (Caena, 2011; De Monte, 2013; Nwagbara, 2014; Zepeda, 2012). In her review of the literature on teacher professional development programmes in various countries, Villegas-Reimers (2003) established that the use of workshops not accompanied by follow-ups to help teachers to implement the new practices was grossly inadequate in improving their instructional practices. Studies by Guskey, (2002) and Steiner (2004) underscored the importance of follow-ups to help struggling teachers to implement new practices. In a recent review of the literature on teacher professional development by Mansfield and Thomson (2016) in Australia, it was established that formal workshops, day long in-service talks by external experts and training intended to use specific learning programmes or approaches dominated teacher development approaches. Studies in various contexts throughout the world established the prevalence of this approach in teacher professional development (Day, 1999; Lieberman, 1995; Maphosa *et al*., 2013; Rose, 2011; Sachs, 2005). Dadds (1997:32) castigated this training model as a "delivery or empty vessel model" which is only effective when introducing new knowledge to teachers, albeit in de-contextualised settings.

Several studies on teacher development point to the common use of the cascade model especially in developing countries. This model is known for its notorious outcomes but it continues to be the dominant approach in most third world countries. Bett (2016) argues that the cascade model continues to be used because it is deemed cost effective and reaches many teachers in a short space of time. Case studies conducted by Hardman *et al*. (2011) and Pryor *et al*. (2012) in Kenya on the school-based teacher development programme for primary school teachers using the cascade model revealed disappointing results. The Key Resource Teachers (KRTs) selected and trained at national level, in turn trained their colleagues at provincial and district levels who, in turn, trained teachers at school level. The two case studies established that teachers at school and classroom levels failed to

understand the philosophy of the new programme and could not effectively implement it as expected. Similar findings were established in a different programme in Kenya by Gathumbi, Mungai and Hintze (2013) and Dichaba and Mokhele (2012) in South Africa. The Kenyan example involved a project called Strengthening Mathematics and Sciences in Secondary Education (SMASSE) jointly funded by the Kenyan and Japanese government. The South African example involved a similar programme jointly funded by the South African and Japanese governments in the Mpumalanga province called the Mpumalanga Secondary Science Initiative (MSSI). Both studies reveal that the cascade model was ineffective in improving the teachers' instructional practices. In the South African context, Mokhele and Jita, (2010) pointed out that the cascade model was abandoned in favour of the cluster model. In Zimbabwe, Gatawa (1998 and Zvobgo (1989) attributed the failure of the new teaching concept called Education with Production to the ineffectiveness of the cascade model. This new teaching concept was intended for teachers to marry theory and practice in the teaching of all subjects. Experts, mainly from the University of Zimbabwe, trained the first generation of teachers who in turn trained provincial and district education officers and a few school heads. These two scholars reported that by the time it reached the schools and teachers, it had a completely different meaning from what was intended. For example, in history, teachers were expected to teach students the historian craft such as the use of primary and secondary sources. Zvobgo (1998) reported that in most schools, the concept was associated with manual work, which was completely different from what the planners intended and as a result, it was abandoned. In Zimbabwe, the Better Schools Programme in Zimbabwe was introduced in 1993 to improve the quality of education in schools (Chikoko, 2007). The programme adopted the cascade model where the focus was on improving the management and instructional skills of the school heads that were expected to implement those skills in transforming their schools. This approach was revised to include teachers as key players in their professional development through clusters (Delport & Makaye, 2009). The cascade model was and still is being used in most countries in Africa but studies continue to show that it is ineffective in bringing about the expected improvements behind classroom doors (Nwagbara, 2014 in Nigeria; Banda, 2013 in Kenya, Zambia and Malawi).

The few examples above established that most of the traditional teacher development approaches used worldwide were characterised by a gap between what teachers received at professional development sessions and the realities of the classrooms (Bett, 2016; Lieberman, 1995). In order to understand and to begin to see beyond such traditional approaches to the professional development of teachers, it is critical to identify and investigate those situations where teachers are provided with opportunities to come together as leaders of their own professional development, in neutral and non-judgemental environments forming what Little (2006) called communities of learners in Zimbabwe. This study focused on history subject panels as such an approach. Whether, history subject panels are one such an innovation is in part, what this study sought to investigate.

2.6.2 Alternative and innovative approaches to teacher professional development

The failure of the traditional approaches to improve teachers' instructional practices and student achievement, coupled with the introduction of new reforms in education with new demands on the teachers and students resulted in the emergence of alternative and innovative approaches to teacher professional development (Lieberman, 1995; 2000; Villegas-Reimers, 2003). Several studies begin to show a shift from teacher professional development characterised by isolation, externally mandated and delivered in "drive-by workshops" (Carroll, 2013:4) designed for the mass to collaborative professional development (Campbell *et al*., 2016; Leu & Ginsburg, 2011; Ricon-Gallardo & Fullan, 2016; Sugumarie *et al.*, 2016). Closely related to this "revolution", as described by Villegas-Reimers (2003), is the acknowledgement that learning is "socially constructed through interaction with [...] knowledgeable others" (Carroll, 2013:4). Whilst, history subject panels appear to be part of this paradigm shift, their effectiveness in improving teachers' instructional practices in Zimbabwe has never been documented.

In her study of networks, Lieberman (2000) noted the coming up of new conceptions about teaching, learning and schooling. Accompanying these conceptions are new practices, policies and organisational settings such as networks, teacher research groups, collaborative, school-university partnerships and professional communities in and out of schools (Bahous, Busher & Nabhani, 2016; Mansfield & Thomson, 2016;

Zepeda, 2012).Lieberman (1995:70), in a review of literature on teacher professional development, identifies three contexts wherein teacher learning occurs: 1) “Direct teaching” comprising, among others, awareness sessions, conferences, courses and workshops and consultations. 2) “Learning in school” comprising teacher action research, critical friends, storytelling and working on tasks together. 3) “Learning out of school” which includes reform networks, school-university partnerships, subject matter networks, informal groups, collaborations and teacher centres. Whilst acknowledging the importance of all these contexts for teacher learning, this study focused on out of school teacher-learning using history subject panels as a case study.

In her extensive review of the literature on teacher professional development, Villegas-Reimers (2003) identifies several key features that characterise this paradigm shift. It is based on constructivism rather than a transmission-oriented model, professional development is conceived of as a long-term process, a process that is context specific, linked to school reform, teachers are conceived of as reflective practitioners and professional development is a collaborative process. These characteristics clearly demonstrate a shift from the traditional to alternative and innovative teacher professional development practices. In another literature review on teacher networks, Rincon-Gallardo and Fullan, (2016) identify eight components also found in most alternative and innovative teacher professional development practices. These include a strong focus on ambitious student learning outcomes, strong relationships of trust and internal accountability, continuous improvement of teachers’ instructional practices through cycles of collaborative-inquiry and the use of deliberate leadership and skilled facilitators within flat power structures. It also includes the increase in the frequency of teacher interactions and learning inwards, the formation of partnerships between teachers and universities faculty members and securing adequate resources to sustain professional development activities. Caena (2011) also noted a shift from a supply to a demand driven professional development. Whether history subject panels embrace all these features of alternative and innovative practices of teacher professional development, in part was what this study sought to investigate.

At the epicentre of these innovative approaches to teacher professional development is a deeper involvement of teachers not only in deciding the content of their learning

but in most cases leading discussions at their professional development sessions (Ainscow, 2016;Campbell *et al.,* 2016; Lieberman & Woods, 2003). In a quantitative study on teacher professional development practices in Malaysia, Sugumarie *et al*. (2016) found that teachers were deeply involved in their learning. Teachers came together to share experiences and good instructional practices. They were also heavily involved in the planning of the content of their professional development and this was found to have increased their ownership, relevance and commitment to the professional development activities. Campbell *et al*. (2016) did not only find a change in terminology used to refer to teacher professional development from staff development to teacher professional learning but also teachers being at the forefront spearheading their own learning as leaders. In a literature review on teacher professional development, Caena (2011) also notes a shift from a top-down to a bottom-up approach to teacher professional development practices. Teachers were found to be actively engaged in their professional learning with peers from different schools. In a recent case study on teacher collaboration, Tour (2016)found that if teachers are given opportunities to determine what they want to learn it does not only increase their ownership and commitment to the programme, but it actually improves their instructional practices. Whilst these studies point to the effectiveness of the alternative and innovative approaches in improving teachers' instructional practices and student achievement, their efficacy as an innovation for teacher professional development, especially in Zimbabwe, still needs to be tested, a gap to be filled by this study.

2.7 SUBJECT PANELS AND TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

This section focuses on the genesis of subject panels, how the teachers conceptualise them, their role in professional development, activities teachers engage in during their sessions and challenges teachers are facing, if any.

2.7.1 Origins and development of subject panels

Giordano (2008) traces the beginnings of school collaborations to the emergence of school clusters in the 1940s in the United Kingdom (UK) and India, where close by rural schools came together for the purposes of pooling their resources together for educational purposes. Teachers in rural schools were not only isolated from colleagues but their schools were also poorly resourced with minimum support from

educational authorities. These conditions made it difficult for the teachers to deliver quality education (Giordano, 2008). The introduction of school clusters was an intervention strategy to curb teacher isolation, provide poor schools with access to more resources and improve the quality of education for the learners.

The wave of educational reforms that swept across Asia and most countries in Latin America during the late 1960s and early 1970s gave impetus to school clustering (Giordano, 2008). Bray (1987) argues that the proliferation of clusters in developing countries was a result of severe pressures faced by third world education systems. Third world countries faced financial challenges, a demand for higher education qualifications by citizens and concerns for improved quality of education. As Bray (1987:7) argues, “the need for quantitative and qualitative advances within a framework of financial austerity has forced governments to seek innovative ways to achieve their goals”. Bray (1987) posits that school clusters were introduced as one such innovation. School clusters were initially popular in Latin America but have now spread to most countries throughout the world. In Latin America, they were introduced in countries such as Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Panama, Nicaragua and Peru. Clusters were also introduced in other parts of the world such as Burma, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Thailand and Sri Lanka (*ibid*).

In 1990, the World Declaration on Education for All (EFA) formulated at the Jomtein Conference, Thailand, ushered in a new commitment to clustering. The Declaration recommended the decentralisation of educational governance, the involvement of local people in education and the improvement of teacher quality (Chikoko, 2007). Ministries of Education, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and international agencies such as USAID made a commitment to improve the quality of education for all learners. This was to be achieved through capacity building programmes in schools. The school clustering approach was adopted as a key strategy for the introduction of school reforms in most developing countries (Mulkeen, 2010).In Africa, the USAID was instrumental in establishing school clusters in Guinea, Malawi and Mali (Giordano, 2008). Studies by Delport and Makaye (2009) and Mokhele and Jita (2012) revealed that school clustering has even spread to Southern African countries such as South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe.

In Zimbabwe, the joint governments of Zimbabwe and the Netherlands introduced a Better Schools Programme in Zimbabwe (BSPZ) in 1993 (Chikoko, 2007) which saw the launch of school clustering in the country. Each cluster was composed of six or seven nearby schools (primary and secondary schools). The need for the secondary school teachers to have separate subject-based professional development gave birth to subject panels (Ministry of Education, 2000). However, it is unknown how teachers conceptualise these grassroots approaches to teacher professional development, what activities they engage in during their meetings and the challenges they are facing, if any (Mitchell & Jonker, 2013).

2.8 CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF SUBJECT PANELS

The search for effective teacher professional development approaches continues to be a challenge for many countries throughout the world (Bett, 2016; Dichaba & Mokhele, 2012). The introduction of subject panels as vehicles for teacher professional development is one such approach intended to address this perennial problem in teacher learning, especially after certification (Ministry of Education, 2000). However, not much has been documented about how teachers in particular, understand these grassroots teacher professional development initiatives, as they are the direct beneficiaries (Mitchell & Jonker, 2013).

De Lima, 2010) views networks, collaboration, consortia, development groups, federations, zones, partnerships and teacher groupings as related concepts. This scholar argues that teachers and many others tend to use these terms interchangeably. However, De Lima (2010:3) warns that, “terminology options are not innocent choices; each term conveys a particular set of meanings that may or may not be verified by the facts”. Lieberman and Grolnick (1998) view teacher clusters and teacher networks as related concepts where teachers from the same or different schools come together for the purposes of understanding their practices. Jita and Ndlalane (2009:58) contend that clusters or subject panels are known by different names in different contexts, “in other countries and contexts, clusters are also referred to as ‘teacher communities of learning’ or ‘teacher networks’”. In this study, history subject panels and the terms above are related concepts. Although, there are many different definitions of subject panels or networks, Lieberman and Grolnick (1998) found that in all 17 networks they studied, teachers were involved in

similar activities which included the sharing of content knowledge, teaching practices, collaboration and negotiation.

Atkinson *et al.*, (2007) view clusters as a form of inter-school collaboration, where teachers come together to share professional experiences and learning issues together pertaining to their craft. In an extensive review of literature on professional development, Villegas-Reimers (2003) found that teacher networks help bring them together to address the problems which they encounter in their work. In addition, she argues that this promotes their own learning as individuals and as groups. Villegas-Reimers (2003:80) further argues that networks can be conceptualised in terms of how they are formed and the functions they are intended to serve. Some networks are formed "either relatively informally, through regular meetings between teachers, or formally, by institutionalising the relationship, communication and dialogue".

Huberman (2001) views networks as a strategy for providing support for the teachers in schools. Huberman further argues that this is more beneficial if it involves teachers from the same school or different schools teaching the same subject. In part, this study focused on history teachers' understanding and experiences of history subject panels as an innovation for their professional development. Gathara (2010) views clusters in Tanzania as an innovation intended to improve teachers' instructional practices and student achievement.

In studies where subject panels are referred to as 'communities of practice', 'inquiry teacher groups' or 'teacher teams', they refer to groups of teachers in the same or different schools coming together to share experiences and good practices about their craft (Mansfield & Thompson, 2016; Roberts, 2006; Stoll *et al.*, 2015; Little, 2006).

Bray (1987:7) conceptualises clusters as "a grouping of schools for administrative and educational purposes". In an extensive literature review on clusters, Bray (1987) identifies three types of clusters, namely those that entirely comprise of primary schools, those that entirely comprise of secondary schools and those that comprise of primary and secondary schools. This study focused on history subject panels that comprise teachers entirely from secondary schools only. Weil and Henk (2003) describe teacher networks in the Netherlands as "bringing schools together in networks. Schools then learn from each other, analyze each other's practices, and

develop various joint initiatives". Similarly, other scholars such as Chikoko (2007), Giordano (2008), and Delport and Makaye (2009) conceptualise clusters as a grouping of schools for educational and/or administrative purposes. In their study of clusters in the Namibian context, Dittmar, Mandelson and Ward (2002) found that clusters referred to a group of schools brought together for two major functions. Firstly, to improve teaching by sharing resources, experiences and expertise among staff and secondly, to facilitate administration and to pool resources together from several small schools. Whilst these various definitions are useful for understanding how subject panels are defined in different contexts, these studies do not specifically define what history subject panels meant to the teachers, a gap that this study intended in part, to address.

In their qualitative case study of the Mpumalanga clusters in South Africa, Mokhele and Jita (2012) found that educational authorities and teachers defined the mathematics and science clusters differently. To the education authorities, clusters meant, "a number of schools that are situated within a specific radius that can work together as a group [...] on the other hand, a cluster referred to 'a group of teaches' who can work together on some specific subject matter issues" (Mokhele and Jita, 2012:5). These two scholars labelled the conceptualisation of clusters by education authorities as the "administrative or structural view of a cluster" (*ibid*: 5), and that of the teachers as the "collaborative view of a cluster" (*ibid*: 7). This was an important finding by these scholars as they also discovered contradictions and dilemmas when the education authorities attempted to institutionalise these clusters. To the administrators, clusters meant an appendage of the administrative arm and to the teachers; clusters were intended to be a forum for improving their CK and PCK. De Lima (2010) advises that it is critical when studying such networks similar to clusters to discover their *genesis,* that is, why they have been formed and what attracts teachers to joining them. This has a strong bearing in terms of understanding issues of ownership and commitment of the teachers. Another critical issue raised by De Lima (2010) hinges on the nature of interactions teachers engage in. This centres on whether participation is voluntary or what Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) referred to as contrived collegiality, where teachers are coerced into participating. Giordano (2008) argues that there are two major types of clusters/subject panels. The first type is created and heavily funded by the education ministry and donor organisations,

which oblige all schools to belong to a cluster as part of a national education reform strategy. The second type is initiated at a local level by schools that have agreed to work together for the purposes of exchanging ideas and collectively addressing their educational problems. These locally created clusters usually receive no ministry support in terms of funding. Giordano (2008:88-91) proposes several cluster typologies:

1. Bottom-up (grassroots) vs. top-down *(*implemented from above)

Teachers usually form grassroots or 'bottom-up' clusters/subject panels and school heads from nearby schools voluntarily decide to come together for the purposes of addressing specific educational issues. Top-down clusters/subject panels refer to those that are initiated by education ministries and donor agencies as a national education reform strategy, requiring all schools to belong to a cluster/subject panel. Participation in these subject panels is mandatory and non-compliance may result in some form of punishment. Giordano (2008: 89) cites Sri Lanka, Cambodia and Mali as a few examples. Mulkeen, (2010) reports that government education ministries with support from international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) initiated most clusters in Africa. In Zimbabwe, a similar trend was observed in 1993 when the governments of Zimbabwe and the Netherlands launched the first phase of the BSPZ (Chikoko, 2007).

2. Voluntary vs. mandatory

Mandatory clustering refers to a situation whereby the education authorities compel all schools to belong to a cluster. Voluntary clustering means schools voluntarily belong to a subject panel. In some countries such as Cambodia (Bray, 1987) and Namibia (Dittmar *et al*., 2002) primary schools are forced to belong to a cluster, whereas in France, education authorities simply encourage schools to belong to school groupings (Giordano, 2008).

3. Selective coverage vs. widespread, national coverage

Selective coverage clusters may be initiated by educational authorities as a pilot project in a selected area or may be introduced as a national education reform strategy. In Africa and most countries in Asia, ministries and NGOs initiated clusters to cover all schools in a country (Giordano, 2003). In Zimbabwe, the launch of the

BSPZ in 1993 compelled all schools to belong to a cluster. Secondary school teachers were forced to participate in district level and cluster subject panel professional development programmes (Ministry of Education, 2000). However, adoption of clusters as a national strategy was found to have several challenges in some countries, ranging from poor funding, weak structures necessary for effective implementation and a lack of relevant legislative or statutory instruments to guide the smooth implementation of the professional development programmes (Pomuti & Weber, 2012 in Namibia; Chikoko, 2007 in Zimbabwe).

4. Financially autonomous vs. financially supported by an outside source

Autonomous subject panels fund their own professional development activities. Giordano (2008) says that this is mostly the case with grassroots clusters. However, the long-term viability and sustainability of these self-supporting subject panels may be compromised as the type and frequency of their activities may be determined by the availability of funds. Those that receive external financial support, such as those in most developing countries, may be viable for some time but after the end of the programme or withdrawal of funding the results are mostly catastrophic (Chikoko, 2007). This study focused on history subject panels in Zimbabwe after the withdrawal of donor funding from 2010.

5. High-intensity vs. low-intensity

In a high-intensity cluster, schools are involved in a variety of operations concurrently and are obliged to share resources systematically. The schools might be under the same administrative structure. In a low-intensity cluster, schools voluntarily choose to collaborate on a specific problem. Giordano (2008) reports that high-intensity clusters were set up in Cambodia during the pilot phase where four to eight schools in the neighbourhood or district formed a cluster and worked as a single unit. The central school is selected as the cluster's administrative centre and all the schools in the cluster shared facilities, materials and teachers. This is unlike low-intensity clusters where schools may work together on a particular project but remain autonomous in terms of daily pedagogical and administrative purposes. Giordano (2008) cites the clustering of special needs in the UK as an example. In Zimbabwe, subject panels resemble a mixture of high- and low-intensity systems in that schools participating in subject panels belong to the same district (high-intensity) but staff

and resources are not shared and administratively are independent of each other (low-intensity). The teachers are free to decide educational issues they want to focus on according to their needs.

6. Pedagogical vs. administrative

Subject panels may be used for pedagogical and administrative purposes. However, the reason for their existence is primarily to improve educational quality. In South Africa, the Mpumalanga clusters were introduced primarily for pedagogical reasons, as their goal was to improve the teaching and learning of mathematics and science in schools (Jita & Mokhele, 2014).Dittmar *et al.* (2002) found that in Namibia clusters were introduced for pedagogical and administrative purposes. Administratively, they could be used as distribution centres for teaching and learning materials in each district. In a study of clusters in South Africa, it was found that education authorities attempted to institutionalise them and even convert them to perform administrative roles. Jita and Mokhele (2012) found that out of frustration some teachers decided to form alternative clusters. In a qualitative case study of one cluster in Zimbabwe, Chikoko (2007) observed that school heads dominated cluster activities at the expense of teachers. Little is known about the role of the history subject panels in the Zimbabwean context. To find out whether they are vehicles for professional development, administrative conduits or both is this study's foci.

7. Participation: Inclusive vs. exclusive

Giordano (2008) posits that inclusive clusters do not restrict participation to school directors and education officials but also include participation of community members, teachers and parents. Exclusive clusters only involve the participation of school heads and education officials. In Kenya and Cambodia, teachers, school heads and community members are expected to participate in cluster activities. In Zimbabwe, participation in cluster activities was restricted to school heads only during the first phase of the BSPZ (Giordano, 2008). In a qualitative case study of a BSPZ cluster by Chikoko (2007), it was established that school heads dominated cluster activities. The situation changed during the second phase of the BSPZ from 1996 when it was found that the cascade model of professional development was not working (Ministry of Education, 2000). History subject panels are exclusive since they only involve participation of history teachers.

8. Clusters with resource centres vs. clusters without resource centres

In countries where clusters are formalised structures, resource centres are used as part of the strategy (Giordano, 2008).However, most of the clusters do not have resource centres but they conduct their activities at schools. Giordano (2003) cites Zambia as an example where resource centres were temporary sites where teachers attended professional development activities or other self-planned programmes. Professional development programmes offered through the history subject panels are not conducted at a resource centre. The question this study also sought to answer is, “where do history teachers meet for their professional development activities?” and “are these venues accessible to all teachers?”This takes into consideration that the secondary schools in Zimbabwe are far apart and isolated.

9. Integrated into the education administration vs. separate programme

In some countries such as Nepal and Namibia, clusters are part of the educational administration. This arrangement is justified on the grounds that it brings supervision and support nearer to schools. Clusters and resource centres in such a scenario become a sort of a sub-district level of educational administration (Giordano, 2003). In Zimbabwe, History subject panels are not integrated into educational administration but rather function separately.

These various ways of conceptualising subject panels discussed above help to justify the need for such a study that specifically focuses on understanding what history subject panels mean to teachers from a Zimbabwean context.

2.9 ROLE OF SUBJECT PANELS IN TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Subject panels are accorded different roles in various contexts depending on the reasons for their creation (De Lima, 2010). In an extensive literature study on teacher clusters, Giordano (2008) and Dittmar *et al.* (2002) found that teacher clusters were used for administrative and educational purposes. In both studies, clusters made it easier for educational authorities to serve hard-to-reach areas. On the other hand, clusters can also be used to provide ongoing professional development for teachers. In South Africa, education authorities hijacked the teacher professional development role of teacher clusters and teachers were coerced into

advancing the national policy agenda (De Clercq & Phiri, 2013; Jita & Mokhele, 2014).

In a qualitative case study by Owen, (2015), it was found that teacher networks are used to provide teachers with a relaxed, flexible and non-threatening environment for teachers to work together collaboratively in improving their instructional practices and student achievement. In another qualitative case study by Gathara (2010) in Kenya, it was established that teacher clusters were used as a strategy to move away from traditional to collaborative approaches to teacher professional development. In their qualitative case study on mathematics and science teacher clusters in South Africa, Maphahlele and Rampa (2015) found that clusters were used to provide teachers with a platform for sharing expertise concerning their craft and resources. Clusters in various contexts were used to provide teachers with spaces for working together collaboratively in improving their instructional practices and student achievement and reducing isolation which tended to characterise teachers' lives (Mitchell & Jonker, 2013; Mokhele, 2013; 2016; Muijs, 2008; Ricon-Gallardo, 2016). Whilst these studies are critical in understanding the role of history subject panels, little is known about how this collaboration is constructed and what impact it has on teachers' instructional practices.

Datnow (2011) emphasises the importance of establishing what brings teachers to collaborate through subject panels. Hargreaves (1994) distinguishes between collaborative cultures and contrived collegiality. In collaborative cultures, teachers voluntarily collaborate and interact meaningfully and willingly (Datnow, 2011). Hargreaves (2010:145) posits that, "contrived collegiality is characterised by administrative controls and teachers are instructed on where and when to collaborate about". Whilst findings from the above studies show subject panels as promising vehicles for teacher professional development, we are yet to find out how teachers work together in subject-based professional development, how the collaborations are organised, the relationships that exist between and among teachers, on what issues teachers collaborate on and issues of power and influence.

Fullan and Hargreaves (1991) identify 'comfortable collaboration' as another form of collaboration that characterise the way teachers work together in networks. Comfortable collaboration refers to teachers working together while avoiding

criticising each other's views when interacting. These scholars argue that such collaboration results in mediocrity and superficial learning. Little is known about how teachers collaborate during their history subject panel meetings.

Lieberman (2000), in her study of networks, found that teachers do not only share experiences and expertise that help to improve their practices but they also establish lasting professional development relationships. Ngcoza and Southwoods (2015 in a qualitative study on mathematics and science networks in South Africa, found that teachers helped each other to improve their CK and PCK. Furthermore, teachers were able to establish cordial and professional relationships that continued to bind them together for a long time. De Clercq and Phiri (2013) found that teachers working together in clusters improved their instructional practices and cooperative learning skills in a friendly and supportive environment. In another study by Jita and Mokhele (2014), teachers who collaborated in clusters where able to establish close professional relationships and networking. The teachers continued to help each other even outside the time allocated for cluster meetings. Little is known about whether history subject panels also provide opportunities for establishing such important professional relationships.

Subject panels are used to provide instructional/curriculum guidance in most countries where curriculum planning and development are centralised (Jita & Mokhele, 2014; Moonen & Voogt, 1998). Lieberman (1995) found that networks are used for supporting teachers implementing innovations, the dissemination of good practice and support for capacity building in schools. These networks helped to develop local, context specific practices and solutions. In Australia, networks are used to provide instructional guidance to secondary school teachers in the implementation of the school curriculum (Moonen & Voogt, 1998). In South Africa and Zimbabwe clusters are also used to help teachers in the interpretation of syllabi and how and when to implement it (Jita & Mokhele, 2014; Maphosa *et al.*, 2013). Mitchell and Jonker (2013) found that teachers were exposed to new information and learning that promoted their understanding of what they were expected to teach in science and mathematics. In another qualitative case study by Jita and Ndlalane (2009), instructional guidance through clusters was provided and constructed around group discussions, debates and co-construction of new knowledge between and among the teachers. This study used a qualitative case study research approach

and design to investigate by whom and how the provision of instructional guidance to ‘A’ level history teachers was enacted.

Ghamrawi (2013) in a qualitative case study on teacher networks in Beirut, Lebanon, found that teacher-led networks help develop teacher leadership. Teachers were responsible for organising, coordinating and facilitating the professional development of their peers. It was established that these teachers begun to look at themselves as resource providers, mentors, coaches, curriculum developers and classroom supporters to other teachers. Ghamrawi (2013) concluded that such activities performed by teachers not trained for such tasks could develop teacher leadership. Several studies on professional development led by teachers themselves promoted the development of teacher leadership skills (Campbell *et al*., 2016; Ingvarson, 2014; Muijs & Harris, 2006; Schwille*et al.*, 2007; Zepeda, 2012). These studies revealed that teachers who were given the responsibility of leading other teachers in collaborative groups or clusters learnt how to lead their peers. The above scholars concurred that if teachers are given opportunities to set their own professional development goals, coordinate and organise their professional development activities, they do not only increase their leadership skills but also their ownership and commitment to the professional development programmes. In another study by Picower (2015), it was found that teacher-driven professional development resulted in the development of teacher leadership skills. In part, this study investigates how teacher leadership is developed through history subject panels.

In a study on secondary school teacher clusters in Nigeria, Nwagbara (2014) found that the induction of new teachers was done through teacher clusters. Sachs (2005) reported a similar finding in a study of teacher networks. De Clercq and Phiri (2013) and Jita and Mokhele (2014) found that teacher clusters in South Africa were also used to initiate new teachers into the profession. In Scotland, the induction of new teachers was done through attaching the novice teachers to expert teachers (Kennedy, 2011). However, what is not clear from these studies is who, how and what form this teacher induction took. Equally important but unclear, is the relationship between the novice teacher and the experienced teachers during the induction process.

2.10 HISTORY SUBJECT PANEL ACTIVITIES TEACHERS ENGAGE IN DURING MEETINGS

Subject panel meetings provide teachers with opportunities to engage in various professional development activities aimed at improving their instructional practices and student achievement (Villegas-Reimers, 2003). In their qualitative case study on school/cluster-based professional development of secondary school teachers in New Zealand, Starkey *et al.* (2007) found that teachers participated in varied job-embedded professional development activities such as learning from each other how to assess students' work. These scholars also established that teachers focused their activities on the technicalities and not the theoretical components of implementing standards-based assessment. The focus on the implementation of standards-based assessment suggests that teachers focused on the implementation of the agenda of the educational authorities. Similarly, a number of studies conducted in South Africa established that teachers spent most of their time in clusters advancing the educational policy agenda (De Clercq & Phiri, 2013; Jita & Mokhele, 2012; Mokhele, 2013; Maphlele & Rampa, 2015). Little is known about what activities teachers engage in during their history subject panel meetings and whose agenda the teachers will be advancing.

In Namibia, Dittmar *et al*. (2002) found that clusters provided opportunities for teachers to work together on issues such as syllabus interpretation, drawing up common schemes of work, setting common test papers and marking guides. In their descriptive survey on issues school clusters tackle in Zimbabwe, Maphosa *et al.* (2013) found that teachers engaged in activities such as syllabus interpretation, setting of common tests, classroom management and teaching methods. In a quasi-experimental study on primary school teacher clusters in the Cross River State in Nigeria, Nwagbara (2014) established that teachers collaborated on activities such as generating best ways of facilitating learning, discussing difficult concepts, joint lesson planning, discussion of examination results and evaluation, design and development of teaching-learning materials. The teachers also engaged in sharing of best formats of writing lesson notes, teaching-learning techniques, classroom management skills and modelling of best teaching methods. Nwagbara (2014) found that teachers who participated in these activities managed to improve their

instructional practices and student achievement. What is not clear from these studies is whether the teachers voluntarily participated in these activities.

In a review of literature on teacher networks in North America, Israel and the United Kingdom, Harris and Anthony (2001:386) established that, “during meetings teachers converse, share stories, plan instruction or even share results of their action research projects”. A qualitative study by Owens (2015) on teacher professional learning communities in innovative contexts, found that teachers participated in activities that were practical and aligned to their daily work with students. They discussed subject matter content, teaching methods, co-planning, team teaching/observing, co-assessment and co-reflection. Campbell *et al.* (2016:221) argue that, “professional learning that is practical for teachers is personalized and contributes to valued student outcomes”. In agreement, Owens, Pogodzinsk, and Hill, (2016:207) posit that, “professional development is most effective when it is relevant to the learners by being intensive, ongoing and connected to practice”. In another study, Mansfield *et al*. (2016) found that professional learning activities that are situated in the authentic world of classrooms, engaging teachers in concrete tasks of teaching, assessment and observation are effective in improving teachers’ instructional practices and student achievement. Using a quantitative research approach, Althauser (2015) investigated job-embedded professional development for mathematics teachers and found that teachers were quite interested in professional development activities that were closely aligned to their daily work with students. However, little is known about whether teacher professional development activities, through history subject panels, are aligned to teachers’ daily work with students in their classrooms.

Meirink *et al.* (2010), in their mixed methods study on teacher learning in collaborative teams, revealed that teachers engaged in a variety of activities such as exchanging ideas, experiences, developing and discussing new materials, getting feedback from colleagues and giving each other moral support. These scholars concluded that the relationship of teachers participating in collaborative subject teams are characterised by interdependency. In Zimbabwe, the Ministry of Education (2000: 19-20) manual on clusters suggested a variety of activities that teachers and heads could engage in through their clusters. These include setting up cluster structures, conducting training needs analysis, formulating annual training plans,

drawing up action plans with budgets, carrying out staff development programmes, conducting information and awareness campaigns, monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of cluster activities and organising cluster workshops. Additional activities include setting and marking common tests, developing teaching materials, discussing professional and education related topical issues, conducting action research, organising group study for personal development, the induction of new teachers and heads of schools, production of magazines and fliers, identifying potential trainers, team teaching, working together on common schemes, plans and syllabi and discussing teaching methodologies. What is not clear from these studies is how teachers enacted all these activities. This study therefore sought to identify the facilitators who enacted various activities at history subject panel sessions.

Stoll *et al.* (2015), in their study of professional development in the UK, found that teacher professional development activities whose content is determined and facilitated by the teachers themselves was effective in improving teachers' instructional practices and student achievement. Frost (2013) also found out that professional development led by the teachers themselves was effective in improving not only the teachers' instructional practices and student outcomes but further increased their ownership and commitment to the professional development programmes. Zepeda (2012) strongly supports the idea that teachers be involved in the planning and delivery of professional development programmes. Zepeda (2012:5) further argues that teacher involvement in decision-making is critical as "it increases moral, ownership, understanding about the direction and process of change [...] and a sense of professionalism, all of which help to sustain improvement efforts". Whilst there seems to be consensus in the literature about the need for teachers to be involved in determining the content and processes of their professional development (Bayar, 2014; Bruce & Flynn, 2013; De Clercq, & Phiri, 2013; Lieberman & McLaughlin, 1992; Stanley, 2011; Yates, 2007), it is not clear from these studies how the teachers should be involved.

Ricon-Gullardo and Fullan (2016), in their review of literature on teacher professional development, established that effective networks in education are those led by skilled teachers. Walter and Briggs (2012) strongly argue in favour of teachers being involved in selecting their professional development activities. In the same vein, Lee (2011) and Patton, Parker and Pratt(2013) concur that teachers should be involved

in the selection of facilitators for their professional development programmes as it increases their ownership and commitment to practising what they learn in their classrooms. Stacy (2013:46) argues that professional development for teachers should utilise local expertise so that teachers can "reclaim their professional autonomy by being experts within their schools". Chung *et al.* (2009) strongly argue that empowered teachers can help each other to improve their instructional practices and student achievement. Little is known about how facilitators for history subject panels are selected and by whom, a gap this study sought to plug.

Hargreaves and Fullan*, (*2012), and Patton *et al.* (2015) concur that teachers need to feel that they are directing their own learning as this increases ownership and commitment to the professional development programmes. Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (2011) and Day (1999) argue in favour of involving teachers in the designing and planning of the content and processes for their professional development programmes. Eaton and Carbone (2008) added that teachers should not only determine the agenda for their professional development activities but should also lead discussions for their professional learning. Guskey and Yoon (2009) and Bayar (2014) also argue in favour of teachers designing, planning and facilitating their own professional development. In support of the use of local expertise, Stanley (2011:177) wrote, "strategies that seem to work well can be named, defined, and closely examined to allow teachers to understand their real efficacy in facilitating learning". Whilst these findings are critical in adding our understanding of history subject panels, it is however, not known how agendas for history subject panels are determined and by whom. Equally important is that not much is known about the effectiveness of the history subject panels in improving the teachers' instructional practices and student achievement.

Bayar (2014) in his study of teacher professional development found that teachers define those activities that address their classroom instructional needs as effective. Di Paola and Hoy (2014:10) found that CPD helps in "building the capacity of teachers to help students learn". Guskey (2002) argues that effective teacher professional development should improve teachers' instructional practices and student achievement. Garet *et al.* (2001) and Mokhele (2014) underscored the need for teachers to meet more frequently for professional development.

2.11 HISTORY SUBJECT PANELS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRUCTURE

Teacher professional learning takes different forms depending on the context in which it is being provided. In their qualitative case study on the Mpumalanga clusters in South Africa, Mokhele and Jita (2012) found out that combining different models for teacher professional learning was effective in improving teachers' subject matter content knowledge and instructional practices. Mokhele (2013) reports that the MSSI project first adopted the cascade model of professional development from 2000-2003. The cascade model was abandoned because it was ineffective and was replaced by the cluster/network approach. The cluster approach had three dimensions. Firstly, cluster/network meetings were attended by teachers in small subject related groups under the facilitation of university-based subject matter experts. Secondly, curriculum implementers (or subject advisors) presented at teacher workshops attended by teacher cluster leaders who were expected to train their peers during cluster sessions and thirdly study visits to Japan were implemented. This entailed selected curriculum implementers (CLs) and some cluster leaders (CLs) being sent for a six-week group study to Japan where they were exposed to various experiences in the teaching of science. Jita and Mokhele (2012: 579) report that, "it was a combination of both workshops and cluster meetings that made the structuring of the MSSI project work for the teachers".

In their study of the SEITT project in Zimbabwe, Gwekwerere *et al.* (2013) report the project adopted an integrated professional development model with six intervention strands. Firstly, it was an integrated resource teacher training programme, which was a fully accredited university postgraduate diploma course, it entailed teacher networking and information technology, resource teacher workshops, science and mathematics resource centres, contextualised materials development and peer coaching. In a related study, Ghamrawi (2013) reports a rather unique professional development structure used to provide teacher learning in Beirut, Lebanon. In this study, it was found that teachers attended workshops presented by trainers. The workshops were then followed by subject-based departments at school level where teachers come together to draw up a professional development term plan. The professional term plan spells out how they would collaboratively put into practice what they learnt at workshops. This plan was given to the trainers who would make

follow-ups to support the teachers implement the new practices. Ghamrawi (2013) found that the model was effective in improving the teachers' ability to introduce the new practices in their classrooms. In these few examples, teachers were actively involved in their learning assisted by external experts. These studies reveal that successful structuring of teachers' professional learning should involve a combination of approaches and involve teachers in their learning. More importantly, these studies show that teachers can be effective in teaching other teachers. Stacy (2013: 40) argues that,

> Empowered teachers are professionals who have the power to create curricula, administer their own lessons, and, as a result, have the ability to effectively teach their students. When empowered to direct their own professional development, teachers claim ownership of their work and invest it accordingly. Engaged, focused, positive teachers have tremendous impact on student achievement.

These approaches were found to be successful in providing effective professional learning experiences to the participating teachers. However, not much is known about how teacher professional learning through history subject panels is structured.

2.12 CHALLENGES FACED IN USING SUBJECT PANELS AS VEHICLES FOR TEACHER PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Subject panels refer to groups of secondary school teachers who meet regularly in subject specific groups for the purposes of learning together. Subject panels are a relatively recent development in Southern Africa (De Clercq& Phiri, 2013) and not much has been documented about how they are organised and the challenges teachers face when using them for their professional development. Subject panels require proper management for them to fulfil their teacher professional development mandate. In countries where subject panels are introduced as a reform strategy they are centrally managed with structures starting from the national level down to district levels (Giordano, 2008). In Zimbabwe, subject panels were introduced as sub-units within clusters comprising primary and secondary schools (Ministry of Education, 2000). When the BSPZ was introduced, secondary school teachers met separately for the purposes of learning together about their practices (*ibid*). Clusters and subject panels were managed through district and cluster committees and professional development activities were coordinated by DRTs and CRTs (Delport & Makaye,

2009). However, from 2010 with the withdrawal of donor funding they are now under the direction of the NASH, little is known about how they are being managed and the challenges teachers are facing using this new structure.

Huberman (2001) argues in favour of teacher networks being managed by teachers themselves. In his study of clusters, Bray (1987) found that most clusters faced organisational and practical challenges. In some contexts, where clusters were managed by school heads it was found that there were many coordination challenges as some of the clusters had too many schools which were too far apart (Bray, 1987). Kennedy (2011) argues that optimum effectiveness takes place when participants at professional development sessions are fewer in numbers. This study focused on the history subject panels that cater for teachers from the whole district, where the administrative and organisational challenges faced by the leaders are not known. Equally important is the fact that not much is known about how the history subject panels' leaders are selected and whether the teachers have any voice in these structures.

The problem of distance and teacher absenteeism at teacher professional development sessions that are offered at central venues has been found to be rampant in some studies. Smith and Gillespie (2007), in their review of the literature on teacher professional development, found that teachers from stations far away from central venues where professional development workshops were offered were frequently absent. In addition, they also established that if professional development sessions are offered at far away venues, it caused strain on the budgets of smaller schools. Knamiller (1999) found that in Chile and Zambia, the great distances between schools resulted in many teachers failing to attend workshop meetings. In an extensive literature review, Leu (2004: 13) concluded that, "Geography certainly play[s] a role in how frequently cluster in-service events can take place since teachers in widely dispersed schools in very remote areas possibly cannot meet as frequently as those in densely populated areas". Battersby and Verdi (2015), in their study on teacher professional development, found that small schools struggled to provide funds to enable their teachers to attend professional development sessions that were offered far away from their stations. Poor funding has been found to be a major barrier militating against teachers meeting as frequently as they needed (Chikoko, 2007).

A mismatch was found between teacher needs and programme activities in clusters where teachers were not given the opportunity to participate in the planning and designing of the professional development agenda (Giordano, 2008). Battersby and Verdi (2015) argue in favour of incorporating teachers in decision-making positions to make professional development relevant to teachers' daily work with students in their classrooms. In a study of clusters and resource centres, Knamiller (1999) established the need for professional development to be targeted and teachers' professional development needs accompanied by follow-up teacher support. Guskey and Yoon (2009) argue that follow-up is critical to help struggling teachers to implement what they have learnt at the professional development sessions effectively. Whether history subject panels involve teachers in determining the agenda for their professional development agendas and whether there is strong follow-up support after their meeting was, in part, what this study aimed to investigate.

Giordano (2003) found that some clusters in Kenya and Zambia closed down with the withdrawal of donor funding. Gathara (2010:4) found that in Kenya, teacher CPD was being hampered by a "lack of funds and lack of follow-up". The issue of poor funding of teacher professional development was found to be a major challenge affecting the smooth operations of teacher clusters in Zimbabwe (Delport & Makaye, 2009; Chikoko, 2005; Maphosa *et al.,* 2013). Timperley *et al.* (2007) strongly urge education ministries to ensure adequate funding for teacher professional development activities in order to raise the quality of education in schools. This study investigated the issue of funding of history subject panels under the direction of the NASH after 2010.

In their study of teacher clusters in Zimbabwe, Maphosa *et al*. (2013) found that teacher professional development through clusters was not guided by clear policies on funding and how they should operate. Stanley (2011) reiterates that right structures and policies provide clear guidelines for effective teacher professional development. In another study by Mundry (2005), it was established that teachers do not only face the challenge of unclear policies but also had the problem of getting sufficient time to engage in their professional development effectively. Smith and Gillespie (2007) also found that teachers face challenges of time to attend professional development sessions.

2.13 CHARACTERISTICS OF HIGH-QUALITY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A focus on the characteristics of high-quality professional development provides a conceptual framework through which teachers' perspectives on history subject panels as an innovation for professional development could be properly understood**.**

Much has been written about teacher professional development, teacher learning and teacher challenges in the past few decades. This literature provides meaningful insights into what constitutes high-quality professional development, characteristics of which include,

> a focus on content and how students learn content; in-depth, active learning opportunities; links to high standards; opportunities for teachers to engage in leadership roles; extended duration; and collective participation of groups of teachers from the same school, grade or department (Garet *et al.,* 2001:919-920).

Birman *et al.,* (2000) argue that professional development that includes all (or most) of these characteristics has the capacity to improve teachers' instructional practices and student achievement. These characteristics were also found to have a positive effect on teachers' instructional practices in studies conducted by several researchers on teacher professional development (Penuel *et al.*, 2007; Steiner, 2004). From her review of the literature on professional development, Mokhele (2014) found that there is an emerging consensus among scholars on what constitutes effective and high-quality professional development programmes. High-quality professional development was found to have the following key components: (a) content focus, (b) active learning, (c) coherence, (d) duration and (e) collective participation (Mokhele, 2014: 411). To this list, Garet *et al.* (2001:290) add "form of activity" as one of the critical features of high-quality professional development. These characteristics of high-quality professional development comprise structural and core features (Porter *et al*., 2003), which include form of activity, the duration and active participation. Core features include dimensions of the substance or core of the professional development experience, such as content focus, active learning and coherence (Garet *et al.,* 2001; Mokhele, 2014). A detailed explanation of these structural and core features of high-quality professional development is provided below.

2.13.1 Form of activity

The form or organisation of the activity focuses on whether the professional development activity is organised as a reform or traditional type. Reform type professional development includes professional development activities organised as a study group, teacher network, mentoring relationship, individual research project or teacher research centre (Porter *et al*., 2003). The traditional types include professional development activities organised in the form of workshops, institutes and conferences (Garet *et al*., 2001).

Evidence in the literature shows that the workshop is the most common type of professional development offered to teachers and also the most criticised (Dichaba & Mokhele, 2012; Villegas-Reimers, 2003). Garet *et al.,* (2001:920) define a workshop "as a structured approach to professional development that occurs outside the teachers' classroom". As a form of teacher professional development, they are mostly organised and led by experts outside the school system (Mokhele, 2014), whilst Penuel *et al.* (2007) argue that, what matters most is not the *type* of professional development activity but its *design*. They suggested that professional development activities need to help teachers "prepare for classroom practice" (*ibid*: 928) and increase student learning, which suggests that the role of professional development is to enable teachers to enact teaching roles effectively. However, several researchers support the view that reform-type professional development activities have higher chances of improving teachers' instructional practices and student achievement (Birman *et al.*, 2000; Steiner, 2004). There is in accordance with the literature that workshops and other traditional approaches to teacher professional development are ineffective in changing teachers' instructional practices (Coburn, Mata & Choi, 2013; Desimone, 2011; Levine & Marcus, 2010). One of the main criticisms of workshops is that they do not provide teachers with "sufficient time, activities, and content necessary for increasing teachers' knowledge, and fostering changes in their classroom practice" (Garet *et al.,* 2001:920). Whilst this has been established through research, I strongly feel that what matters is not the amount of time taken but the quality of interactions that goes on during the professional development sessions and whether the activities are in tandem with teachers' daily work.

As a result of dissatisfaction with the inadequacies of the traditional forms of teacher professional development, there is growing interest in 'reform' types of professional development (Garet *et al.,* 2001; Porter *et al.*, 2003) such as mentoring or coaching and subject panels/clusters. Birman *et al.* (2000) argue that the reform types closely connect with classroom teaching and are easier to sustain overtime. In addition, Porter *et al.* (2003) found that they are responsive to how teachers learn and have a greater influence on changing teachers' instructional practices. In Zimbabwe, history subject panels have been in operation for some time now, however, there is no research I am aware of that has been conducted to establish whether its activities constitute a reform or traditional type. This study attempted to fill this gap.

2.13.2 Duration

High-quality teacher professional development occurs over time and is continuous (Desimone, 2011; Mokhele, 2014). The duration of an activity refers to the time that participants spend on it. In their qualitative study, Smith and Gillespie (2007) found that professional development, which is of a longer duration, provides teachers with opportunities to learn from their practice, especially if it includes follow-up. A study by Birman *et al*. (2000:30) demonstrates that "activities of longer duration have more subject-area content focus, more opportunities for active learning, and more coherence with teachers' other experiences than do shorter activities". Garet *et al.* (2001:921-922) state that professional development activities that are of a longer duration are important as they allow for "in-depth discussion of content, student conceptions and misconceptions and strategies". These scholars further argue that teachers will have adequate time to try out the new practices in their classrooms and find out their effectiveness. This suggests that professional development activities that are of a longer duration have the potential to influence student achievement positively. Whether history subject panels offer teachers professional development of a longer duration, is what this study attempted to unravel and unpack.

2.13.3 Collective participation

Designing professional development for groups of teachers, especially from the same school, department or grade level, is increasingly becoming popular (Garet *et al*., 2001). Smith and Gullespie (2007:218), argue that, "professional development is more effective when teachers participate with others from the same school, grade or

department". Collective participation in professional development has several advantages (Birman *et al.,* 2000; Garet *et al.,* 2001; Mokhele, 2014). Teachers working together may have the collective opportunity to discuss concepts, skills and problems arising from their professional development experiences. When those from the same school participate in the same professional development programme there are high chances of them being able to "share common curriculum materials, course offerings, and assessment requirements" (Garet *et al.,* 2001:922). For Stacy (2013:45), "collaborative, rather than isolated, teacher-led professional development also strengthens professional judgement through teacher discussions of content and student assessment". Collective participation on professional development allows for active learning and is likely to be congruent with teachers' other experiences (Birman *et al.,* 2000). This suggests that collective participation in professional development engenders collaboration and construction of teacher capacity. Whilst it is acknowledged that teacher collective participation has merits, this study also investigated whether teachers actively participate during their history subject panel meetings.

2.13.4 Content focus

The first core feature of professional development concerns a focus on content. There seems to be consensus in the literature that effective professional development should focus on improving teachers' subject matter content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge (Garet *et al*., 2001; Smith & Gillespie, 2007). In his review of the literature Cole (2012), found that high-quality professional development is grounded in the content of teaching. Teacher professional development can be used for deepening teachers' subject matter content knowledge and how to teach that content. Harwell (2003:4) argues that professional development should,

> deepen teachers' knowledge of subjects being taught, sharpen teaching skills in the classroom; keep up with development in individual fields, and in education generally; generate and contribute new knowledge to the profession; and increase the ability to monitor students' work in order to provide constructive feedback to students and appropriately redirect teaching.

Garet *et al*. (2001:924) argue that professional development requires a “dual focus on both the subject matter content and understanding of how children learn specific content”. This suggests that history subject panels should provide opportunities for teachers to increase their subject matter content knowledge and ways to teach that content effectively for the benefit of the learners.

2.13.5 Active learning

The second core feature of professional development concerns the opportunities provided by professional development activities for teachers to engage meaningfully in discussion, planning and practice (Garet *et al.,* 2001). Active learning for teachers engaged in a professional development activity can take various forms. This includes observing expert teachers deliver their lessons, being observed by experts presenting a lesson, planning how to use new curriculum materials and new teaching methods in the classroom, reviewing students’ work in the various topic areas, leading discussions and engaging in written work (Birman *et al.,* 2000; Garet *et al.,* 2001).

Teacher active learning in professional development activities sharply contrasts with the more traditional forms of teacher learning. The traditional forms of teacher professional development have been heavily criticised for their ineffectiveness in fostering meaningful changes in teachers’ instructional practices and improving student achievement (Desimone, 2011; Levine & Marcus, 2010). Traditional forms of teacher professional development rarely provide teachers with many opportunities to engage meaningfully in active learning, which is critical in sustaining the changes made to their teaching practice. Villegas-Reimers (2003) supports the view that professional development for teachers should accord them opportunities to become active learners, suggesting that learning takes place when participants are active rather than passive recipients of other people’s truths.

2.13.6 Coherence

Effective teacher professional development activities are coherent with the overall programme for teaching (Garet *et al.,* 2001). Most traditional forms of teacher professional development activities have been criticised for being disconnected from one another, that is, individual activities fail to form part of a coherent programme for teacher learning and development (Garet *et al*., 2001).

Literature suggests that effective professional development activities aimed at improving teachers' knowledge and skills should form a coherent part of a wider set of opportunities for teacher learning and development (Desimone *et al.,* 2002), which suggests that effective professional development incorporates elements of coherence in its design. Garet *et al.* (2001: 928-929) identify three dimensions of coherence in teachers' professional development, namely connections with goals and other activities, alignment with state and district standards and assessments and communication with others.

The above dimensions suggest that history subject panels' professional development activities should be closely related to teachers' daily work and teachers accorded opportunities to consult each other regularly. Birman *et al.* (2000:32) argue that, "the coherence of professional development with policies and other professional development experiences is directly related to increased teacher learning and improved classroom practice".

The above features of high-quality teacher professional development are critical in understanding the quality of professional development being offered to teachers through the history subject panels in the Masvingo district. However, Garet *et al.* (2008:470) argue that this general consensus "lacks sufficient specificity to guide practice". Despite some perceived limitations to the above features, they provide an adequate yardstick to evaluate or assess history subject panels as an innovation for professional development.

2.14 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study utilised the symbolic interactionism theory by Mead (1863-1931) as a lens to understand teachers' perspectives on history subject panels as an innovation for their professional development. Blumer, one of Mead's students (Berg, 2001), coined the term 'symbolic interactionism'. Blumer specified three basic premises of the symbolic interactionism theory. Firstly, humans act towards things based on the symbolism those things have for them. Secondly, the meanings of things are derived from social interaction and thirdly these meanings are dependent on and modified by an interpretive process of the people who interact with one another (Berg, 2001; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011).The theory holds that people live in a symbolic domain. Interactionists assert that symbols are culturally derived social objects that

have a shared meaning constructed and maintained in social interaction (Aldiabat & Navenec, 2011). The use of language and communication (symbols) provide the main vehicle through which reality is constructed. This suggests that reality is a social product arising out of people's interpretation of the social world.

The social interactionism theory provided direction for this study on exploring how teachers make meaning of history subject panels as a vehicle for their professional development. The theory holds that human beings construct meaning of the world through interaction (Haralambos *et al.*, 2013; McNeil & Townley, 1986). This study focused on understanding the meanings teachers ascribed to history subject panels as an innovation for professional development. Through interactions during history subject panel meetings, teachers shared ideas about effective instructional practices and relevant content to be learnt by their students. The meanings teachers constructed of these interactions were the focus of this study. Understanding how they conceptualised these non-traditional forms of teacher CPD is crucial to the attainment of the major goals of teacher professional development in Zimbabwe.

The interactionist perspective explains a situation by taking into account the actor's definition of it (Cohen *et al.,* 2011; McNeil, 1986). The study focused on learning from the perspective of the teachers, the types and quality of activities in which they engaged during their history subject panel meetings. This is important for understanding how such teacher professional development structures operate and create benefits for them. Authorities in the field agree that the focus of any high quality professional development should see an enhancement of teachers' instructional practices and student achievement (Guskey, 2002; Jita & Mokhele, 2014; Mokhele, 2014). Through interactions teachers direct their activities on increasing their knowledge of history subject matter content and teaching strategies, sustained over time through active and collaborative learning (Darling-Hammond, 2009; Garet *et al.*, 2001). In the process of these activities, the participants themselves suggest possible solutions to challenges.

The social interaction theory posits that meanings are social products formed through the activities of the people interacting (Berg, 2001). Jita and Ndlalane (2009) argue that clusters accord teachers the opportunity for negotiation or interaction, as they engage in the process of learning new information and unlearning old

information. History subject panels enhance teachers' professional development, construction and sharing of subject matter content and teaching approaches. Teachers construct meanings of the effectiveness of history subject panel activities as a group of people interacting. They provide their views about the overall assessment of history subject panels as an innovation for professional development structures. This provides history teachers the opportunity to reflect on what they are doing, how they are conducting their professional development sessions and whether they are benefitting by participating in history subject panels. This is critical as it enables participants to come up with home-grown solutions to challenges they are facing during their course of duty.

People construct meanings through the process of interaction. In this case, there is a need for history teachers to engage in rich and purposeful interactions in order to share experiences about practices that work in the teaching and learning of history at their schools. Ndamba (2013) used the symbolic interactionism theory to understand how teachers of English collaborated to improve the teaching of the subject in secondary schools. It is assumed that if teachers interact meaningfully with each other during their history subject panel meetings, improvements in the teaching of history occur. In another study, Blasé and Blasé (2000) utilised the symbolic interaction theory as a lens to understand teachers' perspectives on principals' instructional practices. This theory is critical in understanding how teachers collaborate in a symbiotic relationship to improve their practice. Teachers need to work in concert to unpack what the history syllabus planners meant and how planners intended it to be enacted. Teachers come together and develop a common understanding of the aims and skills to be developed in the learners.

However, McNeil (1986:49) argues that, "but although those meanings are created by the interaction of members of our society, they are not the same for all of us". This study focused on unpacking teachers' different interpretations of history subject panels as an innovation for their professional development using open-ended interviews and focus group discussions. These data generation instruments provided me with opportunities to explore various definitions teachers constructed of history subject panels. The use of observation permitted me to have a correct interpretation of how teachers collaborated during their history subject panel meetings. Cohen *et al*. (2011:20) assert that, "symbolic interactionists focus attention at the nature of the

interaction, the dynamic activities taking place between people". This suggests that researchers should focus attention on the quality of the interactions as a unit of study. The above data generation instruments provided me with opportunities to be familiar with the teachers and understand what their behaviours meant (Haralambos *et al*., 2013).

The symbolic interactionism theory has been subjected to heavy criticism by some scholars for its focus on a small-scale face-to-face interaction with limited concern for the historical or social setting (Cohen *et al.,* 2011).Haralambos *et al*. (2013:13) asserts that interactionism "focuses on small interaction rather than society as a whole". The theory rejects the notion of a social system. Interactionists contend that society can be systematically analysed and improved. However, the improvements should focus on a small scale and in a piecemeal way rather than suggested by the macro or system theories. Cohen *et al*. (2011) argue that the symbolic interactionism theory directs its attention at the nature of the interaction and dynamic activities taking place between people rather than at an individual. Despite these criticisms, the theory was appropriate for this study since I aimed at understanding teachers' perspectives on history subject panels as an innovation for professional development. This called for tapping the various meanings teachers ascribed to history subject panels as a vehicle for their professional learning and this could be best done using symbolic interactionism as a lens.

The symbolic interactionism theory calls for studying individual interactions in their natural settings (McNeil & Townley, 1986)To achieve this, non-participant observations of history subject panels in session, interviews and focus group discussions were conducted. This enabled me to see and hear how the teachers were expressing their views and opinions. I was able to ascertain how the teachers constructed meanings through interaction, defined history subject panels, identified challenges they were encountering and possible solutions to these challenges were suggested.

2.15 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter presented a discussion of the related literature on teacher professional development locally and internationally. The discussion of the literature revealed that scholars hold different views about teacher professional development and that

teacher professional development take a variety of forms in different countries and settings. The use of history subject panels in Zimbabwe was influenced by international and local factors. However, the discussion of related literature revealed that the debate on the efficacy of subject panels as a vehicle for teacher professional development is still inconclusive. This study was conducted to contribute to this ongoing discourse on teacher professional development using subject panels. The next chapter presents and discusses the research methodology to conduct this study.

CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the methods used to conduct this study on teachers' perspectives of history subject panels as an innovation for professional development in the Masvingo district of Zimbabwe. The discussion focuses on the research approach, design adopted and data generation methods used in the study. The chapter also presents issues of trustworthiness and ethics concerning the study. A chapter summary concludes the chapter.

3.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main research question that guided data collection for the study was:
What are the Zimbabwean teachers' perspectives of history subject panels as an innovation for professional development?

The following are the sub-questions for this study:

- What are the teachers' understanding of history subject panels and their role in professional development?
- How effective are history subject panels' activities for teacher professional development?
- How viable are history subject panels as an innovation for professional development?
- What suggestions and recommendations can be made for the improvement on the structure and function of history subject panels for them to serve better as vehicles for teacher professional development in Zimbabwe?

Table 1 below provides an outline of this chapter before the in-depth presentation and discussion of issues in the table.

Table 2: Outline of the research methodology

Title	Zimbabwean teachers' perceptions of history subject panels as an innovation for professional development
Research Approach	Qualitative research approach
Research Design	Case study research design
General Data Collection:	After being cleared by the university ethics committee (UFS 2015/029), I sought permission to conduct the study from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, the Masvingo PED and Masvingo district DEO. Permission to interview teachers was sought from the school heads of the relevant schools and observation of history subject panels' meetings from the head-in-charge(HIC).Each participant filled in consent forms before commencement of discussions.
Sampling Procedures	Purposive sampling was used to select the setting of the study and the participants. Masvingo district was selected as the setting of the study out of seven districts in Masvingo province. Eight 'A' level history teachers from eight high schools were chosen to participate in this study.
Data Collection Methods	1) Semi-structured interviews with five teachers 2) One focus group discussion with all eight participants 3) Four observations of history subject panels in session (three workshops and one seminar were observed). 4) Document analysis: Minutes of history subject panel meetings.
Instrumentation	Five peers at the researcher's workplace and the supervisor validated the data collection instruments. The instruments were pilot tested on three 'A' level teachers at three neighbouring schools not included in the sample for this study, and their recommendations were considered accordingly.
Data Analysis & presentation	All audiotaped data were transcribed by the researcher and coded using predetermined themes. Similar data for each theme were grouped together and presented as an intergraded whole (see chapter 4).
Trustworthiness	Constructs used as criteria to ensure trustworthiness of the study are credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability.
Ethical considerations	Participants filled in consent forms before discussions, voluntarily participated in the study and retained the right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality was achieved through using pseudonyms for the participants and their schools.

3.3 RESEARCH APPROACH

A qualitative research approach was adopted to address the critical research questions for this study. The decision to utilise this approach was informed by the purpose of this study and the nature of the data required for addressing the above sub-questions. The qualitative research approach enabled me to gather rich descriptive data and to develop an in-depth understanding of history subject panels as an innovation for professional development (Creswell, 2013). Cohen *et al.* (2011:15) argue that the social world can only be understood from the "stand point of the individuals who are part of the ongoing action being investigated". Eight 'A' level history teachers who were actively involved in the activities of the history subject panels were involved in this study. A qualitative research approach was adopted as it was deemed the best approach for investigating human behaviour and learning (Cohen *et al.*, 2011; Creswell, 2012; Flick, 2014; Gay *et al.*, 2011). The qualitative research approach provided opportunities for me to understand teacher learning better and the manner in which they interpreted history subject panels as an innovation for their professional development (Cohen *et al.*, 2011).

The choice of this research approach was also informed by the purpose of the study and nature of the data required to address the above research questions. The aim of this study was to examine teachers' perspectives of the history subject panels as an innovation for their professional development. Specifically, I intended to investigate teachers' understanding and experiences of history subject panels as a professional development project and the meanings they ascribed to them. Qualitative data was needed to address the research questions for this study therefore, this partly explains the rationale for my choice of the qualitative research approach. Flick (2014) argues that data collection tools for qualitative studies include interviews, observations, focus group discussions and document analysis and the information generated is largely in the form of words rather than statistical data. I intended to collect data from the participants about their experiences of history subject panels as an innovation for their professional development and this could only be achieved through a qualitative research approach.

The qualitative research approach best suited this study because I intended to deal with the direct experiences of teachers with history subject panels in their specific

context. This approach provided me with opportunities to “understand, explain, and demystify social reality through the eyes of different participants” (Cohen *et al.*, 2011:15). In this study, participants themselves were allowed to define reality and I attempted to understand this reality in a specific context. The history subject panels in the Masvingo district provided that specific context or world wherein history teachers’ experiences, understandings and meanings they constructed were described and interpreted (Creswell, 2012; Mertens, 2013; Ritchie & Lewis, 2013).

The adoption of the qualitative research approach was also informed by Mead’s symbolic interactionism theory, which was used to understand how participants construct meanings through interaction (Cohen *et al.*, 2011; Creswell, 2012). I desired to gain a deeper understanding of the meanings teachers constructed through their interactions during history subject panel meetings. Furthermore, having been a history teacher for more than a decade, a member of the National History Panel, a DRT and teacher leader, this study provided me with an opportunity to reflect on my own experiences through teachers’ opinions of history subject panels as an innovation for professional development. As indicated above, qualitative research methods are best suited for studies that are aimed at gaining insights into how people construct or make sense of their experiences and this cannot be easily achieved if, for example, quantitative approaches were used (Barbour, 2013; Gay *et al.*, 2011). I sought to investigate teachers’ perspectives of professional development in Zimbabwe by focusing on history subject panels as a case in point.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

This research on teachers’ perspectives of history subject panels as an innovation was conducted using a case study design. A research design is a master plan for a research study providing directions on how it will be conducted. This section of the report summarises the procedures the researcher employed to generate the data, analyse and interpret that data to answer the research questions for this study (Bazeley, 2013; Flick, 2014; Gay *et al.*, 2011). The case study research design guided me to “plan, structure and execute” the research in a way that maximised the “validity of the findings” of this study (Creswell &Clark, 2010:58). According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010:20), a research design describes the procedures the researcher undertakes when carrying out his/her research, showing “when, from

whom, and under what conditions data was to be collected". Furthermore, they argue that a research design guides the researcher in selecting the methods and decisions to be made during the field research work. In this study, history subject panels were viewed as a case of professional development in Zimbabwe. The study analysed teachers' opinions, beliefs and understandings of history subject panels as an innovation for professional development. In a broader sense, the study was about history subject panels as an innovation for teacher professional development in Zimbabwe with history teachers forming the case material.

I adopted a case study research design in order to gain greater insights into and understanding of dynamics of history subject panels as an innovation for teachers' professional development. Gay *et al.* (2011:444) define a case study as "[…] a qualitative research approach in which researchers focus on a unit of study known as a bounded system". In addition, Gay *et al.* (2011:444) define a case study as an investigation of a "phenomenon that occurs within a specific context". A case study, therefore, is bounded, concrete and rooted in the specific context that is to be studied. Data on teachers' perspectives of history subject panels as an innovation for professional development was generated from Masvingo district only. The case study research design enabled me to examine teachers' perspectives of history subject panels as bounded system overtime and utilising four data sources within its setting (Bazeley, 2013; Creswell, 2012; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Nieuwenhuis, 2012; Yin, 2011).

A case study research design was deemed appropriate for an investigation of teachers' perspectives of history subject panels as an innovation for professional development because it was a contemporary phenomenon (Barbour, 2013; Cohen *et al.*, 2011; Nieuwenhuis, 2012). The case study research design enabled me to study teachers' perspectives of history subject panels in a real life situation (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). More specifically, the in-depth examination of teachers' extensive involvement in history subject panels in the Masvingo district provided the case study for this research.

The selection of case studies for the purposes of conducting research are based on various reasons the researcher has for such a design. My choice was based on the need to collect multiple perspectives from participants about history subject panels

as an innovation for their professional development. My main aim was to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' experiences of history subject panels as an innovation for their professional development. The data to answer research questions for this study, as indicated elsewhere in this study, was to be in words and could be best accessed through a qualitative case study research design. Thus, this case study provided me with opportunities for understanding in-depth the views of teachers and their experiences of the history subject panels as a unique case of professional development. The research study was informed by Mead's symbolic interactionism theory, which holds that people construct meanings through interaction in social settings (Berg, 2001; Cohen *et al.*, 2011). I was interested in hearing the teachers' voices and opinions of the history subject panels as an innovation for their professional development. As indicated in the first chapter, studies on teachers' professional development initiatives hardly incorporate the experiences of teachers' who are the direct beneficiaries, especially from their perspectives. Employing a case study research design for this study enabled me to address this critical omission in most studies in part by investigating the efficacy of history subject panels from the perspective of the teachers themselves. In addition, the case study research design was considered important as it could lead to the discovery of new knowledge, the extension of the reader's experience and confirmation of what is already known (Merriam 1998).

Case studies, similar to other research designs, have their own limitations and have been criticised for their dependency on single cases and their results cannot be generalised except in situations when the reader/researcher sees their application (Cohen *et al.*, 2011; Yin, 2011). Furthermore, case studies are not easily open to crosschecking and, as a result, maybe "selective, biased, personal and subjective" and prone to observer bias (Cohen *et al.*, 2012:293). However, my intent was not to generalise the findings, rather I aimed at gaining deeper insights and understanding of teachers' experiences of history subject panels as a vehicle for their professional development (Nieuwenhuis, 2012:76). I utilised four data sources and member checking in order to minimise the problem of bias in this case study (Barbour, 2013; Creswell, 2014; Nieuwenhuis, 2012). Furthermore, my intention was not to generalise the findings of this study to all the history teachers in Masvingo district nor to all the teachers who participated in history subject panels. I was mostly interested

in developing an understanding of what it really meant for participants involved in history subject panels as an innovation for teachers' professional development, in particular to each participant in this study.

3.5 SAMPLING PROCEDURES

When undertaking a research study, researchers do not involve all the elements in an area as units of analysis, rather they only select a few (people, groups, artefacts, settings, etc.) in such a manner that they maximise their ability to answer their research questions (Gay *et al.*, 2011).To Nieuwenhuis (2012:79), sampling refers to the process researchers use to select a portion of the population for study. Purposive sampling was used to select the setting and the participants for this study. The selection of the setting and participants for this study was based on predetermined criteria (Ritchie & Lewis, 2013), that is, on certain characteristics the researcher deemed relevant for the study (Creswell, 2012). Ritchie and Lewis (2013:78) argue that, "it is this feature that makes them [case studies] well suited for small-scale, in-depth studies". For this study, I purposively sampled the setting and the participants because I intended to gain a deeper understanding of the nature, form, and meanings as well as develop explanations about history subject panels as an innovation for teachers' professional development (Ritchie & Lewis, 2013:82).

In this study, criterion-based sampling was used where the setting and participants had to meet or possess certain key features relevant to the study as explained later in this chapter (Patton, 2002). Ritchie and Lewis 2013:78) argue that criterion-based sampling is a more appropriate term than purposive sampling because all sampling is purposive, "but purposive is the term most commonly used in the literature".

3.5.1 Setting of the study

This study was conducted in Zimbabwe, a country with ten provinces, of which Masvingo was chosen because of the limited budget for the study. Masvingo province has seven districts and Masvingo district was selected because I had established, through informal discussions with Provincial Education Inspectors, that the district had the most functional subject panels. This was also in line with the advice given by Denzin and Lincoln (2000:370) that, "many qualitative researchers employ purposive and not random sampling methods as they seek out groups,

settings and individuals where processes being studied are most likely to occur". In addition, the selection of the Masvingo district as the setting of the study was informed by literature, which suggests that only relevant constituencies that illuminate and inform understanding need to be included in a qualitative sample (Creswell, 2012; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Ritchie & Lewis, 2013). Based on this guidance, I selected Masvingo district as the setting for this study. The selection criteria included two key characteristics, namely a well-defined structure for the supervision and monitoring of the operations of subject panels and a clearly laid out programme showing that subject panels are functional.

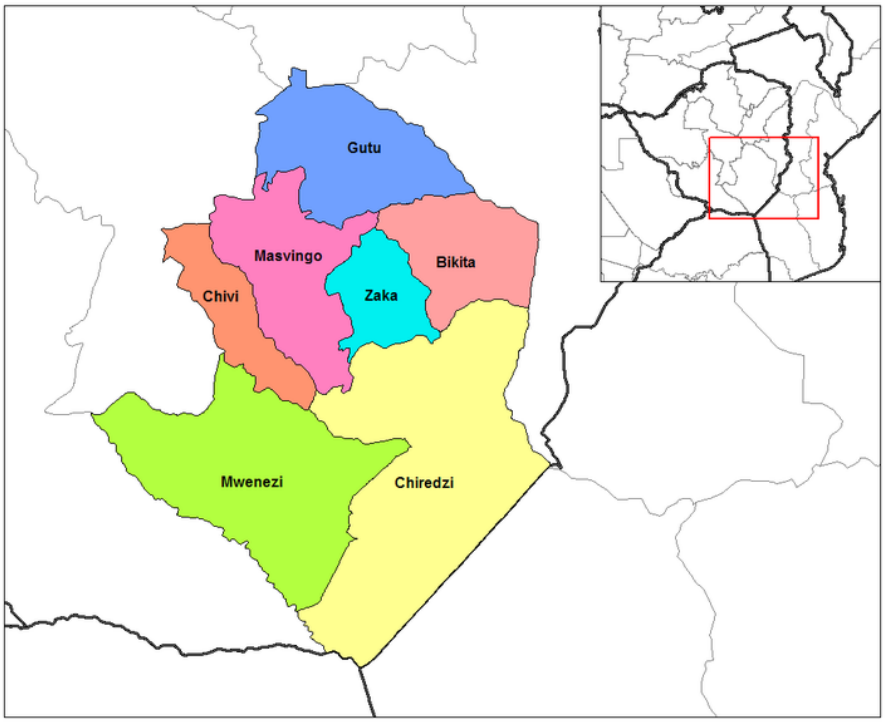

Figure 1: Map of Zimbabwe showing the seven districts of the Masvingo province

According to one Provincial Education Inspector, Masvingo district was the only district out of the seven districts in Masvingo province with a well-defined structure and a programme showing that subject panels were actually active and functional as shown in figure 2 below (informal discussions with Provincial Education Inspector,10/09/2014).

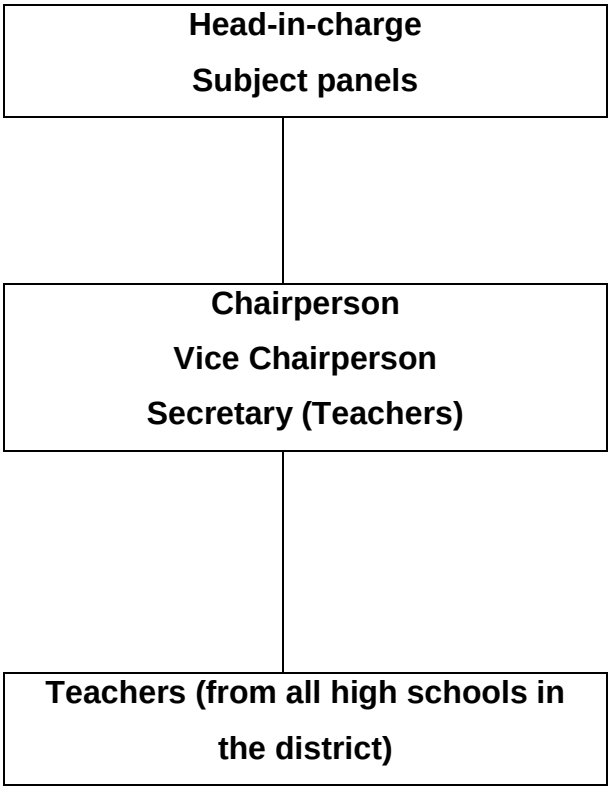

Figure 1: NASH Masvingo district history subject panels' structure.

The above figure shows the structure of the NASH Masvingo district subject panels. All subject panels for different subject areas have the same structure and are organised and conducted at district level. NASH selects a high school head who is also a specialist in the area to oversee the operations of the subject panel. The chairperson, vice chairperson and secretary are elected from subject teachers by the teachers themselves. All teachers in the district belong to a subject panel according to the subjects they teach in schools. The Provincial Education Inspector indicated that other districts were in the process of setting similar structures to guide teacher professional development. It was partly because of this that the Masvingo district was selected as the most appropriate setting for this study.

The subject panels in the Masvingo district are well organised and operate according to a well laid down schedule, as shown in table 3 below.

Table 3: NASH Masvingo district subject panel meetings: Term one 2015

DATE	COORDINATOR	SUBJECT		VENUE
		'0'LEVEL	**'A'LEVEL**	**HIGHSCHOOL**
28Jan.	Teacher (Humanities)	Subject Committees for Geo/His/Div/Soc.		School X
03Feb.	Teacher (maths/science)	Subject Committees for maths and science		School B
04Feb	Teacher (Commercials)	Commerce/ Accounts		School C
05Feb.	Teacher1. Teacher2.	Sciences	Accounts/Economics/B/Studies	School B
10Feb.	Teacher		Maths	School B
10Feb.	Teacher	Subject Committees (Languages)		School X
11Feb.	Teacher	Shona English	Sciences	School B School X
12Feb.	Teacher	Meeting all Chairperson practical subjects		School A
28Feb	Teacher	History/Geography/RME		School B
25Feb.	Teacher3 Teacher4	Agric/B.S/Metal/Wood Work	Shona Literature	School X School B
04March	Teacher	F/F;FN/Music/Art	Geo/Div/Soc	School X (Practicals) School B(Humanities)
11March	Teacher	HEXCO Subjects	'A' level Practicals	School X

(Adapted from the NASH Masvingo district subject panels programme term one 2015)

The above table shows the programme for subject panels of the Masvingo district for the first term of 2015[1]. According to the Provincial Education Inspector, the other six districts in Masvingo province did not follow well laid down programmes for subject panels and this made Masvingo district the most appropriate setting for my study.

[1]Names of schools and teachers responsible for the different subject areas have been left out for ethical reasons.

3.5.2 Selection of schools

The selection of schools that participated in this study was based on geographical location, having ‘A’ Level history classes and active participation in history subject panels. This was aimed at including schools from diverse areas within the settings. Ritchie and Lewis (2013:83) argue that one of the requirements for a qualitative sample “[…] is to ensure that the sample is as diverse as possible within the boundaries of the defined population”. One of the district executive history subject panel members also assisted me in identifying schools that were quite active in history subject panel activities.

Following the above advice on the set criteria and informed by relevant literature, I finally selected eight high schools for this study, comprising four rural high schools, one growth point high school and three urban high schools. The eight high schools represented diverse geographical locations in the Masvingo district (See chapter 4).

3.5.3 Selection of participants

The selection of participants was closely aligned with the selection of schools. All teachers who taught classes at ‘A’ level in Zimbabwe are holders of at least one university degree; therefore, those who took part in this study had similar qualifications. Participants for this study were ‘A’ Level history teachers who were actively involved in History subject panels for at least three years. This was because I wanted information-rich participants (Yin, 2011).

Following the above criteria and informed by relevant literature, I finally included eight teachers in my sample. The intention was not to come up with a big sample because qualitative studies require small samples (Ritchie & Lewis, 2013). Furthermore, this study was intended to be descriptive and exploratory. Too many participants were likely to generate excessive amounts of data, which was likely going to overwhelm me (Yin, 2011).

The other consideration that informed my selection of a small sample was the nature of the primary data collection strategy for case studies. Gay *et al.* (2011) argue that qualitative researchers are mostly guided by circumstances. The sample size may appear to be small but the researcher had to return several times to the same participants seeking clarification or confirming issues (Ritchie & Lewis, 2013).

3.6 DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

After deciding on a research design, developing it and constructing research instruments, researchers begin to collect data to address critical research questions for their studies. Data collection for this study spread over a period of nine months. Qualitative case studies use data collection instruments that yield data mostly in text (Berg, 2001; Cohen *et al.*, 2011; Yin, 2011). The data collection instruments used for this study included semi-structured interviews, observations, focus groups and document analysis (Creswell, 2012; Flick, 2014; Yin, 2011). The process of data collection for this study, the manner in which the instruments were constructed and used is discussed in the section below.

3.6.1 Instrumentation

Before collecting data to answer the study's critical research questions, I designed four research instruments for the generation of relevant data. The construction of the data generation instruments was done after an extensive literature review. This literature review constituted what history subject panels meant, their role in professional development, activities teachers engaged in during their meetings and their effectiveness in professional development, viability of subject panels as an innovation for professional development, challenges faced in using teacher-led professional development programmes and how they can be improved. This study utilised document analysis, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and observations to generate qualitative research data (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). The four data generation instruments were important in providing me with multiple data sources for the purposes of triangulation of information (Yin, 2011).

Document analysis involved a thorough search of history subject panel minutes from school heads and 'A' level History teachers. Only a few documents were found, however, they provided me with sufficient information about the venues for history subject panel meetings, agendas, facilitators and attendance at workshops and seminars. The information from the history subject panels' minutes and literature review on subject panels/teacher clusters was important for guiding me in designing the interview schedule questions, focus group discussion questions and on what to observe at history subject panel meetings.

The interview schedule was pilot tested with three ‘A’ level history teachers from three neighbouring high schools which did not form part of this study’s sample. The teachers were known to the researcher to be actively involved in history subject panel activities. These were deemed to be ‘information rich’ and relevant for testing the validity of the instruments. The purpose of the pilot test was intended to provide me with information about the time to be taken interviewing participants and the clarity of my questions. The validity of the interview schedule was further increased through specialist judgement. Five peers, who are also PhD students with other universities and my supervisor, assessed the validity of the data generation instruments and their recommendations were considered accordingly.

3.6.2 Document analysis

Documents refer to a wide range of written materials that a researcher can use to produce qualitative information (Creswell, 2014; Hancock, Windridge & Ockleford, 2009 They take a variety of forms such as policy documents, mission statements, annual reports, minutes of meetings, codes of conduct and case notes (Ritchie & Lewis, 2013). Flick (2014:255) defines documents as “standardized artefacts, case notes, case reports […] expert opinion”. Nieuwenhuis (2012) states that there are two types of documents namely primary and secondary documents, that is, unpublished and published, respectively.

For purposes of this study, primary documents (minutes of meetings and reports written by teachers about history subject panel meetings for their respective heads) were used in order to address sub-question1on the type of activities teachers engaged in during their meetings. Hancock et al., (2009) argue that documents can be important in understanding the philosophy of an organisation as required in ethnographic studies. In this study, minutes of history subject panel meetings and reports were critical for understanding the content, agendas, attendance and activities of History subject panel workshops and seminars. These documents were also important in the development of my interview schedules, which I used to elicit teachers’ understanding of history subject panels, their role in professional development, type of activities, effectiveness of history subject panels in professional development, challenges teachers were facing and how they could be improved. However, not many documents of minutes of history subject panels were found and

not much has been reported from them. Flick (2014:255) suggests four criteria for assessing the quality of documents:

- Authenticity– Is the evidence genuine and of unquestionable origin?
- Credibility– Is the document free from error and distortion?
- Representativeness– Is the evidence typical of its kind, and if not, is the extent of its unusualness known?
- Meaning– Is the evidence clear and comprehensible?

The above four criteria for assessing the quality of documents were used to select history subject panel minutes and/or reports I needed for this study. I spent three working weeks studying documents in order to have a thorough understanding of the operations and functions of History subject panels in the Masvingo district.

3.6.3 Semi-structured interviews

The interview schedules used to generate data to answers the four research questions for this study were constructed after an extensive literature study of history subject panels and analysis of minutes of history subject panel meetings. The semi-structured interview questions were validated by five colleagues, who are also PhD students with other universities in and outside Zimbabwe and my supervisor. To further increase the validity of the semi-structured interview schedules, I conducted a pilot study with three ‘A’ level history teachers from three neighbouring high schools not included in the final sample for this study. The teachers selected for pilot study were already known by the researcher to be actively involved in history subject panel activities. This was intended to familiarise the researcher with the instruments, find out the time taken and whether the questions were accessible to the participants. The semi-structured interview questions were found to be appropriate and only minor adjustments were made. The next step involved actual face-to-face interviews with five purposively selected ‘A’ level history teachers. The period of data collection using interviews was from July to November 2015 (refer to table 4 in chapter 4 below). Interviews could not be conducted in August and September 2015, as this was school holidays and therefore difficult to arrange meetings with potential interviewees.

An interview schedule is a structured set of questions used by the researcher to ask interviewees to provide answers to research questions (Ritchie & Lewis, 2013). In this study, pre-set semi-structured interview questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010) were used to solicit answers from five purposively selected interviewees on their understanding of history subject panels and their role in professional development. The interviewees were also asked about the effectiveness of the activities of teachers during history subject panel meetings, the viability of history subject panels as an innovation for professional development, challenges teachers faced and how the structure and function of history subject panels could be improved to better serve them as vehicles for professional development (questions 1 to 4). It was important to ask similar questions to all interviewees to ensure that no area is left out and to compare responses during data analysis.

Pre-set semi-structured interview questions were deemed appropriate for this study for various reasons. Firstly, they were found flexible and permitted me to deviate and probe further in order to gain a deeper understanding (Yin, 2011) from teachers about what history subject panels meant to them and their role in professional development, how they were enacted, the challenges, if any and how these could be solved. Furthermore, the researcher did not want to inconvenience interviewees as all interviews were conducted after school and some of them were staying away from their work places. They also provided me with opportunities to understand the world from the perspective of the participants (Barbour, 2013; Creswell, 2012; Nieuwenhuis, 2012). In addition, I was able to gather rich descriptive data critical for addressing all my research questions and to understand how the teachers constructed knowledge and social reality (Cohen *et al.*, 2011; Nieuwenhuis, 2012). Finally, the interviews also allowed me to generate data that could not be accessed using other methods. This data included facial expressions, gestures, body language and other important cues, especially when they were expressing their feelings about the effectiveness of history subject panels as an innovation for their professional development.

All five interviews were conducted at the workstations of the participants. The interviewees were selected from five high schools, two rural, one growth point and two urban high schools. The researcher phoned the participants and arranged for interviews in advance. This was intended not to disrupt teaching and learning

activities. Participants signed consent forms after the researcher explained to them the purpose of the study and assured them of confidentiality. Most of the schools had two ‘A’ level history teachers and only the most experienced of the two was selected per school because the researcher needed information rich participants (Creswell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Yin, 2011). The interviewees were asked to provide detailed verbal information about their views and experiences of history subject panels as an innovation for their continuing professional development (CPD). The interview questions were closely linked to the four research questions for this study. In addition, the interviews were in tandem with Mead’s social interaction theory, which posits that people construct meanings through social interaction. I was able to construct the meanings interviewees had about history subject panels as vehicles for their professional development. The researcher had to probe further for detailed explanations of various facts and issues not understood. This enabled the interviewees to develop their ideas and provided in-depth information about their understanding of history subject panels and their role in professional development.

The interview method has its own limitations. As a regular facilitator at some of the history subject panel meetings, some of the interviewees knew me. It was possible for them to be biased in their responses in order to please me (Borg & Gall, 1996). To counter this limitation, I had to ask the same question differently at a later stage of the interview process to establish consistency in the responses. I observed four history subject panel sessions and I was able to compare responses with what was actually taking place at the meetings. The focus group discussion also helped in verifying truthfulness of the responses I got during interviews. Gay *et al.* (2011) argue that interviews can cause uneasiness on the part of interviewees when responding to questions. To overcome this limitation, I started interviews by explaining to the participants the purpose of the study, then requested that they sign a consent form and ensured them of confidentiality and anonymity. This was followed by general discussions on their professional and academic qualifications and teaching experience. This was not only for ethical reason, but was also intended to settle the interviewees and make them feel comfortable to open-up (Yin, 2011). I did not face challenges in having interviewees open-up and voice their opinions because they had experience of conducting research, as all were university graduates. Interviews were conducted after work in the offices of the interviewees

and this further ensured confidentiality about what we were discussing. Each interview lasted for about one hour. In addition to audio taping the interviews, I also took down field notes about salient issues like body language and facial expressions, which could be critical during data analysis. I also ensured that questions were open-ended, which allowed participants to provide explanatory responses (Creswell, 2012; Hancock et al., 2009).

3.6.4 Observations

Observations of four history subject panel meetings were designed to be conducted after the interviews but some of the activities important to this study were held early and the researcher had to observe them as they arose. I had no control over when these meetings could be held and I had to adjust my schedule accordingly. Observations of history subject panel sessions stretched from July 2015 to March 2016. The observation protocol sheet used to observe the activities of history subject panel meetings is presented under Appendix B. The observation protocol made my observation of history subject panels uncomplicated as important components to be observed were identified in advance. Issues to be focused on during observations were identified and discussed with peers and the supervisor beforehand. Observations were intended to answer research questions two to four of my study. More specifically, observations were intended to authenticate the quality of activities teachers engaged in, whether the activities were embedded in teachers' class work, the artefacts used, who facilitated meetings, nature and quality of interactions and issues of power and control, comments teachers were raising about their interactions and how differences were resolved. Such a focus was important as it provided me with first-hand information about the dynamics of professional development through history subject panels.

Observations of history subject panels in session enabled me to gain deeper insights and understanding of how History subject panels operate as vehicles for teachers' professional development. Nieuwenhuis (2012:83-84) defines observation as a "systematic process of recording the behavioural patterns of participants, objects and occurrences without necessarily questioning or communicating with them". The choice of observation, as one of the data generation instruments for this study, was deemed appropriate as it also accorded me opportunities to generate live data from

naturally occurring events (Creswell, 2012). I was able to gain a rich understanding of teachers' practices during their history subject panels.

The first session, attended by ten teachers, was observed on 10 July 2015 and focused on drawing up marking guides for the district 'A' level history mid-year examination. The second session was held on 17 July 2015 and involved 30 'A' level history teachers focusing on how to mark 'A' level history essays. The third session was conducted on 26 September 2015 and involved teachers and students. This session focused on preparing 'A' level students for their final examinations. Permission to observe all four history subject panels was sought from and granted by the HIC of the Masvingo district history subject panels before the meetings.

Although observation as a data gathering technique has often been criticised for being selective and subjective (Cohen *et al.,* 2011; Creswell & Clark, 2010), it remains a critical data collection instrument in qualitative research studies. Observation of the History subject panels in session was critical for this study as it provided me with "[...] an insider perspective of group dynamics and behaviours in different settings" (Nieuwenhuis, 2012:84).

Attending history subject panels as a non-participant observer provided me with rare opportunities to hear, see and experience reality as participants did. I was able to learn from experience (observation) the activities in which teachers engaged the manner in which they interacted and the language they used (Cohen *et al.,* 2011; Nieuwenhuis, 2012). Observing teachers during their history subject panel meetings enabled me to build positive relationships with them in the setting and use other data collection instruments with ease.

As a non-participant observer, I had to record all the important events as they were occurring. In the process, I took down detailed field notes about the language used by the participants, issues they collaborated on and the manner in which the collaboration was constructed. Being a non-participant observer helped participants engage in their activities without interruptions from me and made them feel comfortable (Cohen *et al.,* 2011; Yin, 2011). The field notes and the actual words used by participants were critical during data analysis. At times, I had to use shorthand with memos on the margins to provide a summary of what was said or happening as events tended to unfold fast. The researcher also recorded special

events on the right margins and these were critical during the reporting phase of the study.

Observations, as a data generation method, have their own limitations. The researcher had no control over the proceedings (Cohen *et al*., 2011) during the history subject panel meetings. At one meeting, the researcher had to just sit and watch the participants discussing issues that had nothing to do with my study. During meetings, participants at times took long to settle down, such that I had to wait until the panel executive restored order and business of the day would then start. Despite such occasional setbacks, I managed to observe four history subject panels without facing any difficulties. I was well received by participants, as a good number of them knew me.

On the day of each session, I explained the purpose of the research and assured all participants that the information being collected was for research purposes only (Patton, 2002). I was able to ask some participants a few questions about how they felt about their professional development using history subject panels and certain aspects that needed further clarification after the sessions as a way of enhancing the credibility of my findings and establishing rapport with participants.

Table 3 below shows the focus of observational data for this study. The history subject panel sessions observed dealt with various professional development aspects ranging from drawing marking guides for the district ‘A’ level history mid-year examinations to the preparation of students for their final history examination. I closely followed all proceedings for the four sessions.

Table 4: An analytical framework of observed data

Code	Activity 1	Activity 2	Activity 3	Activity 4
Date	10/07/15	17/07/15	26/09/15	08/03/16
Venue	Urban High School	Urban High School	Masvingo Teachers' College	Christian High School
Time	1000 to 1307	0946 to 1328	0900 to 1340	0934 to 1446
Participants	10 Teachers	30 Teachers	15 Teachers & 226 Students	74 Teachers
Agenda	Drawing marking guides for mid-year 'A'level districts examination	- How to mark 'A'level history essays. - Discussion of mid-year 'A' level history examination marking guides.	Preparing 'A' level students for final examination.	-question interpretation -syllabus interpretation
Issues discussed	Expected responses/answers for history papers 1 & 5.	-Tips on marking 'A'level essays with special emphasis on mark bands.	-discipline; -selecting questions; -question interpretation and attack; and -essay structure.	
Artefacts used	-'A' level history syllabus (9155). - 'A' level history mark bands. - History textbooks. - Draft marking guides	- 'A' level Masvingo district history mid-year question papers (1 &5). - 'A' level history mid-year marking guides. - 'A' level history mark bands. - 'A' level history textbooks.	- Question and answer history textbooks; -Handout with 'A' level History Mark bands;	- 'A' level history textbooks. - 'A' level history syllabus document. -Past examination question papers.
Facilitators	-2 'A' level examiners (one for each paper: 1& 5).	- 2 'A' level examiners (one for each paper: 1 & 5)	-An history expert(Author)	-2'A' level history examiners (one for each paper: 1& 5).
Structure/nature of interactions	-presentations of draft responses by each teacher followed by discussions.	- Presentation of marking guide for each question followed by discussions. --Corrections and contributions were noted.	- Presentations by facilitator; - Student pair work/discussions and feedback -question and answer session from teachers and students.	-Presentations followed by dialogues.
Interesting issues observed	-no comfortable collegiality observed during interactions. - High level debates.	- High level teacher participation was observed. - No comfortable collegiality was observed during discussions. -High level debates and active participation.	-High level student participation; -involvement of final beneficiaries of professional development (students) from different schools was something unique/unusual of CPD. -no comfortable collegiality during feedback sessions.	-High level debates on contentious issues. -teachers were free to open up and speak about aspects challenging them in their teaching.

3.6.5 Focus group

The term ‘focus group’ is often used interchangeably with ‘group discussions’ focused on a specific topic of interest to the researcher (Flick, 2014). In a focus group discussion, 6 to 12 participants are brought together to discuss a specific research topic in which a researcher is interested. In this case, I was interested in their views and opinions about history subject panels as an innovation for their professional development. I conducted one focus group discussion with eight out of the expected ten teachers at one of the schools in Masvingo town. This session was aimed at addressing research questions 1 to 4. The session was conducted on Saturday 11 July 2015. The reason for conducting this session on a weekend was intended not to disrupt teaching and learning time and to allow participants from outside Masvingo town to attend. The venue for the focus group discussion was convenient for participants because of its centrality. The session lasted for one and half hours. The focus group discussion focused on all the items in the interview schedule in order to verify interview responses and gain a deeper understanding of history subject panels as a vehicle for teachers’ professional development. I identified three teachers who had not taken part in interviews during the 10 July 2015 history subject panel session with the help of one of the committee members. The three participants were then asked to sign consent forms before discussions started. The participants for this focus group discussion were purposively sampled, had wide experience with history subject panels and were ‘A’ level History examiners and teacher leaders. This was deliberate, as I wanted information rich participants (Yin, 2011). The inclusion of participants who had been interviewed earlier on was deliberate, as I wanted their views to be interrogated by their peers and to allow them to check the accuracy of their transcribed interview responses.

The choice of focus groups as a qualitative data collection technique was appropriate for this study in a number of ways. Blumer, in Flick (2014:196), contends that,

> A small group of individuals, brought together as a discussion or resource group, is more valuable many times over than any representative sample. Such a group, discussing collectively their sphere of life and probing into it as they meet one

> another's disagreements, will do more to lift the veils covering the sphere of life than any other device that I know of.

The focus group discussion was appropriate for my study because it stimulated discussion and utilised "its dynamics of developing conversation in the discussion as a central source of knowledge" (Flick, 2014:196). Participants had the opportunity to interact and furthermore interrogate each other's ideas about history subject panels as an innovation for their professional development and this could not have been possible in a one-to-one interview ((Hancock et al., 2009).The focus group discussion provided opportunities for each participant to present his own views and experiences of history subject panels and gave them an opportunity to hear from colleagues. The focus group discussion allowed participants to listen, reflect on what others said and, in the light of this, further reconsider their own standpoints (Ritchie & Lewis, 2013). I was the moderator during the focus group discussion and my major role was to listen carefully, taking down field notes. In the process, I also asked questions to clarify issues. I ensured that the discussions remained on course by reminding participants to remember the key aspects to be discussed and each participant had a copy of the questions to be discussed.

Hancock et al., (2009:18) advise that, "[…] it is a good idea to offer refreshments[…] as people arrive also serves as a good 'ice-breaker' and allows for participants to meet each other before the focus group starts". I provided participants with refreshments as a way of establishing rapport with them and to allow them to familiarise themselves with each other (*Ibid*). I welcomed all the participants and thanked them for coming and informing them of the purpose of the study. A copy of issues to be discussed was given to each participant before the commencement of discussions.

Focus groups are not easy to convene as some participants may not come and in this case, two did not turn up despite having agreed to take part in the study. Another challenge is that, if discussions are not properly managed they may result in participants discussing issues not pertinent to the study (Flick, 2014; Ritchie & Lewis, 2013). In order to keep the discussions focused I used a guide outlining the main issues to be addressed. We laid down house rules acceptable to all members before starting our discussions. At this stage, all the participants had signed consent forms.

As the moderator, I ensured that a few participants who were more vocal did not dominate the discussions (Cohen et al., 2011). The researcher provided the three participants who did not participate in interviews exercise books and they were given time to go through the questions and write down their own responses to these questions. Those who had taken part in the interviews were given back their interview transcripts, thus providing an opportunity for them to verify the correctness of the transcriptions (member checking). The next step involved participants selecting a secretary to write down their agreed upon group responses. The method was appropriate as it resulted in lively debates, all responses were written down and discussions were audio taped with their permission. Participants had the chance to correct each other in the process. All the group responses were written on a flipchart and I took down detailed field notes, especially on body language, facial expressions and issues participants failed to agree on. The method was appropriate as it provided me with an opportunity to capture everything we had discussed, including negative responses.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

All the data collected for research purposes ends up with data analysis to give the study its order, meaning and worthiness. Creswell (2012:461) views data analysis as "organizing, accounting for and explaining the data; in short, making sense of the data in terms of participants' definition of the situation, noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities". As in most qualitative research studies, data analysis was continuous and an interactive process (Creswell, 2013; 2014; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Nieuwenhuis, 2012). Data collection and analysis for this study was undertaken concurrently. This helped me identify issues that needed further clarification and detail. Conducting data collection and analysis concurrently enabled me to identify and fill in the gaps in the process. This also helped me to keep the study focused on history subject panels as an innovation for professional development.

I took a number of steps in the process of analysing data. The first critical step was to listen closely to all the audiotapes several times before transcribing them verbatim and reading the field notes several times. This helped me understand them and transcribe them without much difficulty. Creswell (2012) advises that the researcher

himself/herself carry out the process of transcription. I transcribed all the audiotapes personally in order to ensure that all the words were captured including comments about facial expressions and body language. Transcribed interview data was returned to interviewees for the purposes of checking content accuracy (Yin, 2011). This process was followed by a thorough search for similar responses and bringing them together through the process of segmentation. Critical segments on teachers' perspectives on history subject panels were identified from the study's objectives (Cohen *et al.,* 2011; Ritchie & Lewis, 2013). The next step was the coding process, described by Nieuwenhuis (2012:105) as "reading carefully through your transcribed data, line by line and dividing it into meaningful analytical units". The process of coding for this study was done following the research objectives. All data with similar meanings were given the same label. This was intended to facilitate easy tracking and retrieval of information. Data that had similar thematic ideas were examined together and compared (Creswell & Clark, 2010; Flick, 2014; Silverman, 2013). I then embarked on a thorough study of the transcribed data in order to generate meanings through classification and categorisation. This involved the process of grouping similar responses together and ordering units of meanings from the interviews and the focus group discussion.

I also conducted a documentary analysis of all the minutes and reports of minutes together with detailed narratives of observations of history subject panels' sessions. Content from these documents was allocated to predetermined categories. These documents yielded plenty of information about various components relevant to the study. The data from the four data sources were presented using thick descriptions and were presented as an integrated whole. This enabled me to produce a complete picture of teachers' perspectives on history subject panels as an innovation for professional development.

3.8 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY

Trustworthiness is a term used in assessing the quality of a qualitative inquiry and seeks to support the argument that the study was conducted in a transparent manner (Yin, 2011) and that its findings are credible (Loh, 2013). Rayn, Coughlan and Cronin (2007:742) used the term 'rigour' synonymously with the term trustworthiness when referring to "the plausibility, credibility and integrity of the

qualitative research process". Lincoln and Guba (1985) provided constructs that can be used as criteria for evaluating the quality of a qualitative research study namely, credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability. I used these four constructs to ensure trustworthiness of this study on teachers' perspectives of history subject panels as an innovation for professional development.

3.8.1 Credibility

Credibility refers to the degree to which a study's findings are an authentic and accurate representation of the meanings of the research participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). This suggests there should be consistency between participants' views and the researchers' representation of those views. To achieve this, I employed several techniques such as triangulation, member checking and presenting data in the form of thick descriptions. Triangulation refers to the use of "two or more sources to achieve a comprehensive picture of a fixed point" (Padgett, 2008:186). Data generation for this study involved the use of multiple data sources, namely semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, document analysis and observations of the history subject panels in action (data triangulation). The data obtained from these multiple sources was compared to find out if they pointed to the same conclusions. This helped to ensure that the findings were credible from the perspective of the research participants (Loh, 2013). In addition, I involved two authorities on qualitative research, a colleague and my supervisor (observer triangulation), to assist me in analysing the data. This technique ensured that important ideas were not missed out and that 'completeness' was achieved (Drisko, 1997).

Another technique I used to achieve credibility was member checking. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe member checking as a valuable strategy for increasing trustworthiness in qualitative research. This involved corroborating the findings of the study by seeking feedback from the research participants (Creswell & Miller, 2000). All transcripts from interviews, focus group discussions, observations and my own reflections were submitted back to five of the eight participants to correct errors (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Ritchie & Lewis, 2013). Member checking was important for providing an 'insider' perspective and checking the accuracy of my interpretations of the data (Anastas, 2012. This helped me to ensure that the findings reflected the

participants' experiences of history subject panels as an innovation for their professional development.

I used thick descriptions in this study in order to achieve credibility. This involved providing a detailed account of teachers' experiences of history subject panels as a vehicle for their professional development, paying special attention to the context in which they occurred. Creswell and Miller (2000:128-129) explain that,

> The purpose of the thick description is that it creates verisimilitude, statement that produce for readers the feelings that they have experienced, or could experience, the events being described in a study. Thus credibility is established through the lens of readers who read a narrative account, and are transported into a situation.

In order to come up with thick descriptions, I used prolonged engagement with the participants. Data collection started in July 2015 and ended in March 2016. I had time to interact with participants through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and during observations of history subject panel meetings. The five teachers involved in interviews also took part in focus group discussions. This repeated contact with participants resulted in some information being repeated and this permitted triangulation from different participants. All interviews and focus group discussions were audio taped and listened to several times before being transcribed verbatim.

3.8.2 Dependability

Dependability involves the researcher providing sufficient documentation about how the study was conducted, allowing readers to follow and critique the whole research process (Lietz & Zayas, 2010; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To achieve dependability or auditability criteria, I documented all the research procedures adopted in this study in such a way that readers could follow the trail used and potentially arrive at similar or comparable conclusions (Rayn *et al.*, 2007). I provided a rationale for the theoretical and methodological decisions I made throughout this study. All the changes that deviated from my original plan are documented in sufficient detail. This was intended to allow readers to follow my research process. All categories created during data analysis were distinctly labelled, including all revisions made to the categories. The whole data analysis process was documented in detail to enable readers to see

decisions made and how the analysis was done including the processes used to arrive at the conclusions (Nieuwenhuis, 2013; Ritchie & Lewis, 2013).

3.8.3 Transferability

The transferability criterion refers to the applicability of the findings to situations outside the study and is found meaningful (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rayn *et al.*, 2007). This is a qualitative study and I did not intend to generalise the findings to other settings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that it is not the responsibility of the researcher to generalise results of a qualitative inquiry. The purpose was to understand teachers' experiences of history subject panels as an innovation for their professional development. In addition, the sample for this study was too small and the results cannot be generalised to other contexts (Loh, 2013).

It is acknowledged in the literature that qualitative studies do not seek generalisations (Cohen *et al.*, 20110.. However, readers can apply findings of this study to similar situations since a detailed description of the context under which the study was conducted is provided. To achieve the transferability criterion, I presented the data using thick descriptions thus allowing readers to understand how the findings of this study may be applicable to their own settings (Creswell, 2012; Shenton, 2004).

3.8.4 Confirmability

The confirmability criterion refers to the ability of others to confirm or corroborate the findings of a research inquiry (Drisko, 1997; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It involves demonstrating that the study's interpretations and conclusions are derived from the data provided (Rayn *et al.*, 207). In order to achieve the confirmability criterion, Shenton (2004:72) advises that, "Steps must be taken to help ensure that as far as possible that the work's findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than characteristics and preferences of the researcher". I used a number of strategies, including triangulation, an audit trail, peer debriefing, negative case analysis and a reflexive journal maintained throughout the study to achieve the confirmability criterion.

I utilised the triangulation technique to reduce researcher bias (Flick, 2014; Silverman, 2013). Data were generated from four data sources comprising document

analysis, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and observations of history subject panel sessions. Data generated from these sources were compared and contrasted during the data analysis process. Peer debriefing involved consulting with the supervisor and colleagues experienced in qualitative methodology (Padgett, 2008). The researcher discussed all the research decisions and procedures made with peers and the supervisor and received valuable feedback that enhanced the quality of this study (Shenton, 2004). This technique also promoted reflexivity, which was a constant feature for the whole study. In the process, new ideas were generated and potential pitfalls linked with the methodology of this study were identified and corrected. I used an audit trail in order to provide readers with evidence that would enable them to trace decisions made during the study and procedures I adopted (Shenton, 2004). Negative case analysis was analysed in order to find out contradicting evidence during data analysis (Lietz & Zayas, 2010). This technique helped me to achieve a complete or an exhaustive exploration of the teachers' perspectives of history subject panels as vehicles for professional development in the Masvingo district.

3.9 ETHICAL ISSUES

Ethical issues are a critical component in any research study and I ensured good conduct and respect for participants throughout the whole research process. Ethics are beliefs of what is considered morally right or wrong. They deal with what people consider morally proper or improper when undertaking a research study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). I tried to do what is right and to avoid harm to research participants while conducting this study on history subject panels as an innovation for professional development (Cohen *et al.*, 2011; Orb, Eiesenhauer & Wynaden, 2001).

Sampling for this study was an ethical issue as I tried as much as possible to come up with participants who are not only information rich but also representative of the diverse schools and teachers in Masvingo district. Ritchie and Lewis (2013:83) argue that one of the requirements of a qualitative sample "[...] is to ensure that the sample is as diverse as possible within the boundaries of the defined population". Purposive sampling of the research sites and participants ensured diversity of views from multiple data sources. This was critical as it enabled me not to group together participants in a general category. The sample for this study comprised eight

participants from eight high schools in the Masvingo district. The schools included one boarding and day, two urban, one growth point, one mission, church-run day and three rural day schools. These high schools represented the diverse school types in the Masvingo district, which was the setting for this study.

There is need for researchers to protect the dignity of participants involved in a research study, hence I ensured that ethical guidelines where put in place from the beginning to the end of this study. I applied for permission from the University of the Free State Ethics Committee to conduct this study. In the ethical clearance application, I made an undertaking that I was going to respect and protect the rights of all participants. Principles outlined in the ethical clearance application document guided the administration of this study. I took time to inform participants of their rights before participating in discussions about history subject panels as an innovation for professional development. The participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without giving any explanation. This was intended to respect the autonomy of research participants (Berg, 2001; Flick, 2013; Ritchie & Lewis, 2013). I respected participants' freedom of choice referred to by Cohen *et al.* (2011:776) as the right to "self-determination". The consent forms I used for this study contained my supervisor's details such as e-mail address, full name and telephone numbers. The participants were informed to contact my supervisor in case they needed more information and possibly inform the supervisor of any malpractices. The consent form also contained my phone numbers, e-mail and physical address in case the participants needed clarification on any issues or in case they needed to find me.

The participants agreed to participate in this study without being coerced. Closely linked to the principle of autonomy is the issue of 'informed consent'. I provided participants with relevant research information such as the purpose of the study, how data will be collected and used and what was required of them (Ritchie & Lewis, 2013). This was intended to provide a basis on which participants could make informed decisions about their choice to take part or not to participate in the study. Cohen *et al.* (2011:777) assert that, "Consent thus protects and respects the right of self-determination and places some of the responsibility on the participants should anything go wrong in the research".

The concept of informed consent has four critical elements to be addressed in any research study when dealing with the issue of ethical considerations, i.e. competence, voluntarism, full information and comprehension (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). In order to address the principle of competence, I ensured that participants selected for this study were adults. The research participants for this study were 'A' level history teachers in Masvingo district high schools and were all above the country's legal majority age of eighteen years. Competence also suggests 'capacity', that is, the ability of the participants to acquire, retain and evaluate information received from the researcher and the ability to make a choice to participate (or not). As stated above, the teachers who participated in this study were deemed competent. In addition, none were cognitively or emotionally challenged at the time data collection was being undertaken. The second element of informed consent, voluntarism, was addressed through participants retaining the power of choice. They voluntarily decided to participate in this study without any form of coercion. This principle of volunteering was maintained throughout the research process (Cohen *et al.*, 2011; Creswell & Miller, 2000) as there was room for participants to withdraw at any time.

Comprehension entails that participants fully understood the nature of the study and its procedures (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). In order to ensure that participants had adequate clarity about the purpose of the study and its intended procedures, I allowed them to ask questions and in the process, their concerns were addressed. Participants for this study had a minimum of a first university degree and clearly understood what it meant to be involved in a research study since they had also conducted research studies before. After willingly accepting to participate in this study, each of them signed a consent form.

In most studies, confidentiality and anonymity are often used interchangeably. Berg (2001) defines confidentiality as an attempt to remove from research records any elements that might indicate subjects' identities. In this study, I avoided any attribution of comments to any particular participant. I ensured that all audiotapes and transcripts were only accessible to the researcher and all information and/or identifying labels were removed. Ritchie and Lewis (2013) refer to anonymity as concealing the identities of research participants and making them unknown to outsiders. Throughout the study, I used pseudonyms instead of participants' real names, and the same applies to institutions where the participants worked. The

information collected for this study was not exposed to other people who did not participate in this study (Nieuwenhuis, 2012). Instead of their real names, I used pseudonyms and case numbers in reporting data for this study.

Obtaining permission from the relevant authorities is a key ethical consideration to be addressed by any researcher. Cohen *et al.* (2011) advise that for easy access into the field, researchers need to obtain permission from the authorities starting from the top officers. After being granted permission to conduct this study by the University of the Free State's Faculty of Education Ethics Board on 30 June 2015 (UFS-HS2015/0291, I proceeded to apply for permission from the Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in Zimbabwe on 3 July 2015 and this was granted on the same day. I also sought and was granted permission to conduct this study by the Masvingo Provincial Education Director (PED) on 3 July 2015. The District Education Officer (DEO) granted me permission to carry out this study in the Masvingo district on the same day. The DEO simply stamped the letter from the PED, signed it and wrote 'Approved' (see Appendix J). This was the letter I carried to the identified schools and to teachers who participated in this study.

My entry into the schools for purposes of data collection was not difficult. I carried the letter from the PED, which was stamped and signed by the DEO to the principals of the participating schools. They were cooperative because I had a letter of authorisation to conduct this study from the PED that was also endorsed by the DEO. Visiting the principals' offices as the first port of call during data collection was intended to fulfil the undertaking I made in my ethical clearance application about respect for authority. All the heads were very cooperative and as a formality, they only asked for the letter of authorisation from the PED and DEO. The heads facilitated my easy access to relevant teachers and they provided me with quiet and separate offices for interviews with teachers. All the teachers were cooperative, as I faced no challenges in obtaining their consent to participate in this study. I first gave each of the teachers I visited the invitation letter to take part in the study (see Appendix 4). I also explained the purpose of the study, potential benefits and risks for participation and assured all teachers of confidentiality and anonymity. All teachers who took part in this study voluntarily consented to be interviewed and audio taped. Each of the participants then signed a consent form before being

interviewed (see Appendix 5). I verbally requested each of the heads of participating schools for permission to hold a focus group discussion on Saturday 11 July 2015. This was granted, as this was not going to disrupt teaching and learning time for the teachers and students. The focus group discussion was conducted at one of the schools in Masvingo town. This was convenient because all the teachers, including those from rural schools, go to Masvingo town for the weekend. Eight of the expected ten teachers turned up for the focus group discussions. I thanked participants after each interview and the focus group discussion. I also requested their permission to conduct follow-ups by phoning them or visiting them again for clarification and/or asking them further questions.

3.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter 3 has presented the research methodology utilised in this qualitative case study. The study used multiple sources of data that included interviews, focus group discussions, observation and document analysis. This was intended to gain fuller insights into teachers' experiences of history subject panels as an innovation for professional development. The chapter specifically focused on the research approach, design, sampling, data generation and analysis, trustworthiness and ethical considerations. The next chapter presents the data from the various data sources used in this study such as interviews, focus group discussion, document analysis and observation.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents findings on teachers' perspectives of the history subject panels as an innovation for professional development. The study used a qualitative research approach and specifically a case study research design. The instruments used to generate qualitative data to answer the key research questions for the study included document analysis, interviews, focus group discussions and observations of the activities of history subject panels (Yin, 2011). The rationale for the use of these instruments in qualitative research has been provided in the methodology chapter (chapter 3). Data presentation, analysis and discussion of findings are organised and presented as an integrated whole, drawing on all the data types at the same time to present findings on each key research question. More specifically, data are organised and presented thematically, guided by the study's research objectives and emerging themes. This was critical as it facilitated easy management of the large volumes of data generated for the study.

The objectives of this study were to:

- Examine how teachers understand history subject panels and their role as an innovation for professional development.
- Assess the effectiveness of history subject panels' activities for teacher professional development.
- Assess the viability of history subject panels as an innovation for professional development.
- Suggest how the structure and function of history subject panels can be improved to make them serve well as a vehicle for teacher professional development in Zimbabwe.

4.2 DATA PRESENTATION

Eight ‘A’ level history teachers from eight high schools participated in this study. Five of the eight teachers participated in interviews, and focus group discussions (see chapter 3) and all eight teachers were involved in one focus group discussion. Three interviewees who took part in the focus group discussion were later interviewed as part of the follow up on issues not fully clarified (Cohen *et al.,* 2011). The inclusion (in a focus group discussion) of participants who were interviewed earlier was intended to have their views presented and interrogated by their peers and thereby increase the credibility of the findings. The other three participants who were not interviewed but included in focus group discussions were identified as ‘information rich’ participants (Ritchie & Lewis, 2013).

For ethical reasons, pseudonyms are used to identify all the research participants and their institutions (Creswell, 2014). All the schools in which the participants worked are given numbers from one to eight according to the order in which I visited them. This was critical as it provided an easy way for following them up. Each participant was given a pseudonym that is difficult for anyone to trace or identify (Flick, 2014). This had a dual purpose of making it easier for me to track the data and further ensure their security and anonymity (*ibid*.

The table below shows the codes assigned to the schools, in terms of whether they were day or boarding high schools and the accompanying participants’ pseudonyms.

Table 5: Profile of participating schools and participants

School codes	Participants' pseudonyms	Day/Location & Status
1	Mberi	Day and Boarding: Urban
2	Mapakise	Day: Urban
3	Chingeve	Day: Urban
4	Chambara	Day: Growth point
5	Zhou	Day: Mission Church-run
6	Nyota	Day: Rural
7	Zvaita	Day: Rural
8	Nyati	Day: Rural

The eight schools selected for this study represented the various school types actively involved in the activities of history subject panels. Ritchie and Lewis (2013:83) argue that a qualitative sample should be as "diverse as possible within the boundaries of the defined population", support the manner in which the sample was selected. Church-run mission boarding schools were excluded from the sample because they do not actively participate in the history subject panel activities.

The participants used their school numbers during the focus group discussion and pseudonyms were attached to each by the researcher to further protect their identities, even from the participants themselves. In addition, this facilitated easy management of the large volumes of data generated for this study.

4.3 PARTICIPANTS' DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

The table below shows the participants' demographic data relating to their experience in teaching 'A' level history in particular, qualifications, participation in the activities of the history subject panels and their role/position in the history subject panels. The information below also provides details about the characteristics of the participants from whom data was generated.

Table 6: Participants' details

Pseudonym	**Teaching experience in years**	**'A' level history teaching experience**	**Qualifications**	**Participation in history subject panels in years**	**Position held in history subject panels**
Mberi	14	11	Med history	10	Teacher leader, Facilitator, & Examiner
Mapakise	11	10	BA Honours History & GradCE	11	Participant
Chingeve	28	16	BA General History & Divinity	15	Participant
Chambara	15	7	BSc Education, History & Geography	15	Participant
Zhou	22	6	B.Ed. History	6	Participant
Nyota	15	12	MEd History	11	Facilitator & Examiner
Zvaita	13	10	M.Ed. History	11	Facilitator & Examiner
Nyati	15	15	M.Ed. History	12	Facilitator &Examiner

Key: BA: Bachelor of Arts; B.Ed.: Bachelor of Education; BSc: Bachelor of Science; BA Gen: Bachelor of Arts General; GradCE:Graduate Certificate in Education; M.Ed.: Master of Education

The above table shows that the participants had teaching experience ranging from six to 28 years. Their ‘A’ level history teaching experience ranged from six to 15 years and each had a minimum qualification of a first degree. All participants had sufficient ‘A’ level history teaching experience required for this study. Their involvement with the history subject panel activities ranged from six to 15 years, which suggests that some had become involved in history subject panel activities before 2010, during the time of the BSPZ. Four were teacher leaders, facilitators and ‘A’ level history examiners. All facilitators selected for this study had Master's degrees, which suggest that teachers who were highly qualified led the history subject panel activities. This is in accordance with the views of Patton *et al.* (2015) who argue that professional development activities should be led by highly qualified facilitators. In order to have a balanced sample, four of the selected informants were teachers who attended the history subject panel activities as participants only.

4.4 OVERVIEW OF THE EMERGING THEMES

The table below presents a summary of the themes, sub-themes and categories that emerged from the analysis of data generated for the study. This layout was critical as it guides the presentation of data and discussion of findings.

Table 7: Emerging themes, sub-themes and categories

Themes	Sub-themes	Categories
1.Teachers' understanding of history subject panels and their role in professional development	1.1 Teachers' understanding of history subject panels	1.1 Teachers' understanding 1.2 Differences with other forms of professional development
	1.2 Role of the history panels in professional development	1.1 Role of history subject panels
2. Effectiveness of history subject panels	1.1 Type of activities teachers engaged in during history subject panel meetings	1.1 Type of activities teachers engaged in. 1.2 Selection of facilitators 1.3 Agenda setting
	1.2 Assessment of activities teachers engage in	1.1 Important activities 1.2 Less important activities 1.3 Overall assessment of the activities
3. Effectiveness of the history subject panels in professional development.	1.1 Effectiveness of the history subject panels	1.1 Evidence of effectiveness 1.2 Evidence of ineffectiveness
	1.2 Nature of history subject panels' professional development programmes	1.1 Structure of CPD -workshops -seminars Teacher collaboration
4. Challenges in using history subject panels for professional development and suggestions for improvement	1.1 Structure of the history subject panels	1.1 Organisation -advantages/disadvantages
	1.2 Challenges teachers face	1.1Challenges encountered 1.2Suggestions for improvement

4.5 THEME 1: TEACHERS' CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF HISTORY SUBJECT PANELS AND THEIR ROLE IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The use of subject panels is a recent phenomenon in teacher professional development in Southern Africa. Furthermore, little is known about how they are conceptualised, especially by the teachers who are the direct beneficiaries (Jita & Mokhele, 2014) and their role in professional development. In light of this, I felt it imperative to solicit participants' views through interviews and one focus group discussion about their understanding of the history subject panels, their role in professional development and if they perceived any differences between professional development initiatives offered through the history subject panels and other teacher professional development approaches.

4.5.1 Teachers' understanding of history subject panels

In this study, subject panels and teacher professional development clusters are viewed as referring to the same thing. Teacher clusters seem to be understood differently in the literature, for example to Atkinson *et al.* (2007), they are referred to as a form of inter-school collaboration. To Giordano (2008) and Dittmar *et al.* (2002), they refer to a group of schools brought together to improve sharing of resources and as tools to facilitate easy administration of schools and to Jita and Mokhele (2012; 2014; Jita and Ndlalane, 2009), clusters represent a recent manifestation of collaborative forms of teacher learning. This seemingly different understanding of clusters found in the literature suggests that when discussing clusters/subject panels, the issue of context needs to be taken into consideration. Against this backdrop, I found it imperative to find out from the participants what the history subject panels meant to them.

4.5.1.1 Sub-theme 1: Teachers' understanding of the history subject panels

I began my conversations with Mberi, a teacher leader and one of the regular facilitators at history subject panel sessions from school 1. When asked about what the history subject panels meant to him, he had this to say,

> Right, it means coming together of teachers and students within the district right, when teachers come together they present the questions that they have and in fact they have presenters right, the markers present on the most important

> aspect that has to be considered when writing essays because we find problems when writing ‘A’ level essays. They are demanding so those people with the knowledge will assist teachers and students on how they can improve pass rate.

The above quote seems to suggest that Mberi understood history subject panels in terms of the activities teachers engage in during their meetings. It appears that Mberi understood history subject panels as a platform for teachers to come together and learn from each other how to write good ‘A’ level history essays. Probed further about the involvement of students in programmes intended for teachers, he had this to say,

> In fact they are very, very important to both teachers and pupils. At times teachers fail to interpret the questions right, but when you are discussing with others you come to understand the challenges you are facing. And in addition to that, you become very friendly to colleagues who you can ask after or if you face some problems you tend to have friends in these subject panels.

The above quote seems to suggest that Mberi also understood the history subject panels as a platform for teachers and students to learn from each other in a more relaxed atmosphere. The involvement of students in the activities of the history subject panels is not documented anywhere in the literature reviewed for this study. Equally important seems to be the fact that Mberi also conceptualises the history subject panels in terms of professional relationships that teachers establish during their interactions at professional development meetings.

Responding to the same issue Mapakise, a participant from school 2, seems to understand the history subject panels in terms of what he expects to get from participating,

> Yaaah, it means a lot...to me it would create a lot of anxiety and zeal and passion to benefit from that panel...but you would find that those hopes and anticipation would end up not getting that kind of knowledge aaaah or the imparting of those aspects we say are crucial and at the end you find that those panels aaah become just to rubber stamp the whole thing.

It seems to Mapakise the history subject panels are supposed to be a source of important information for teachers about the teaching and learning of ‘A’ level history. However, he could not hide his disappointment at their failure to satisfy his

expectations. While the history subject panels hold a lot of promise on supporting teachers and generating passion about the subject, it seems they do not always deliver.

Chingeve, from school 3, attends the history subject panels as a participant and seems to view them in terms of how they affected him, “It inspires me to let my students be exposed that they have confidence in me and also that they have confidence in themselves”. Asked to explain further, he laughed a little and said, “To actually prepare the student for the examination as well as to equip the teacher with the latest findings, be it religious or historical”. Chingeve seems to understand the history subject panels in terms of their capacity to provide a space to prepare students for examinations and teachers to receive the latest information about the teaching and learning of ‘A’ level history. The researcher observed that on 26 September 2015, 226 students from different schools in Masvingo district attended a seminar whose main agenda was to prepare them for their final examination. It was also observed that students were taught by an external expert on how to manage time and interpret and answer questions during examinations.

Answering a similar question, Chambara from school 4, understands the Masvingo district history subject panel as, “The coming together of teachers to improve their teaching”. Asked about its purpose he pointed out that, “Yaaah the purpose is actually to discuss issues pertaining to the teaching and learning of history as a subject in schools”. This response seems to concur with other interviewees that the history subject panel was a forum for teachers to learn from each other about the teaching and learning of ‘A’ level history in schools.

Zhou from school 5, a former primary school teacher and regular participant at history subject panel meetings, seems to understand the history subject panels in terms of how they transformed him from being a primary school teacher into an effective ‘A’ level history teacher. He pointed out that, “just that word Masvingo district history subject panel, even if I heard that name I just wake up because I know that’s the panel which actually shaped me to become what I am today”.Asked to explain further he added that, “...they helped me because when I started teaching ‘A’ level I didn’t know how to actually tell pupils, how the content itself, to interpret that content, to interpret the syllabus, all I got that information from those panels”. With a

smile on his face, he went further to say, “These have actually equipped me to be what I am today, a very effective teacher, and a teacher who always produces good results”. This response seems to suggest that Zhou understood the history subject panels in terms of their impact on him.

Nyota, a facilitator and examiner from school 6, seems to understand the history subject panels as “A structure meant to improve the teaching of ‘A’ level history and pass rates”. The excerpt seems to suggest that Nyota understands the history subject panels in terms of their purpose.

Nyati, from school 8, understands the history subject panels as a platform for teachers to learn from each other about challenges they encounter in the teaching and learning of ‘A’ level history. This is evidenced by his response when he wrote that, “It refers to the bringing together of teachers to discuss problems they encounter in teaching ‘A’ level history”.

In their collective group response during focus group discussions, the participants wrote the following,

> The history subject panels are a means/way where teachers come together and share their experiences through assisting each other on question answering and interpretation. Syllabus interpretation is also carried out.

The above quote suggests that the participants understood the history subject panels as an initiative intended to bring teachers together for the purposes of learning from each other about issues affecting them in their teaching.

What seems to emerge from the above excerpts is that participants understood the history subject panels in three main ways. They seem to understand them in terms of the activities they engaged in during their meetings, what they invoked in them and as a forum for improving their instructional practices and student achievement. Their responses seem to suggest that they do not understand them as non-traditional professional development initiatives intended to improve their instructional practices and student achievement as perceived by Jita and Ndlalane (2009). They seem to understand the history subject panels more as a forum for building teachers’ capacity to implement the ‘A’ level history curriculum and a platform for constructing students’

confidence in their learning and preparing them for examinations. I will return to this discussion in chapter 5.

4.5.1.2 Differences between history subject panels and other approaches to professional development

As subject panels are a relatively new platform for teacher professional development characterised by collaboration and teacher autonomy (Shah, 2012), it was necessary to find out from participants whether they see any differences between subject panels and the more traditional forms of teacher professional development, such as professional development offered by outside experts through workshops and/or conferences.

Mberi and Chambara viewed the differences between professional development offered through the history subject panels and that offered through other approaches in terms of the role assigned to teachers during their meetings. Their responses suggest that the history subject panels allowed teachers to be actively involved in their learning whereas, in other forms of teacher professional development they are assigned the role of spectators. Mberi pointed out the following,

> Yes, I attended one. On the issue of subject panels there is cooperativeness. There is no one who is very, very dominant. There is cooperation unlike in the other sectors they will be telling us what to do and on the subject panels we are encouraged to ask questions, we are encouraged to interpret the questions as you feel like unlike in other areas where you are told what to do. So it's very, very important.

For Mberi, the issue of "power" is clearly important. In subject panels, teachers are not "told" but they cooperate in developing the content of their professional development. To Chambara, "... the difference is that at subject panel meetings we have the chance to ask questions even in Shona whereas at these other meetings with outsiders we will be listening only". For Chambara, history subject panels seem to offer a much more relaxed environment for learning where they are even free to engage in their mother tongue. The responses by Mberi and Chambara seem to be in accordance with the views held by Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (2011) and Tours (2016) who strongly argue that teachers need to be actively involved in their learning.

However, Mapakise, Chingeve, Zhou and Nyati saw no difference in the two approaches to teachers' professional development. Mapakise pointed out that,

> There would not be much difference, but I think something organised by outsiders ... what it would only have, it would create that element of curiosity and probably an outsider can be listened to better and people might have confidence in the one who would be organising from outside...

Responding to the same question during the focus group discussion, Nyati simply wrote, "No difference". It seems these three participants do not notice the paradigm shift in teacher professional development offered by subject panels as noted by Villegas-Reimers (2003).

Nyota and Zvaita seem to understand the differences between the two approaches in teachers' professional development in terms of what they focus on. "History panels are focused on historical data interpretation and analysis, whereas other forms of professional development target varied forms of knowledge in different subject areas". To Zvaita, "History subject panels cater for the specific needs, hopes and aspirations of the student and history teachers, whereas other forms of professional development may be irrelevant to teachers and students' needs".

Responding to the same question about the differences in the two approaches, the participants' collective group response was,

> The major difference is that in history subject panels we meet as history teachers and understanding on the subject matter as the teachers are well versed with historical issues, whereas workshops conducted by outside experts there is lack of in-depth of subject matter.

The participants' collective group response seems to suggest that the differences between the two forms of teachers' professional development lies in the composition of participants as well as the focus and depth of what is discussed. This seems to sharply contrast with what emerged from the literature where there seems to be consensus that the new approaches are characterised by teachers having more say in what they wish to learn and that collaboration and co-construction of knowledge are key features (Marcus & Levine, 2010; Villegas-Reimers, 2003)

4.5.2 Role of history subject panels in professional development

The second sub-theme focused on what participants perceived as the role of the history subject panels in professional development. I started my conversations by asking Mberi about the role of history subject panels in professional development and he had the following to say,

> In fact the panel play a significant role since we started it. Eeeh many, many teachers benefitted from these panels, especially the junior teachers, those from universities. Some of them they did not do the topics we are teaching so we need to talk to them... we need to teach those new teachers... those who have just joined the service on how to interpret the syllabus and how to answer some of the questions because some of the questions are very tricky, there are new terms that are cropping up which they cannot attend to so easily.

According to Mberi, the role of history subject panels seems to be the induction of new teachers into the profession. This involved discussing and engaging with the actual content of the subject, almost like learning anew. It is also about interpretation of the content for teaching, more like what Shulman (1986) would call pedagogical content knowledge (PCK). Therefore, in addition to induction, subject panels become a classroom for teacher learning about content knowledge (CK) and PCK especially. This view of subject panels and teacher learning is also confirmed by Mapakise who describes the role of the history subject panels in terms of their purpose in CPD:

> The purpose is to refine teachers, right, and also to furnish themselves with relevant information and better teaching methods in a bid to improve pass rate and also those panels I think need to also be panels for students also, being also taught particular topics by different people. I think from there they become even more meaningful than what they are right now.

The response by Mapakise suggests that the role of history subject panels in professional development is to improve teachers' CK and PCK. Clearly, Mapakise brings another dimension of student learning to the fore, which is important for shaping the role of history subject panels as platforms for teacher learning about how to improve classroom practice.

Chingeve on the other hand, perceives the role of history subject panels in terms of providing space for teachers to share teaching and learning resources, **"**You find out

that the literature is always available be it on the Internet or latest publications". Asked to elaborate on this point, he explained as follows, "Of which some of the institutions will not have been exposed to that literature. So as a result of these panels the teacher and the students get exposed to that literature".

In the same vein, Chambara, with a smile on his face, pointed out that, "Aaaah, its role, mainly the role is to actually try to discuss issues with history teachers pertaining to the teaching of history as a subject..." This quote seems to suggest that history subject panels provide spaces for teachers to learn from each other about the teaching and learning of 'A' level history in schools.

Zhou also confirmed the role of the history subject panels in terms of their purpose: "Its purpose is to tell us history teachers about how to teach, how to perfect our pupils such that they come up with very good essays". Clearly, for Zhou the subject panel is more authoritative than just an advisory platform. It provides guidance that is more direct to teachers on 'how to teach'.

Emerging from the above responses is the fact that the participants had varied perceptions of history subject panels in terms of professional development. This resonates with the lack of consensus in the literature about the role of subject panels in professional development (see chapter 2).

Nyota and Nyati seem to perceive history subject panels as having a dual role namely that of improving teachers' instructional practices and student achievement in public examinations. This is evidenced by their written responses during the focus group discussion: "Improving teaching of history and preparing students for examinations" and "preparing pupils to write good essays in examinations".

Answering the same question about the role of history subject panels in professional development, Zvaita wrote, "Further training of teachers in history teaching and improving pass rates in schools". This quote equates the role of subject panels to that of teacher training institutions, which provide further education to the in-service teachers.

The teachers' collective group response was, "Syllabus interpretation, teaching methodology sharing, and assisting each other on how to answer questions". This suggests that the participants perceive the role of history subject panels in terms of

activities related to the improvement of CK, PCK and student achievement. It would be interesting to explore the sources of authority further on these aspects of professional development and the manner in which history subject panels actually deliver on these expectations in terms of content of CPD for the teachers.

4.5.3 Theme 1: Discussion of the findings

The findings revealed that participants understood history subject panels more in terms of their function and efficacy for teachers. Their understanding revolved around the activities they engaged in during their meetings, such as setting questions for mid-year examinations and presentations at seminars, development of essay writing skills and learning how to teach 'A' level history. The responses begin to provide some evidence that history subject panels were clearly a vehicle for improving instructional practices and raising student achievement. This echoes the conclusion by De Clercq and Phiri (2013) and Jita and Ndlalane (2009) who found teacher clusters to be sites for collaborative teacher learning. To Atkinson *et al.* (2007) clusters are a form of inter-school collaboration in which teachers come together to share issues pertaining to their craft. In the same vein, Gathara (2010) described clusters as representing a move away from the traditional approaches to more collaborative forms of teacher professional development.

The participants assigned various roles to history subject panels in CPD. The findings seem to suggest that one of the roles is the induction of new teachers into the profession, supporting the finding by Jita and Mokhele (2014) on Mpumalanga teacher clusters in South Africa and Nwagbara, (2014) on teacher clusters in Nigeria.

Alhough the participants seemed to agree about teacher induction as a key role they assigned to history subject panels, the content of the induction and the approach is different from common approaches to teacher induction. In the apprenticeship model (Day, 1999; Kennedy, 2014; Villegas-Reimers, 2003) of teacher induction, the mentor is the master teacher that must be emulated. The evidence from this study seems to suggest that new teachers were being initiated into the status quo, as noted by Mberi, "We need to discuss thoroughly with them [new teachers] on how to approach these topics..." Unlike in the master-novice approaches to induction or the apprenticeship model, induction through subject panels seem to take a different route where collegiality and co-construction of knowledge is emphasised as

highlighted by the words “we need to discuss...with them...” The novice teachers are not perceived as empty with no contribution to make. However, the findings also suggest that the history subject panels had another key role, that of developing teacher leadership and providing instructional guidance to the novice and experienced teachers. Although the study by Jita and Mokhele (2014) established a similar role for the Mpumalanga clusters in South Africa, there does not seem to be much research on the instructional leadership role of teacher subject groups such as the history subject panels or clusters.

Another finding suggests that history subject panels provide a space for teachers to collaborate and learn from each other, sharing experiences and resources. This supports the finding by Delport and Makaye (2009) and Maphosa *et al.* (2013) that during cluster meetings teachers shared CK and PCK. Similarly, Dittmar *et al.* (2002) found that in Namibia, teachers shared resources through participation in cluster activities. The evidence in this study suggests that history subject panels provide a platform for teachers to solicit and receive assistance in the implementation of the new history curriculum of Zimbabwe. The researcher claims that such a role is critical, especially in Zimbabwe, where the curriculum is centrally designed with teachers not receiving adequate instructional guidance from educational authorities (Gatawa, 1989; Zvobgo, 1998). This challenges the thinking that once a new syllabus is developed and sent to schools, teachers can implement it with ease. Focus group discussion and document analysis draw attention to the fact that syllabus interpretation, especially of the new ‘A’ level history of Zimbabwe syllabus, is a key and recurring activity at history subject panel meetings. The researcher also observed that interpretation of the history of Zimbabwe syllabus took almost half of the time of the history subject panel meeting held on 8 March 2016. This further suggests that history subject panels play a critical role in providing teachers with opportunities to receive and provide support for their colleagues in the implementation of the ‘A’ level history curriculum in the Masvingo district.

A unique role assigned to history subject panels seems to be the provision of space for the development of communities of learning for students. Evidence from interviews and focus group discussion shows that students actively participate in the activities of history subject panels. In one history subject panel meeting held at a teachers’ college in Masvingo town on 26 September 2015, 226 students from

different schools in the Masvingo district were involved in a seminar whose primary agenda was aimed at preparing them for their final examination in history. Student involvement in CPD programmes intended for teachers seems to be something unique in this case and has not been discussed in the literature reviewed on CPD in general. More research needs to be done to document examples on how subject panels create these communities of learning for students.

Evidence in this study is also in accordance with the history subject panels' role of providing teachers with opportunities to establish lasting professional relationships as evidenced by Mberi's response when he said, "...you become friendly to colleagues who you can ask after or if you face some problems you tend to have friends in these subject panels". This supports the finding by Lieberman (2000), Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) and Ngcoza and Southwood, (2015) who all state that teachers construct lasting professional relationships when sharing professional capital.

Participants in the study had mixed views on the differences between CPD programmes offered through history subject panels and those organised and offered through other approaches. Some participants noticed a sharp difference between the two forms of teacher professional development, which represents an important paradigm shift in teacher professional development (Villegas-Reimers, 2003). The major difference they noted was that in subject panels there was active participation by the teachers in setting the agenda and co-construction of knowledge, whereas in other forms the teachers were accorded a passive role (Marcus & Levine, 2010). Interestingly some of the participants failed to notice this paradigm shift and just saw value in all forms of CPD. What is therefore a significant shift for some teachers may not matter much to others. Issues of power and professionalism thus mean different things to different teachers. Some may just be preoccupied with the day-to-day challenges of what to teach and how and did not seem to mind where the instructional leadership support comes from and in what form. As long as it is provided, that is all that matters for them.

4.6 THEME 2: EFFECTIVENESS OF HISTORY SUBJECT PANEL ACTIVITIES IN CPD

There seems to be consensus in the literature that teachers engage in a variety of activities mostly aimed at improving their CK and PCK during their professional development sessions (Campbell *et al.,* 2016; Dittmar *et al.*, 2002; Gwekwerere *et al.,* 2013; Maphosa *et al*., 2013; Tours, 2016). In part, this study aimed at finding out activities teachers engaged in during their history subject panel meetings and if teachers regard them as effective in improving their instructional practices and student achievement. Two sub-themes emerged from the analysis of the data on this theme: type of activities teachers engaged in during history subject panel meetings and teachers' assessment of the effectiveness of the history subject panel activities. Evidence from this theme seems to suggest that the history subject panel activities are effective in improving teachers' instructional practices and student achievement.

4.6.1 Type of activities teachers engaged in during history subject panel meetings

I began my conversations by asking Mberi about the types of activities teachers engaged in during their history subject panel sessions. He pointed out that, "... some teachers will be making sure that pupils are listening and others will be busy marking essays..."Asked to explain further he said,

> Teachers, some of them will be marking the tasks given to students first [students' seminar presentation papers] right and some will be trying to interpret those, some of the questions to other teachers so that there will be no confusion in front of the students.

He was also quick to add that, "we will be teaching each other how to mark those essays and making some additions". The above excerpts suggests that history teachers engaged in seminars with their students where they focused on students' seminar papers and learned from each other how to assess students' work.

Document analysis of the history subject panel minutes revealed that teachers engage in activities such as syllabus interpretation, essay writing and how to assess students' work. Similarly, I observed that in three out of four history subject panel meetings teachers helped each other in interpreting and answering 'A' level history

questions. ZIMSEC examiners led the discussions whilst the rest of the participants paid attention, taking down notes or issues that needed further clarification.

In response to the question about activities teachers engaged in during their history subject panel activities, Mapakise had this to say,

> We will be mainly focusing on the best ways that can be adopted to teach the history subject... So, we will rather be exchanging notes on how best also students can be taught to present themselves well mainly, the main target would be the aspect of improving pass rate.

It appears that the response by Mapakise suggests that teachers learn from each other about issues based on improving their PCK. Asked to say more on the same issue, he pointed out that,

> Right, we mainly focus on technicalities to answer questions, the learning part of the questions. I think this is the main aspect, the technicalities. The content part of it, they have a general assumption that every practising teacher of course might have content here and there pertaining to the subject so the issue of content is given very little attention.

Mapakise's response indicates that teachers largely focus on the technical aspects of teaching rather than CK per se. Literature reviewed for this study shows that effective professional development prioritises the learning of CK and PCK (Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Owens *et al*., 2016; Stoll *et al.*, 2015). In this context, it was necessary to find out more about what Mapakise meant by "technicalities". His explanation was,

> Yaaah, essay writing and general marking... what do you expect on the body, what do you expect on the conclusion, an assignment is continuous, it should have got an introduction, it should have got a topic sentence supported by relevant evidence.

According to Mapakise, teachers helped each other more on issues of pedagogy and ways of marking 'A' level history essays during their history subject panel meetings. The interview data was supported by observations I made of a history subject panel meeting held on 8 March 2016. During the meeting, history content was not given a high priority. The participants mainly asked questions that called for explanations. For example, the participants asked questions on the differences between major and

minor sources of history on Section A of the history of Zimbabwe syllabus. The facilitators simply responded by providing distinctions between the two types of sources and then quickly moved on to other issues. What seemed to be the main areas of focus at this meeting were issues revolving around the interpretation of task words in an essay such as "*To what extent", "How far", "Evaluate"*, and *"Discuss*". It was observed that content was only referred to for the purposes of illustrating what the task words meant. A possible reason for not focusing on content in-depth could be that all 'A' level teachers have a minimum qualification of a first degree, hence the belief that they are adequately competent in content. The other key component that was emphasised at history subject panel meetings that I observed was a focus on the major components and structure of a good essay. I was concerned to notice that the teachers did not use students' work in their discussions on how to assess students' essays. This seems to deprive the teachers of what Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009:490) describe as "opportunities to develop a common understanding of what good work is, what common misconceptions students have..."

Responding to the same issue about activities teachers engaged in during their subject panel sessions, Chingeve had this to say,

> When they are alone they [teachers] actually look at the complex topics they find difficult to deliver in their respective schools and they find people [teachers] who are experts in those areas, who are there to enlighten them on that.

Chingeve's response suggests that teachers identified history topics they find challenging to teach and assist each other on how best they could be taught to students. The focus on PCK appears to be a recurring theme throughout the discussions with the participants. At a history subject panel meeting held on 8 March 2016, I observed that teachers identified what they considered to be challenging topics and then helped each other to identify the main components teachers should stress during their teaching. For example, the participants had challenges in teaching Section A of the history of Zimbabwe syllabus. This section deals with sources of the history of Zimbabwe (ZIMSEC, 2000). The ZIMSEC examiners led discussions focusing on the identification of key aspects such as distinguishing pre-history from pre-colonial history and major and minor sources of history. The discussions did not

include teaching methods such as group work but seemed to focus on what Mapakise referred to as “technicalities”.

Responding to the same question about the activities teachers engaged in during their history subject panel meetings, Chambara pointed out that,

> ...what happens is that schools are given different questions to present and the presentation should be done by pupils and not teachers. So we will be having teachers at these seminars with students presenting, you are given different topics with different questions... so, me as a teacher I will assign different pupils to research on those questions so that they can present at that seminar.

Chambara’s response seems to confirm what emerged from some of the participants about student involvement in subject panel activities. The issue of student involvement in history subject panel activities is discussed in-depth below.

Similarly, Zhou’s response about activities teachers engaged in during history subject panel meetings seemed to echo what other interviewees said. He expressed his views as follows,

> Ok, when we meet as teachers... the activities which we normally do is just to come up with questions and those examiners will help us where normally pupils fail or where pupils normally score a lot of marks such that when we are teaching we would follow that trend.

The above response confirms that teachers work together in coming up with seminar questions for students to present and the identification of areas where they face challenges or areas they scored higher marks in examinations as the major activities teachers engaged in during their meetings. The use of ZIMSEC examiners to provide instructional guidance to their colleagues seems to be a recurring theme throughout the conversations with the participants.

Tables 8 and 9 below from document analysis and observations summarise activities teachers engaged in during history subject panel meetings. Data from document analysis and observations are presented in tabular form to facilitate comparison of activities teachers are involved in during their history subject panels and to avoid repetition.

Table 8: Document analysis data on activities teachers engaged in during history subject panel meetings

Date	Venue	Activities
18/02/2014	Mucheke High School	-Syllabus interpretation -Selection of examiners to set mid-year examinations
24/09/2014	Victoria High School	-Preparing students for final examinations -Examination tips from examiners
18/02/2015	Mucheke High School	-Syllabus interpretation(Paper 1) -Selection of examiners to set mid-year examinations
04/03/2015	Christian High School	-Syllabus interpretation (Paper 5) -Analysis of district examination results -Selection of item writers

Table 9: Observed activities of history subject panels

Date	Venue	Activities
10/07/2015	Victoria High School	-Drawing of mid-year marking guides
26/07/2015	Christian High School	-How to mark history essays. -Standardisation of 'A' level mid-year marking guides.
26/09/2015	Masvingo Teachers' College	-How to excel in examinations. -How to write good essays. -Question interpretation
08/03/2016	Christian High School	-Question interpretation -Syllabus interpretation

The activities of the history subject panels as revealed by the document analysis and observations are similar to those outlined in the interview data. The above findings support the argument by Smith and Gillespie (2007) that teachers should be engaged in professional development activities that are aligned to their classroom work.

4.6.2 Selection of facilitators for history subject panel meetings

Facilitators play an important role in teacher professional development programmes (Lee, 2011). Patton *et al.* (2015) argue that teachers should be involved in the selection of facilitators for their CPD programmes as it increases their ownership and commitment to practising what they learn in their classrooms. It was against this backdrop that I became interested in finding out from participants how facilitators were selected to lead discussions at history subject panels. On this issue, Mberi commented,

> Usually we select a marker, somebody with marking experience or somebody who has been in the field for some time with knowledge in a particular subject... whether in a particular area, whether Section A, Section B or any section.

Mberi's response suggests that examiners or knowledgeable and experienced teachers facilitate history subject panel activities. Probed further on who selected the facilitators, he argued that, "...if that person is a marker, we know some makers who produce better results in the district we can ask the tricks, the methods which they use". Asked to say more about who selected the facilitators, he pointed out that,

> When we are selecting a marker, then the Committee will select who to call. Right, and at times as I have said we can choose somebody with the knowledge who has been producing better results in the district to assist.

The above quotes point to the fact that the executive committee has the mandate to select facilitators for history subject panel meetings. My observations were that ZIMSEC examiners led three out of four sessions of the history subject panel meetings. This is in accordance with the argument by Stacy (2013:46) that professional development for teachers should utilise local expertise so that teachers can "reclaim their professional autonomy by becoming experts within their schools..."

Further discussions on whether he would also prefer the use of outside experts, Mberi was quick to say, "...external experts were out of touch with what is happening in the classroom". This finding further supports views by Ricon-Gillardo and Fullan (2016) that empowered teachers can help each other to improve their instructional practices and student achievement.

Asked about how facilitators were selected, Mapakise pointed out that, "...people who facilitate, people just sit down and choose a committee of facilitators. Sometimes we have volunteers to facilitate. That's the key point". Mapakise's response suggests that the executive committee selected some of the facilitators while the teachers themselves selected others and others are volunteers. This demonstrates that teacher leadership at history subject panels is distributed as some teachers volunteer to lead discussions.

In response to the same question about how facilitators are selected, Chingeve had this to say, "It's like the teachers are well informed that at Mucheke there is one who is well versed in the subject so that one can as well facilitate the teaching of the subject based on the results themselves. The results can be a reflection of the competence of the teacher". The response by Chingeve points to the importance of the teacher's competence in teaching 'A' level history as an important criterion for selection as a facilitator.

Chambara and Zhou agreed with the view that examiners were often preferred as facilitators. Probed further about whether outside experts are also used as facilitators for history subject panel activities, Zhou pointed out that, "We have never done that because they are expensive". Asked whether he would prefer external experts to facilitate at history subject panel meetings, he jovially responded saying, "Yes it is very good, especially writers. We want them to come up with their views, but normally it is very expensive to invite those people..." What seems to emerge from this conversation is that external experts who are writers are welcomed as facilitators at history subject panel activities. My observation of one history subject panel held on 26 September 2015 supports what Zhou said as an external expert who is an author of several 'A' level history textbooks in schools facilitated this meeting.

All participants agreed that the executive committee, with a few volunteering themselves, select facilitators for history subject panel meetings. Asked whether this

was the best approach, the participants laughed and I got the sense that they disapproved of the method employed to select facilitators. Nyati, as if responding on behalf of the other participants said, “They are the leaders we selected so it is good, though teachers can also have a say in choosing these presenters”. This appeared to be a crafty response that was intended not to disappoint some members of the executive committee that were present, such as Mberi, as other participants suggestively laughed. The participants’ collective group response seemed to confirm that the majority of the teachers had little contribution in the selection of facilitators,

> A committee chosen by the history teachers within the district facilitates at meetings. Usually we look at the member’s knowledge of the subject and also his/her administrative capabilities. His/her contributions to the history subject panel meetings.

The above excerpt suggests that the selection criteria of facilitators by the executive committee were partly based on the teachers’ knowledge, administrative skills and contribution during history subject panel meetings.

An emerging finding is that facilitators for history subject panel meetings are mostly selected by the executive committee and are teachers who are ZIMSEC examiners, with little input from the teachers. This approach contradicts the argument by Eaton and Carbone (2008) that facilitators for teacher professional development sessions should be chosen by the teachers themselves.

4.6.3 Agenda setting for history subject panels

An increasing body of research argues for the need for teachers to be involved in the planning and designing of their professional development activities (Hargreaves *et al.,* 2012; Owens *et al*, 2016; Patton *et al.,* 2015; Stoll *et al,* 2015). Teachers need to feel that they are directing their own learning as this increases ownership and commitment to their activities (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011; Ingvarson, 2014; Picower, 2015). It was against this backdrop that I solicited teachers’ views on how agendas for their history subject panels were constructed.

Responding to the question on how agendas for history subject panel meetings are set, Mberi pointed out that, “The chairman, in fact we prefer the chairman and his committee to do so”. Asked whether teachers were involved, he said, “It’s mostly the

executive committee's duties to set agendas". This response seems to suggest that only the executive committee has the mandate to set agendas for the history subject panel meetings.

Asked about how agendas for the history subject panels were set, Mapakise had this to say, "Aaaah the executive". Asked whether other teachers were involved in the agenda setting process, he quickly pointed out that, "Aaaah they normally do not consult. They just impose". Mapakise's response seems to echo Mberi's words that the executive committee sets the agendas for the history subject panels. This approach stands in sharp contrast to the views by Walter and Briggs, (2012) and Hargreaves *et al.,* (2013) who argue in favour of involving all teachers in the planning and designing of their CPD programmes. These authorities further argue that by involving teachers, it makes CPD programmes more relevant to participants' needs.

In response to the question about how teachers who are not in the executive are involved in the agenda setting process, Nyota and Zhou agreed with Chingeve who pointed out that,

> At the end of it [meeting] there can be a plenary session whereby people are there to brainstorm issues that are there to have proved to be more of a challenge and these are the issues which are tabled now for further future meetings.

Zvaita also expressed his views saying, "Uuuum during meetings teachers may point out areas in need of further discussions. These form part of the agenda for the next meeting". As if in support of his colleagues, Zhou also said: "Yaaah, their input is there during our meetings where we normally tell the executive to come up with questions normally those actually contribute, teachers say out what they expect from those discussions". Asked whether teachers told the executive about issues they wanted included in the agenda, Zhou pointed out that, "Yaaah, they tell them what they want [...] it is the teachers who tell the executive committee what to include in the next meeting". The views of these three participants seem to suggest that teachers not in the executive committee also have a say in the agenda setting process. This seems to concur with the researcher's observation of one meeting held on 8 March 2016.At this meeting, issues such as "sources of history for the Great Zimbabwe State and the role of Revolutionary Governments in France from 1789 to

1799” were not properly understood by teachers and they agreed that these issues should be part of the agenda for their next meeting.

In response to the same question about teacher participation in the setting of agendas for history subject panel meetings, Chambara explained more clearly how the teachers’ input plays out against the wishes of the executive committee. Chambara pointed out that, “Yes the executive, actually they will be saying last time we discussed the syllabus interpretation, so this time we are moving on to looking at examination techniques...” Asked to say more about the agenda setting process, he added that, “It is the executive committee which comprises of teachers, chairman, and secretary and so forth ... that sets the agendas for our meetings". Asked to explain whether teachers are involved in drawing up the agendas for their meetings, he laughed and said, “Those committee and executive members are teachers”**.**

Similarly, the participants’ collective group response on agenda setting was as follows,

> The agenda is set by the chairperson in consultation with the committee members. However the subject panel head may set the agenda in consultation with other heads or the subject inspector. The subject inspector may also come up with the agenda.

The setting of agendas for history subject panels seems to be the responsibility of the executive committee with the teachers, in general playing a minimal role. The advice by Frost (2013), Mansfield *et al.,* (2016) and Stoll *et al.,* (2015), who strongly argue that the involvement of teachers in the planning/designing of agendas for professional development activities increases ownership and commitment to the professional development initiative does not appear to have been heeded in this context.

4.7 TEACHER ASSESSMENT OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF HISTORY SUBJECT PANELS’ ACTIVITIES

The evidence from the data presented above shows that teachers engaged in a variety of job-related activities. However, it was unclear which activities they valued and which ones were perceived to have little value in their professional development. Datnow (2011) argues that professional development activities need to be of value to

the participating teachers. Against this backdrop, it became imperative for me to verify this point with the participants themselves.

4.7.1 History subject panel activities regarded as important by teachers

I asked Mberi about activities of the history subject panels he considered important to him, “Right, listening to the presenter on question interpretation. This is what I enjoy most ...and the arguments that are put forward by different teachers...and making some contributions. Also how essays are marked”. Mberi’s response seems to suggest that he regards listening to presenters on question interpretation, arguments advanced by other participants and contributing as important to him. This response appears to support the view by Garet *et al.* (2001) who strongly argue in favour of active teacher participation during professional development activities.

Responding to the same issue about history subject panel activities that could be regarded as important to him, Mapakise had this to say,

> ...whereby, the facilitators would be giving information about aaaah say some feedback that would have been given by the reports from the examiners. Right, ‘*kuti*’ (that) the year 2014 the percentage rate was probably say 90% history nationwide and the problems which most of the students were experiencing in answering their questions.

The above quote suggests that Mapakise valued feedback from examiners about students’ performance in national examinations and the problems they face in responding to questions. Asked whether the presentations by the examiners would be focusing on a question-by-question analysis, Mapakise, with a smile on his face said, “... it will be just general, not question-by-question, a general thing”. Whilst this seems to be what Mapakise valued about history CPD activities, my feeling from the observations was that the feedback from the examiners’ reports could be more helpful to the teachers if it focused on a question-by-question analysis rather than being generic.

Chivhenge, Chambara and Nyati seem to agree that syllabus interpretation is a critical component for their professional development activities. Chingeve pointed out that, “Syllabus interpretation and then the relevant literature are the most important activities”. Chambara argued that, “Syllabus interpretation and how to mark essays

are important to me". As if in support of his peers, Zvaita also pointed out that, "Essay writing techniques and syllabus interpretation" were critical. The activities valued by the participants are more closely aligned to their work with students in the classroom.

Zhou for example was more specific when he pointed out that, "...actually in my case, I actually admired... how we must teach pupils to analyse facts. That is the most important area". Zhou's response seems to suggest that he valued interactions among teachers focused on improving his PCK. Nyota on the other hand held in high regard the "question answering techniques, seminars with students and essay writing skills". This suggests that Nyota values professional development activities that are skills-based, focused on answering questions and writing quality history essays. He also seems to place a high premium on activities that involve students through seminars. Nyati who supported the latter view on student involvement also wrote, "all activities are helpful to teachers [especially] ... the seminars with students are very important as they learn from different teachers and from their colleagues". The involvement of students in history subject panel activities seems to be a recurring theme.

The participants' collective group response suggests that teachers valued different professional development activities, including:

- Question answering techniques are important for the teacher and students.
- Contemporary issues in the teaching of history are also important as teachers share these ideas.
- Scheming and syllabus interpretation are also important as they guide the teacher on how to deliver his/her lessons.
- Sharing experiences and helping each other to improve results.
- How to mark essays

Most of the activities identified by participants did feature prominently during history subject panel activities as shown in tables 8 and 9 above. This approach supports the finding by Bayar (2014) and Di Paola (2014) that teachers prefer professional development activities that improve their classroom work with learners at their schools.

4.7.2 History subject panel activities regarded as less important by teachers

I was also interested in finding out activities that participants considered of less value to them. This was critical since professional development activities need to focus on activities that are important to teachers (Sachs, 2005). I started my conversations by asking Mberi about professional development activities he considered less important to him.

> In fact we don't have topics that we think are not very important, each school selects the area, so all topics are very, very important. You find out some schools are doing Section A, B, and C while others are doing D, E and the other one. Therefore we need to cover that ground, so all topics are very important to us.

The above excerpt seems to indicate that Mberi, as a teacher leader, regards all professional development activities teachers engaged in during history subject panels as important. Mapakise, Zhou and Nyota, on the other hand, seem to agree that a lack of variety in professional development activities make them less important to them. Mapakise had this to say,

> ... of little value, aaaah probably that element where you would be able to see that there would be, especially in terms of the techniques of essay writing which in most cases doesn't appear to be changing. So the style happens to be the same. The way they would tell you this year they would tell you the same aspect next year. Aaaah and that thing become a bit monotonous.

Similarly, Zhou pointed out that, "Repetition of certain issues or topics which we know already does not help us. We need variety and something new". In the same vein Nyota wrote that, "The recycling of topics we are already good at like essay writing". Clearly, the teachers' perspectives are that professional development activities should be varied to avert feelings of monotony among participants.

Responding to the same question about activities he considered of little value, Chingeve pointed out that, "Uuuum if one who is not so well versed in the subject is selected to facilitate then the whole gathering (laughs) becomes useless". This seems to suggest that professional development activities led by ill-prepared or less knowledgeable facilitators are of little value to him. Patton *et al.* (2015) and Owens *et*

al., (2016) recommend the use of knowledgeable facilitators at teacher professional development sessions.

Answering the same question about activities they considered of less value to them, Chambara and Zvaita seem to view activities that make participants passive recipients of other people's truths of little value to them. Chambara expressed his displeasure for such activities when he said, "...being involved in aaaah activities that we have no time to ask questions and are hurried uuuum becomes useless and a waste of time". As if in support of his colleague, Zvaita had this to say, "Those activities where we are at times just being listeners and not discussing". The responses by these two participants seem to agree with the finding by Garret and Yoon (2009) that high quality teacher professional development should regard participants as active and not passive learners.

Responding to the same question about history subject panel activities that are of little value to him, Nyati pointed out that "too many students during seminars is of less value ..."This response seems to suggest that high student numbers at seminars deprive learners of adequate attention to their concerns by the facilitators. I was able to witness this challenge first hand during my observation of one history subject panel held on 26 September 2015, where 226 students attended a seminar and many students' questions were left unanswered.

4.7.3 Teachers' overall assessment of the effectiveness of history subject panel activities

The use of subject panels as vehicles for teachers' CPD is a relatively new phenomenon in teachers' CPD not only in Zimbabwe but also in Southern Africa (De Clercq & Phiri, 2013). Against this backdrop, it became imperative for me to find out from the participants what their views are about the effectiveness of the activities they engaged in during history subject panel meetings.

Seven out of eight participants seem to agree that the history subject panel activities teachers engaged in are effective in improving their practices and student achievement. Asked about his views on the effectiveness of the history subject panel activities, Mberi pointed out that,

> Uuuum, they are very, very important if they are well led. We used to produce better results in the district especially in 2013 because we had a number of panel meetings, but last year the results were not very good because there were problems that the region was giving a torrid time to our heads that they should not be subject panels because teachers use a lot of money from parents as a result people ignored these subject panels.

The above quote suggests that if teachers hold regular workshops, students' performance improves. This is in accordance with the finding by Mundry (2005) that if teachers have more time to work together they can improve their instructional practices and student achievement.

In response to the same issue, Chingeve pointed out that, "They are very important if you look at the results they are super, then it shows the subject panel activities are very important". Like Mberi, Chingeve's response suggests that the good performance by students in public examinations was a clear testimony of the effectiveness of the history subject panel activities.

Chambara and Zhou provided self-reports about how they have been transformed into competent 'A' level history teachers. Chambara had this to say, "Yaaah yaah they have actually changed my teaching. I am now a far much better teacher than I started". Zhou revealed how the history subject panel activities positively affected him, "The panels are very good because when I joined the secondary department from primary I knew nothing but now I can teach very well with confidence".

The responses by Nyati and Nyota on the effectiveness of the history subject panel activities were also positive. Nyati said, "The activities are very effective because results in most schools are above ninety per cent". Nyota also added his own views by saying, "Overall they are effective but they need to be improved".

The participants' final collective group response seems to suggest that history subject panel activities were effective in meeting their goal of improving teachers' instructional practices and student achievement.

- They are helpful in that teachers share problems they encounter in teaching certain topics or in finding sources on certain topics. Those with

the sources would openly tell colleagues how they could obtain the sources.

- The subject inspector, if present, would usually tell the teachers his expectations and anything new that he may need to share with the students.
- Sharing of experiences – teachers are given time to share their experiences on the teaching and learning of history and by doing so become confident in their delivery of the lessons.

Mapakise's overall assessment about the effectiveness of the history subject panels' activities was, however, negative as he noted that, **"**They are not doing justice aaaah in terms of improving the teachers and improving the pass rate in schools". This seems to contradict the views of his other seven colleagues sharply, who pointed out that the history subject panel activities are effective. My feeling is that Mapakise is a veteran history teacher and may need something different from what the history subject panels are currently offering.

The majority of participants seem to agree that the activities of the history subject panels were effective as they managed to transform some of them into highly competent 'A' level history teachers. The main evidence in the effectiveness of history subject panel activities seems to be teacher transformation and good student achievement in public examinations. This agrees with the finding by Althauser (2015) that effective professional development transforms teachers into competent practitioners and improves student achievement.

4.8 THEME 2: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

My discussions of findings for this theme are presented following the order of the six sub-themes that emerged from the analyses and presentation of data as shown above. Overall, the main findings seem to suggest that history subject panels are effective in meeting their goal of improving teachers' instructional practices and student achievement.

The first finding reveals that history teachers engage in various activities that are closely aligned to their classroom work with students during their subject panel meetings. These activities involve teachers learning from each other to correctly

interpret the ‘A’ level history syllabus, assess students’ work, interpret questions, respond to challenges students face in answering questions in examinations and share skills to teach essay writing. It also involves discussing effective teaching approaches, sharing responsibilities in the setting and writing of common mid-year examinations and preparing students for their final examinations through seminars.

These findings are consistent with those found in the literature (Althauser, 2015; Campbell *et al.,* 2016; Dittimar *et al*., 2002; Gwekwerere *et al.*, 2013; Komba & Nkumbi, 2008; Maphosa *et al.*, 2013; Nwagbara, 2014; Owens *et al.*, 2016). Evidence abounds in the literature that professional development activities aligned to teachers’ classroom work improve their teaching practices and student achievement (De Luca *et al*., 2014; Kennedy, 2011; Mansfield *et al.,* 2016; Owens, 2015).

The second finding is that history subject panel activities are facilitated by teachers who are ZIMSEC examiners. It also emerged from conversations with participants that those selected to facilitate at history subject panels are teachers who are examiners with a track record of producing good ‘A’ level history results. This seems to support the argument by Stacy (2013) and Ricon-Gallardo and Fullan (2016) that teacher professional development should maximise the use of local expertise. Battersby and Verdi (2015) posit that facilitators should be knowledgeable about what they are asked to facilitate. It seems that the main facilitators at history subject panels are primarily teachers themselves and external experts are rarely utilised. However, findings by Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (2011) and Jita and Mokhele (2014) suggest that effective professional development programmes use local and external expertise. It emerged from interviews that external experts who are preferred to facilitate at history subject panel meetings are authors of textbooks being used in schools. Four of the five interviewees pointed out that they mostly utilised local expertise (ZIMSEC examiners) rather than external experts because the latter are expensive to hire. Guskey and Yoon (2009), Stacy (2013) and Lee (2011), argue that local experts are more effective than outside experts. In the same vein, Stanley (2011:77) supports the use of local expertise when he argues that “professional learning communities can be rich and effective when it honours the expertise of its members...”De Luca *et al.* (2014) argue that facilitation of professional development activities by teachers has a positive effect on teachers’ instructional practices as experienced teachers share what works well for them, at

the same time provoking meaningful and reflective interactions with their peers. Stanley (2011:77) claims that, “strategies that seem to work well can be named, defined, and closely examined to allow teachers to understand their real efficacy in facilitating learning...”

It was also established that facilitators at history subject panels are selected by the executive committee with minimal involvement of the majority of the history teachers. This stands in sharp contrast to Hargreaves *et al*. (2012) and Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (2011), who strongly argue that teachers should have an input in the selection of facilitators for their sessions as this helps to increase their commitment to the professional development activities.

The third finding is that agendas for history subject panel meetings are mostly set by the executive committee with minimal involvement of the rest of the history teachers. This finding is contrary to the finding by Stanley (2011:77) that “professional development that derives its impetus and energy from participants offers teachers a valuable sense of initiative and control over their own learning”. In addition, Bayar (2014) and Zepeda (2012) argue that teachers need to be involved in determining what they want to learn at their meetings as this increases ownership and relevancy to their programmes. The exclusion of the majority of teachers in determining what they want to learn reduces their ownership of the entire professional development programme.

The fourth finding reveals that participants differed in terms of activities they regarded as important to them. This seems to suggest that professional development activities should focus on a variety of activities in order to cater for individual teacher concerns. What appears to be common is that all activities deemed important by participants are closely related to their classroom work at schools. Similarly, participants showed differences in terms of activities that they consider being of little value to them.

Although the participants felt slightly unhappy about their exclusion from determining what they learn at the history subject panels, there seems to be consensus that the activities they engaged in are effective in terms of improving their practices and student achievement. The nature of activities teachers engaged in during the meetings corresponds with their classroom work with students at schools. This

supports the finding by Di Paola and Hoy (2014) that teachers define those activities, which addresses their classroom instructional needs as effective.

4.9 THEME 3: EFFECTIVENESS OF THE HISTORY SUBJECT PANELS AS AN INNOVATION FOR TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In part, this study aimed at finding out from the participants whether history subject panels were effective as a vehicle for teachers' professional development. This was critical because little is known about the effectiveness of these recent approaches to the professional development of teachers (Jita & Ndlalane, 2009; Ono & Ferreira, 2010).

4.9.1 Sub-theme 1: Teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of history subject panels as an innovation for professional development

Two categories emerged from the data on teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of history subject panels in professional development namely, evidence of effectiveness and evidence of ineffectiveness.

4.9.1.1 Evidence of effectiveness of history subject panels as an innovation for professional development

In pursuance of this objective, I asked participants to provide me with evidence indicating that history subject panels were effective as an innovation for their professional development. In response to this question, Mberi pointed to the fact that, "If all teachers are called more than ninety percent will attend...which shows that some people are respecting the subject panel meetings". Mberi seems to view the effectiveness of history subject panels in terms of teacher attendance at meetings. Probed further, he added the following,

> And when those meet [teachers] they will definitely work. They will do the work as expected because the head of subject panels will be there assisting as well. Therefore it's very, very effective and the reports, the feedback..., is even sent back to schools.

Mberi's response seems to suggest that history subject panels were effective in meeting their goal. However, the presence of the HIC suggests that the teachers

concentrated on their professional development because the National Association of Secondary Heads' (NASH) representative would monitor them.

Mapakise judged the effectiveness of history subject panels in terms of their impact on him.

> I would say ... they affected me positively probably in the sense that sometimes there is this element of updating us on the current trends be it at national level. What is unfolding at the national level in terms of history as a subject and generally that element of how the nation as a whole has performed, and which district has dominated.

Asked whether the history subject panel had any impact on him in terms of his subject CK and PCK, he was quick to say, "eeeh'' (yes).

Responding to the same question to show evidence that the history subject panels were an effective vehicle for teachers' CPD, Chingeve pointed out that,

> The activities focus on what teachers do in class, so they are relevant and that shows their importance. Many teachers benefitted from these panels including myself. Eeeeh they made me a very good teacher producing good results.

Chingeve, similar to Mapakise, seems to view the effectiveness of the history subject panels in terms of how they have improved their own teaching and their focus on activities aligned to teachers' classroom work.

Charamba explained how his involvement in history subject panels assisted him to be a more effective 'A' level history teacher when he said,

> Yaah actually as an 'A' level teacher I benefited a lot from these panels...right now because I have interacted with examiners I know what to mark, what to expect from an essay. I can actually deliver to my pupils, when writing this type of question examiners expects you to do this and that.

This seems to suggest that to Chambara history subject panels were an effective vehicle for teachers' professional development because they helped him to become a more effective teacher in terms of assessing students' work.

Asked for evidence on the effectiveness of history subject panels as an innovation for teachers' professional development, Zhou pointed out that,

> Number one, because of the results which I said earlier I was telling you of last year when only two pupils out of 176 failed in the whole district and the rest passing history at 'A' level. I think I paid tribute to those panellists, and even with pupils coming up with good essays, we teachers we get a lot of adequate content to teach the pupils- all that is from those panellists, because they actually shape us, where you are wrong you are corrected there and where you are right you get credit from those panellists. So I think they are very good.

The reports by teachers about how history subject panels transformed them into competent teachers and the good results they claimed to be producing suggest that they were effective in meeting their intended goal of improving teachers' instructional practices and student achievement. This seems to support Di Paola and Hoy's finding (2014:10) that effective CPD helps in "building the capacity of teachers to help students learn".

Responding to a similar question about the effectiveness of history subject panels, Zvaita wrote that,

> Syllabus interpretation has helped me and my students to be acquainted with the specific needs/requirements in form of aims, goals, content, activities, methodology and assessment and evaluation techniques. This has helped my students pass as they will face the relevant questions in exams from the relevant syllabi.

The above quotation seems to echo the views of other participants about the effectiveness of instructional guidance teachers and students receive through history subject panel sessions.

For Nyota, history subject panels seem to be effective as they provided him with a platform to share with colleagues useful resources he uses in teaching his students.

> Discussion on useful resources that is textbooks, Internet, extracts and other useful media was useful. This is helpful for teachers and students as some resources are shallow, biased and therefore may not lead to the acquisition of meaningful knowledge.

Probed further about the same issue, Nyota pointed out that, "You get sources from other teachers which are useful therefore it is effective". This suggests that history

subject panels are a readily available database for teachers and students as they shared information about relevant sources of information to use at their schools.

The finding emerging from these conversations suggest that history subject panels are an effective innovation for teachers' professional development. The evidence given by participants point to the fact that history subject panels are effective as they focus on teachers' classroom work such as syllabus interpretation, teaching approaches and ways to assess students' work. In addition, other participants draw attention to the interactions at history subject panel meetings that are critical as teachers learn from their more knowledgeable peers to improve their instructional practices. Guskey (2002) argues that teacher professional development should improve teachers' instructional practices and student achievement. Two participants' self-reports testify that they have been transformed into competent teachers because of their participation in history subject panels. The participants claimed that participation in history subject panels has resulted in increased student achievement.

4.9.2 Evidence on the ineffectiveness of history subject panels as an innovation in professional development

Turning the question of the effectiveness of subject panels around slightly, I asked about what in them makes them less effective. Mberi began by providing me with evidence on the ineffectiveness of history subject panels as a vehicle for teachers' professional development where he pointed out that, "At times there is overcrowding at these panels and sharing of information becomes a problem". Similarly, Chingeve argued that, "too many students are difficult to teach and control and this makes the panels not effective".

The above excerpts suggest that when there are too many students at seminars disciplinary problems arise. Both participants were concerned about the quality and effectiveness of the interactions between teachers and students at seminars. As discussed earlier, my observations of a history subject panel seminar involving students showed the difficulties of maintaining discipline and adequately addressing students' concerns.

Expressing his views on the ineffectiveness of history subject panels, Mapakise registered some displeasure as he reported,

> They are not doing justice aaaah in terms aaah the teachers and improving the pass rate. The people who will be facilitating themselves aaah some of them would be showing a clear indication that they are not worried much about the whole issue about subject panels and imparting knowledge.

The above quote seems to suggest that Mapakise views a lack of seriousness on the part of the facilitators as a clear sign that history subject panels are not always effective as a vehicle for teacher professional development. Similarly, Chambara pointed out the need to improve,

> Yaaah there is need for a lot of improvement in these panels because actually the number of times they are carried [out] is something of concern again because sometimes we might not have them, and have them only in one term especially they come in the second term. First term there will be nothing and second term that's when most panels are done.

The failure in having regular meetings could be a clear sign that history subject panels may be ineffective as a vehicle for teachers' professional development. There seems to be consensus in the literature that teachers need to meet more frequently for the purposes of improving their instructional practices and student achievement (Garret *et al.*, 2001; Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Mokhele, 2014; Mundry, 2005). Zhou emphasised the point about having regular meetings,

> Our weakness which I actually see in our panel is that we don't normally hold regular meetings; maybe because of funds I have observed that in most cases we only get very serious towards examination, whereas we must start preparing in January or February when the year is starting but in most cases you only hear of those meetings in July or September towards exams. I think that one is a weakness which needs to be corrected.

Nyota and Zvaita echoed the similar sentiments around the need for regular meetings. The responses by these four participants seem to suggest that having fewer subject panel meetings was a clear sign that history subject panels were ineffective. The document analysis also supported the finding that very few meetings were scheduled for the year 2015 for 'A' level history (see chapter 3).

In a different response to the question about evidence showing that history subject panels were ineffective, Nyati seemed to be unhappy with the regular absence of

facilitators at meetings forcing ill-prepared facilitators to lead proceedings during meetings,

> At times resource persons invited to the history subject panel may decide to absent themselves, then the teachers present are then asked to present what they have not prepared adequately rendering the subject panel meeting ineffective.

The evidence about the ineffectiveness of history subject panels seem to revolve around the limited number of subject panel meetings, a lack of seriousness on the part of facilitators, congestion at seminars and repetition of activities at meetings. This contradicts the finding from literature on high quality teacher CPD, which stresses that teachers need to meet more frequently so that they receive help from colleagues (Birman *et al.,* 2000; Desimone*,* 2011; Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Lee, 2011)

4.9.3 Nature of history subject panel professional development programme

Subject panels/clusters are increasingly becoming popular as vehicles for teachers' CPD, replacing the more traditional approaches (Jita & Mokhele, 2012). It was imperative to find out from participants the structure of professional development offered by history subject panels and the quality of teacher interactions.

4.9.3.1 Structure of professional development

In terms of structure, it seems history subject panels adopted two approaches, namely teacher workshops and seminars involving teachers and students. Teachers from different schools convene at designated venues in Masvingo town to discuss issues pertaining to the teaching and learning of 'A' level history. What emerges from participants' responses is that history subject panels provide teachers with a context where they come together and learn from each other about their practices. Below are the reflections of participants on the structure of history subject panels. Mapakise had this to say about how the history subject panels were structured,

> They bring together teachers from different institutions where they would get a chance to discuss challenges and... probably pass rates in their institutions and also how they conduct their jobs...the support which people are getting from their respective administrations at schools... to me it's quite an exchange.

In this quotation Mapakise points out that ‘A’ level history teachers from different schools come together to discuss issues related to the teaching of history in their schools. Chambara echoed this, pointing out,

> You meet with different types of teachers with different areas of specialisation in history ...so when you meet you discuss with those teachers the papers, the syllabus and then past exam papers...what are the challenges...sometimes you get a lot of information from others which can help you to deliver to students.

Agreeing with his colleagues, Nyati pointed out that, “At panels history teachers from different schools in the district come together to discuss about improving teaching and pass rates”.

The above excerpts suggest that history subject panels provide a context within which ‘A’ level history teachers come together and share experiences about their practices. This concurs with the finding by De Clercq and Phiri, (2013), Mitchell and Jonker (2013) and Maphlele and Rampa (2015) about the Mpumalanga clusters in South Africa in which teachers convened for the purposes of learning from each other and understanding their practices.

Participants agreed that when teachers meet, selected facilitators present first followed by discussions or contributions from participants. Asked about how the history subject panels’ CPD workshops are constructed and whether participants benefitted from such structuring, Nyati pointed out that, “Presenters present what they have and we ask questions, everyone can ask or answer any question”. The participants are accorded an active role at history subject panel sessions unlike in more traditional approaches to teacher professional development (Aison, 2016; Bayar, 2014; Sugumarie *et al.,* 2016). In addition, history subject panel workshops seem to provide teachers with opportunities for networking, sharing and collaboration (Lieberman, 2000; Ngcoza & Southwood, 2015).

There were no hard and fast rules governing teacher interactions during their workshops. Participants’ responses suggest that teachers give each other turns to ask questions or contribute. For example, asked whether there are rules governing teachers’ behaviour during these workshops, Mberi pointed out that, “There are no

rules but we give each other turns to speak". Answering the same question, Chambara pointed out that, "You speak through the chair".

4.9.3.2Teacher collaboration

Literature on high quality teacher professional development has collaboration as a hallmark (Desimone *et al.,* 2002; Desimone, 2011). In part, I was interested in finding out from the participants how they worked together during their history subject panel meetings. More specifically, I was interested in finding out whether teachers engaged in their activities actively, passively, individually or collaboratively. It was critical to find out what issues teachers collaborated on and how the collaboration was constructed. This is in accordance with Jita and Ndlalane (2009), who argue that not only the existence of the structure (the subject panel) matters but the quality of interactions teachers engaged in during their sessions also matters.

I started my conversations by asking Mberi whether teachers had opportunities to collaborate during history subject panel meetings,

> At times we tell each other on the issue of teaching methods and areas that we should concentrate on because at times lecture method doesn't pay. As a result these days history is about visiting some areas; the Great Zimbabwe, the issue of Khami, that method is very important. We are encouraging each other to do that and some schools are doing that.

The above suggests that teachers learn from each other in a relaxed environment about the latest pedagogical approaches such as educational tours. The fact that teachers "tell each other" and are "encouraging each other" seems to suggest that they interacted in a collegial way. According to Mberi, teachers worked together as equals and collaborated around issues related to the latest approaches in the teaching of 'A' level history. This seems to support the argument by Ricon-Gallardo and Fullan (2016) and Patton *et al.* (2015) that teachers should assume the role of active learners during professional development, constructing their own meanings and understandings through discussions focused on relevant tasks.

Responding to the same issue about how teachers collaborated during history subject panel workshops and seminars, Mapakise had this to say,

> The presenter would present and teachers would be asking questions and also want clarification on other areas, how ...best they can to deliver even lessons on their respective classes and how they can be able to motivate their below average students so that they develop interest in the subject... It would be more of a discussion with the facilitator.

The above response seems to suggest that teacher collaboration during workshops and seminars is constructed around what facilitators present. This suggests that teacher collaboration took the form of dialogues, “asking questions” on various issues they may need more details on from facilitators. To Mapakise, the dialogues took the form of “discussions”. It would appear that the teachers worked together in a relaxed and non-threatening environment, discussing issues related to improving their PCK.

In response to the same question about whether teachers had opportunities to collaborate during history subject panels, Chingeve also pointed out that**,** “Yaaah you will find out that the moment you are yourself to teach ‘A’ level for the first time you find out you actually face a lot of complications. It’s like you are actually walking on a mine infested field (laughs) and you definitely need someone to take you along”. This response hints at another role of history subject panel workshops and seminars, that of providing teachers with the much needed space to solicit and receive help from their peers.

Expressing his views about the importance of teacher collaboration during history subject panels, Chambara pointed out that,

> When you come from university or college you will be an academic...but when you are taught from these subject panels at professional level, having different professionals, you meet teachers with different experiences, years of teaching in the field and you get information through interaction. They will be teaching you, how you teach these students, what you have to focus on is different from the experience that you get from university or college.

The above excerpt highlights the fact that teachers collaborate on issues closely aligned to their classroom work with students. In addition, this response points to the difference between the way teachers learn at universities and at history subject panels. What teachers learn at universities may not be directly linked to how

teachers teach in schools (Villegas-Reimers, 2003). What is emerging from this conversation is that teacher professional development through history subject panel workshops and seminars is job-embedded. Lauer *et al.* (2014) argue that teacher professional development activities should foster group discussions and the sharing of experiences.

Responding to the question on teacher collaboration during history subject panels, Zhou pointed out that, “we talk and in some cases we exchange notes”. Probed further about how other teachers participated in the deliberations, he added that, “Yaaah, the other teachers just come in when they want to respond to what have been said... if there are any contributions they come from the floor”. This excerpt seems to suggest that teachers actively participate during history subject panel meetings as they are allowed to ask questions or contribute. This was confirmed by my observations of four history subject panel meetings where teachers worked together in a collegial atmosphere. I observed that facilitators would present their papers first while other teachers listened either taking down notes or issues they felt were unclear during the presentations. The interactions among teachers took the form of dialogues with participants helping each other in explaining issues to their colleagues.

In the focus group discussion on how teachers collaborated during their history subject panel workshops, Nyota wrote that, “Teachers help each other on many things like how to interpret the syllabus because it is very difficult to understand”. Similarly, Chingeve wrote that, “Trying to understand some of the questions alone is not an easy task; one has to share views with others”. Nyati concurred by saying, “We mainly help each other on question interpretation and how to properly mark essays”. In the same vein, Zvaita also wrote, “We tell each other on how to mark and interpret the questions”. What seems to emerge from the above excerpts is that teacher collaboration during workshops and seminars revolved around issues related to the analysis of the ‘A’ level history syllabus, question interpretation, student assessment and identification of those areas difficult for teachers to teach.

The above excerpts suggest that teachers constructed their collaboration around issues related to the improvement of their CK and PCK. These findings support the claim by Maphahlele and Rampa (2015) that teachers who participated in the

Mpumalanga clusters in South Africa collaborated on issues aimed at improving their CK and PCK and that teacher collaboration thereby reduces isolation (Dittmar *et al.,* 2002; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011).

4.9.4 Theme 3: Discussion of findings

The above findings reveal that history subject panels are effective as a teacher professional development innovation. The majority of participants reported improvements in their instructional practices and student achievement. For example, Chambara had this to say, “Yaah actually as an ‘A’ level teacher I benefitted a lot from these panels ... right now because I have interacted with examiners I know what to mark, what to expect from an essay. I can actually deliver to my pupils...”This resonates with the characteristics of high quality teacher professional development as described by many scholars of professional development (Garet *et al.*, 2001; Mokhele, 2014), which highlights increments in teacher’s instructional repertoires and student achievement as key features. Di Paola and Hoy (2014:10) argue that professional development should help in “building the capacity of teachers to help students learn”. Findings from this theme suggest that because of their participation in history subject panels, participants increased their understanding in terms of how to interpret the ‘A’ level history syllabus, essay writing and question interpretation. This is clear testimony of the effectiveness of history subject panels.

While subject panels appeared helpful to the teachers, there were some weaknesses identified. Participants concurred that the infrequent meetings organised for history teachers is a sign that they are ineffective. High quality teacher professional development activities are of longer duration (Mokhele, 2014; Mundry, 2005; Smith & Gillespie, 2007). It emerged from participants that their activities were continuously of major concern as was the infrequency of history subject panel meetings. For example, Zhou pointed out that, “Our weakness which I see in our panel is that we don’t normally hold regular meetings...” The finding seems to suggest that they only become serious during the third term, starting from September, when they would be preparing ‘A’ level students to write their final public examinations. This seems sharply to contradict with one of the key components of high quality teacher professional development where the issue of duration is given a high premium (Birman *et al.,* 2001; Porter *et al*, 2003).

Another finding is that in terms of structure of CPD, history subject panels adopted two approaches, namely workshops and seminars. At workshops, only teachers participate and most of the teachers seemed to be happy with the information and instructional guidance they receive. For example, Mberi told me that, “When you are discussing with others you come to understand the challenges you are facing... and you become very friendly to colleagues who you can ask after or if you face problems you tend to have your friends in these subject panels”. This suggests that history subject panel workshops act as a readily available database for teachers where they consult when faced with challenges in their teaching. In addition, the workshops seem to provide opportunities for teachers to establish what can be described as lasting professional relationships. The workshops are critical for teachers in terms of providing instructional guidance. This is important in a country such as Zimbabwe where the school curriculum is centrally designed and pushed into schools with no well-defined teacher support structures (Gatawa, 1998; Zvobgo, 1999).

Seminars are a second approach in terms of structure of professional development offered through history subject panels. At these seminars teachers and students attend with the latter doing most of the facilitation. For example, Mberi a teacher leader had this to say about these seminars, “At seminars both students and teachers attend, but in most cases students or examiners present at these seminars”. This finding about student involvement in activities designed for teachers has not come up in the literature on professional development reviewed for this study. The history subject panels seem to take on a new role of providing space for the creation of some form of communities of learning for students. The responses by participants seem to suggest that these seminars are beneficial to students and teachers. For example, Zhou pointed out that, “Pupils learn many things at these seminars and we the teachers also learn from the pupils and contributions from other teachers and examiners”. I will discuss this issue in detail in chapter 5, as it seems to be something unique about these subject panels in Zimbabwe.

Teacher collaboration is a hallmark of high quality professional development and participants reported that they worked together in developing their instructional and pedagogical repertoires. The findings reveal that teacher collaboration revolved around activities such as setting common district mid-year examinations, seminars

with their students, exchanging notes and teaching-learning resources. My observations revealed that teachers actively participated in their activities as equals in accordance with the concept of “collaborative cultures” by Hargreaves (1995). Field (2013) and Sachs (2005) describe this type of collaboration as being democratic and providing teachers with the much-needed autonomy. Teachers also reported being transformed into competent and more effective practitioners through working together in history subject panel activities. This supports the finding by Shah (2012) that collaboration increases teachers’ knowledge.

Patton *et al.* (2015) argue that collaboration should be characterised by openness, trust and support among teachers. I observed that teachers engaged in open, honest and constructive dialogues during their meetings. The less experienced teachers reported that they had a chance to grow professionally through discussions and reflections with more experienced teachers.

Clearly, the history subject panels contained most of the characteristics described by the researchers as constituting high quality teacher professional development. The majority of the participants pointed out that the history subject panels transformed them into competent teachers. This supports the finding by Guskey (2002) that effective teacher professional development results in the improvement of teachers’ instructional practices and student achievement.

4.10 THEME 4: CHALLENGES FACED IN USING THE HISTORY SUBJECT PANELS AS AN INNOVATION FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

In part, this study intended to find out from the participants the challenges they faced when using history subject panels as a vehicle for their professional development. This was critical as it enabled me to provide data-based recommendations for improvement. Two sub-themes emerged from the analyses of data on this theme namely organisation of the history subject panels and challenges teachers faced using this structure for their professional development.

4.10.1 Organisation and effectiveness of the history subject panels

Data on the organisation of history subject panels was solicited through individual interviews and focus group discussions. The use of the two sources of data provided opportunities for comparison of findings (Yin, 2011).

I found it imperative to find out from participants how history subject panels were organised and whether there are any advantages/disadvantages for having such a structure.

All participants seemed to be aware of how the history subject panels were organised. To avoid unnecessary repetition, only three examples of participants' responses are given. For example, Mberi pointed out that, "...the chairman, vice-chairman, secretary and two committee members". He added that, "this formed the district history subject panel executive committee". In the same vein, Mapakise seems to repeat what Mberi said, "It has a chairman, and vice-chairman and committee members. That's the executive". Nyota wrote, "HIC, chairperson, vice chairperson, secretary, two committee members".

The excerpts above seem to suggest that a district executive committee comprising of the HIC, chairperson, vice-chairperson, secretary and two committee members headed history subject panels. The involvement of the HIC suggests that the NASH values history subject panel activities. The rest of the executive committee members are teachers selected by the teachers themselves. This supports Hargreaves *et al*. (2012) who argue in favour of teachers leading their own professional development activities. Similarly, Day (1999:157) also argues in favour of teachers being "centrally involved in decisions concerning the direction and processes of their own learning".

Six out of eight participants agreed that the way history subject panels were organised has advantages in providing leadership for their professional development activities. Asked whether this structure had any advantages, Mberi was quick to point out that, "Very effective because there will be order at meetings and communication through the HIC to schools is easy". Chingeve also seems to be of the view that the history subject panel structure is effective: "Yaah yaah yaaah, it is effective ... for dissemination of information, there is need to have that structure..." Mberi and

Chingeve's responses also emphasised that the way the history subject panels were organised made communication to schools easier.

Zhou took the view that the advantages of the organisation of history subject panels were only in terms of their efficiency in coordinating subject panel activities:"Yaaah, that structure is helpful only for coordination purposes and nothing else...They are just there to coordinate these activities". Responding to the same issue about the effectiveness of History subject panel structure, Zvaita wrote, "It's effective since everything is going on well". Similarly, Nyota wrote that, "Partially effective because teachers cannot organise meetings whenever they wanted them". Nyota's response suggests that a lack of autonomy for teachers to organise meetings whenever they felt it necessary was a major obstacle rendering this structure less effective.

Asked about the benefits of having such a structure, Mapakise pointed out that, "...I don't see any advantages to have this structure because they are failing in many ways. At times meetings are conducted without facilitators". Probed to say more about the ineffectiveness of the history subject panel structure he noted that, "At times facilitators are not informed in time so they will not come". The above quote suggests that poor communication renders the history subject panel structure less effective in leading teachers' professional development activities.

4.10.2 Challenges faced by teachers in using history subject panels in professional development

Little is known about the challenges teachers face in using history subject panels as an innovation for professional development, especially under the direction of NASH since 2010. It was therefore imperative to find out from participants the challenges that they faced. Most participants pointed to poor funding as the major challenge in using history subject panels as an innovation for their professional development. Mberi pointed out that, "Resources, money-wise, they need to be paid those people [facilitators] ... yes they need to be paid... but we can't because the resources from the heads are scarce, from the schools are scarce". Mberi seems to view the lack of resources, especially funds, as a major challenge teachers faced in using history subject panels as a vehicle for their professional development.

Mapakise affirmed that, "Right, aaaah those people you find that most of the problems which they will be complaining about is the issue of funding". Asked to elaborate on this challenge, Mapakise explained that,

> Funding is not there and they will be struggling themselves as the executive to attend the meetings because the problem we are having emanates with the kind of our schools. The schools don't want to give out money... when we attended a certain panel at Ndarama we have to go there with our own means... out of our own interest. We had to pump out something...

The above excerpt seems to suggest that the issue of poor funding in this case has reached alarming levels as teachers end up using their own resources for school business. Probed further about the issue of poor funding, Mapakise pointed out that at times NASH fails to pay travelling and subsistence allowances for facilitators,

> ...people who will be facilitating, the facilitators and probably the executive. Though it has pledged to sponsor, but sometimes you will find them crying foul that NASH hasn't given us anything. They just say write down your names aaaah and the number of people attending and take the minutes.

Chingeve also joined the chorus about poor funding of history subject panels when he pointed out that,

> Yaah, you will actually find that funding is a problem... It has proved to be a challenge in that, where you need the funds, take for example typing of much needed literature for use by teachers, but you actually find out it's not forthcoming.

Asked to say more about the challenges teachers were facing, he added, "As I said before, there is overcrowding at seminars and some teachers come late for meetings due to transport problems". The issue of overcrowding at seminars seems to be a recurring theme in this study. As pointed out above, I observed that due to the high student numbers at history subject panel seminars, it was difficult to respond effectively to all concerns raised by students.

Asked about the challenges teachers faced in using history subject panels for professional development, Charamba confirmed what his colleagues said when he pointed out the lack of funding as a major challenge,

> ...they will say your things are expensive to the school. We want to save funds for the school so sometimes they won't allow you to go out there because they will say you claim T and S [Travelling and Subsistence] to go there and also to those seminars you want to claim and also going with those pupils is another challenge to the school to fund those pupils to attend those seminars especially our rural day schools, their funds are limited.

These quotations paint a rather gloomy picture where school heads, who are supposed to be supporting teacher participation in professional development activities, seem to distance themselves because of lack of funding. Referring to professional development activities as "your things" seems to suggest that the heads are not always as favourably inclined to teachers' participation in history subject panels.

Pursuing the same issue about challenges faced by teachers in CPD, Zhou noted that,

> Some challenges, there are some teachers who complain of administration in schools. There are some who say their headmasters refuse to give them permission to attend to those panel meetings, and in some cases they say in fact financially when you attend such a committee you are supposed to be financed from the school, then some headmasters say the school does not have money and attendance is not always 100% because of those reasons.

The issue of some school heads denying their teachers the opportunity to participate in history subject panels surfaced several times during the interviews.

In summary, the data suggest that teachers faced three main challenges in using history subject panels for their professional development. These challenges seem to revolve around poor funding, overcrowding at seminars and a lack of transport, especially for rural teachers. The issue of poor funding for facilitators, participants and students to attend history subject panel activities seems to be a major problem as almost all participants mentioned it. Poor funding seems to affect participation of some teachers and students negatively, especially those from small schools in rural areas. These findings affirm previous findings from the literature about poor funding for teacher professional development activities (Delport & Makaye, 2009) in addition

to the refusal of permission by some school heads for teachers to participate in the history subject panels.

4.10.3 Suggestions for improvement of history subject panels as an innovation for professional development

I was also interested in finding out from the participants how these challenges could be overcome to make history subject panels an effective vehicle for teachers' professional development. Mberi and Mapakise took the view that increasing the budget and making participation compulsory can make history subject panels more effective as vehicles for teachers' CPD. Mberi expressed his views as follows,

> There is need for schools to take these panels more seriously by providing a strong budget for the workshops and seminars. I think making them mandatory can force these heads to be more serious about improving pass rates...

Similarly, Mapakise had this to say,

> ...what I think is that there should be a constitution that should also be put in place to make them a bit compulsory so that all the teachers or concerned staff would attend and more to that, they should oblige institutions to support the teachers to attend those panels.

Asked for additional comments, Mapakise said:

> I would want to say that subject panels need to be funded and need to gear up a bit to become a bit more serious and have got people who are determined to make an improvement involve the students and also should be in a position to also hire people like item writers. We would want also subject managers from ZIMSEC to be also part and parcel so that we would also be able to assist.

Probed further on whether history subject panels should continue to be used as a vehicle for teachers' professional development, Mapakise, with a smile on his face, was quick to point out that, "Very much, very much, and is the best way to go".

Mapakise's responses seem to suggest that the challenges teachers were facing in using history subject panels for their professional development could be overcome by having a constitution that would make attendance at subject panels mandatory and by increasing funding.

Another participant, Chivhenge, expressed his views for the improvement of the history subject panels saying, “I think as well more workshops for the teacher so that when they stand in front of the students they have confidence”. Probed further, he noted that, “and again there was a time whereby we had to invite even facilitators from ZIMSEC as a provincial association so that these could actually impart the latest”. Chingeve concurs with Mapakise on the issue of using external experts.

Similarly, Chambara seems to share the same opinion with Chivhenge that increasing the number of workshop meetings would make history subject panels more viable. He pointed out that,

> Yaaah there is need for a lot of improvement in these panels because actually the number of times they are carried [out] is something of concern again because sometimes we might not have them, and have them only in one term especially they come in the second term. First term there will be nothing and second term that’s when most panels are done.

The participants’ collective group response during the focus group discussion seemed to capture most of the suggestions presented above.

- Put in place a constitution to force all schools to attend.
- Schools should be divided for seminars to avoid congestion.
- Schools should have budgets for staff development.
- All teachers should have a say in the history subject panel agenda.
- At least two workshops per term.
- Hire outside experts from ZIMSEC.
- Rotate venues for teacher workshops to reduce costs for rural schools.

The suggestions put forward by the participants to improve history subject panels as a viable innovation for teachers’ professional development seem to touch on the very core of effective teacher skilling. For example, a constitution provides the much-needed guidelines in terms of aims and objectives of the professional development initiative, the rules and regulations to be adhered to and many other critical issues

that seem to militate against the effective utilisation of subject panels as an innovation for professional development.

4.10.4 Theme 4: Discussion of findings

Observations and discussions with participants uncovered several challenges teachers faced in using history subject panels as a vehicle for their professional development. Participants felt that their greatest challenge in using history subject panels as an innovation for professional development for history teachers was poor funding. The critical shortage of funds has been found to have a negative impact on teacher participation in history subject panel activities. The stringent financial controls by NASH and its subsequent sanctioning of meetings of history subject panels had a negative impact on the frequency of meetings teachers wanted to conduct. Participants felt that this top-down approach used by NASH in terms of deciding the frequency of their meetings was demoralising most teachers. This has brought to the fore the contentious issue of the autonomy/control debate (Sachs, 2005). While NASH was made up of school instructional leaders, they seem unwilling to provide adequate funding for teacher professional development through subject panels. Literature is clear about the need for adequate funding for teacher professional development activities (Giordano, 2008; Githara, 2010; Smith & Gillespie, 2007; Timperley *et al.*, 2007). The participants agreed that some school heads refused to provide travel and subsistence allowances for their teachers to take part in history subject panels. As a result of financial difficulties, some teachers and students ended up using their own resources to attend history subject panel activities. The shortages of funds as a crippling factor on the smooth functioning of clusters in Zimbabwe confirm previous findings from studies on Zimbabwe by Delport and Makaye (2009) and Chikoko (2007). The shortage of funds was found to be a barrier in the production of materials, with a lack of facilities, computers and printers affecting the production of handouts for participants by facilitators (Maphosa *et al.,* 2013).

Another challenge that emerged from observations and discussions with participants was the issue of distance. Participants felt that conducting all activities in Masvingo town disadvantaged rural schools, especially teachers who use public transport to attend history subject panel meetings. Smith and Gillespie (2007) argue that

centrally located venues that require participants to travel may result in some not attending or coming late for meetings. In the same vein, Battersby and Verdi (2015) argue that conducting teacher professional development sessions at a great distance causes strain on the budgets of small schools. Observations revealed that some participants arrived late and left before the end of those meetings to catch buses back to their schools.

Poor communication was another challenge faced by teachers using history subject panels as a vehicle for their CPD. The participants seem to agree that it was difficult to pass information about workshops to all teachers. They felt that inviting teachers for meetings through writing invitation letters and either leaving them at the now defunct Better School Programme Zimbabwe (BSPZ) offices or the DEO's office was ineffective. Some school heads might not reach the education offices to collect the letters, as they may not have any business to do there. This further confirms the finding by Smith and Gillespie (2007) that information gaps result in some schools not receiving the workshop invitations. The result was high participant absenteeism at history subject panel meetings.

Participants concurred that the issue of time was a serious challenge that negatively affected the activities of history subject panels. Guskey and Yoon (2009: 497) underscore the need "for educators to have more time to deepen their understanding, analyse students' work and develop new approaches to instruction". I observed that sometimes teachers failed to complete what they had planned or that some aspects were hurriedly done or even left out due to a lack of time. Mundry (2005) strongly argues in favour of providing teachers with more time for their CPD activities.

The lack of clear policies to guide teachers' professional development caused confusion. NASH has no policy concerning teacher professional development. There is consensus in the literature that teacher professional development should be guided by clear policies (Chikoko, 2007; Stanley (2011) is also of the opinion that right structures and policies provide clear guidelines on the provision of teachers' CPD. Equally important, the participants concurred that the lack of follow-up meant that teachers could either implement what they learned during history subject panels or not. In their study, Guskey and Yoon (2009:497) recommend that "Educators at all

levels need just-in-time, job-embedded assistance as they struggle to adapt new curricula and new instructional practices to their unique classroom contexts". It is up to each individual teacher to apply what s/he has learnt at the history subject panel meetings. The problem is even worsened by infrequent history subject panel meetings, which means that teachers took time before sharing feedback on the practicality of what they would have learnt at their meetings.

Student involvement in the activities of the history subject panels was found to be beneficial; however, the main challenge I observed is that there would generally be too many students to conduct effective interactions. I observed that many students left the seminar with unanswered questions since individual attention was difficult. High student numbers at seminars are a barrier to the effective exchange of information, partly resulting in the formation of alternative panels by mission-run boarding schools. Heads of boarding schools refused their students participation in the activities of history subject panels because they saw little benefit for their students, preferring to hire experts for their schools and teaching their students separately. In the same vein, Kennedy (2011) argues that optimum effectiveness takes place when participants at professional development sessions are fewer in numbers.

The participants suggested that NASH should have a constitution that would make it mandatory for all teachers to attend history subject panel activities. One interviewer suggested that the DEO convenes a meeting with all heads and asks them to take history subject panel professional development activities more seriously. The participants put forward a couple of suggestions to improve history subject panels as an innovation for professional development. For instance, Mr Mapakise suggested that NASH should have a constitution to guide their operations and make attendance at history subject panels compulsory for all teachers. In a way, this would possibly force school heads to provide teachers with transport and subsistence allowances instead of teachers using their own meagre resources for school business. All participants agreed with the suggestion that school heads should include in their annual budgets funds for teacher professional development activities, in the same way they budgeted funds for other activities. This would allow teachers to hire external expertise when necessary. Participants agreed that they needed to decide when they should meet rather than NASH dictating to them. On the issue of

distance, the participants suggested that schools close to each other be allowed to have separate sessions to reduce expenses and allow more time for interaction.

4.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has presented, analysed and discussed data that was collected using interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis. In some cases, data from the three instruments corroborated each other but in other cases, there were some differences in what participants said or what the researcher observed. A qualitative case study research design was adopted precisely for its ability to solicit teachers' views and opinions about teachers' perspectives on history subject panels as an innovation for professional development. The next chapter provides a brief summary of the findings of the study, conclusions and recommendations on areas for further study.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 SUMMARY, FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The provision of high quality, relevant, continuing and sustained collaborative professional development is critical in improving teachers' instructional practices and student achievement (Guskey, 2002; Musanti & Pence, 2010). The use of subject panels in teachers' continuing professional development (CPD) is a recent phenomenon in Southern Africa and not much has been documented about their effectiveness in teacher skilling (Jita & Mokhele, 2014), hence this study sought to address this gap in the scholarship. The study sought to investigate Zimbabwean teachers' perspectives on history subject panels in professional development. The main research question that guided this study was *"What are the Zimbabwean teachers' perspectives of history subject panels as an innovation in professional development?"* The following critical questions guided the administration of the study.

- What are the history teachers' understanding of history subject panels and their role?
- How do history teachers regard the effectiveness of history subject panels' activities in professional development?
- How do history teachers regard the viability of history subject panels as an innovation for professional development?
- What suggestions and recommendations can be made for improvements in the structure and function of the history subject panels for them to serve better as vehicles for teacher professional development in Zimbabwe and elsewhere?

5.2 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The study sought to investigate Zimbabwean teachers' perspectives of history subject panels as a professional development innovation. The History subject panels in Masvingo district were used as a case study to understand and gain insights into

how ‘A’ level history teachers conceptualised history subject panels. They were also used to determine their role as a professional development innovation, the effectiveness of their activities in teacher professional development, their viability as a professional development innovation, the challenges encountered in using them for their professional development and suggestions for their improvement to make them effective vehicles for teacher skilling in Zimbabwe and elsewhere. This study was conducted at a time when there were enthusiastic calls for studies to be conducted on the role of teacher leadership in professional development, especially outside the formal school structures. These studies were to be subject-based and “designed to influence teaching and learning in schools and districts” (Jita & Mokhele, 2014:13). In addition, the study was conducted when the Better Schools Programme (Zimbabwe), which was jointly sponsored by the governments of Zimbabwe and the Netherlands, had pulled out leaving the responsibility for teacher professional development under the direction of the National Association of Secondary Heads (NASH) from 2010.

Not much has been documented about the effectiveness of subject panels in improving teachers’ instructional practices and student achievement. This study sought to address this anomaly by focusing on teachers’ perspectives of history subject panels in Masvingo district as a case study. The studies available in Zimbabwe largely focused on clusters, combining views from school heads and primary school teachers and not much has been documented about voices of secondary school teachers. The limited studies on professional development that focused on secondary school teachers only focused on mathematics and science, excluding the voices of history teachers. The current study sought to fill this gap by focusing on teachers’ experiences of history subject panels. The research report is spread out over five chapters and these are summarised below.

Chapter 1 provided the orientation and the contextual background of the study. The background of the study spelt out how subject panels came into existence in Zimbabwe. A brief outline on the evolution of teacher professional development from 1980 to 1993, when the Better Schools Programme Zimbabwe (BSPZ) was launched, is also provided. It was argued that subject panels came into existence because of the deterioration of education standards in the country. The problem addressed by the study was on the poor quality of the country’s education. It was

argued that there was a vast gap in the literature that needed to be addressed as a matter of urgency. The introduction of subject panels as an innovation for the professional development of teachers was not only new to Zimbabwe but also to the whole of Southern Africa and not much has been documented about their efficacy. Thus, this study was aimed at soliciting teachers' perspectives of history subject panels as a professional development innovation in the Masvingo district.

The study also provided the value of the study where it was strongly argued that it would contribute new knowledge about teacher professional development using history subject panels. The delimitations of the study covered the study's boundaries. The study was situated in the Masvingo district of Zimbabwe and specifically focused on 'A' level history teachers' perspectives of History subject panels as a professional development innovation. The limitations of the study highlighted the challenges faced by the researcher. It clearly stated that the limitations of the study were similar to those normally related to case studies. The important concepts used in the study were defined in this chapter. Furthermore, an outline of the research's chapters was provided and the final part was a chapter summary.

Chapter 2 provided a discussion on the review of related literature with the view of grounding the study in the scholarship and at the same time borrowing from that scholarship. The review of related literature focused on the various perspectives scholars have of the concept of teacher professional development. It emerged that scholars define professional development in various ways. However, there is a consensus in the literature that teacher professional development should aim at improving teachers' instructional practices and student achievement. A focus on trends in CPD in Africa was intended to ground the study in an African context. It emerged that although there were new forms of teacher professional development in Africa such as clusters and subject panels, the traditional workshop/conference type are still the dominant approaches being used to skill teachers. The remaining components focussed on the review of related literature being guided by the study research questions and objectives. The focus was on how teachers conceptualised these new collaborative forms of teacher CPD, the activities teachers engaged in, teacher collaboration and challenges faced in using subject panels in CPD. The focus on characteristics of high quality teacher professional development provided

the conceptual framework through which the effectiveness of the history subject panels as an innovation in teacher professional development could be understood. The main characteristics of high quality teacher professional development that were identified included the form of activity, duration, collective participation, content focus, active learning and coherence. The chapter also presented a more detailed description of the symbolic interaction theory by Mead (1863-1931), which was utilised as a lens to understand teachers' perspectives of history subject panels as a professional development innovation. Central to this theory is that people co-construct meanings through interaction. The review of related literature closed with a chapter summary.

Chapter 3 provides the methodology employed in conducting this study. The study utilised a qualitative research approach and a case study research design. This was deemed suitable because the study aimed to investigate teachers' views, opinions and experiences of history subject panels as a teacher professional development innovation. Such a study could be best conducted through a qualitative approach, as the data was to be in words and not figures. Qualitative data generation instruments used for this study included interviews, document analysis of reports of history subject panel meetings, one focus group discussion and four observations of history subject panels in session. Participants from eight high schools selected for this study were purposively sampled as only the information rich were needed. All eight participants, one from each school, were 'A' level history teachers with a minimum qualification of a first degree in history and were actively involved in the activities of history subject panels.

Chapter 4 presented the findings of the study. The data on the findings of the study were presented following the order of the four main themes that emerged from the analysis of the data.

Theme 1 findings revealed that participants' conceptualisation of history subject panels is shaped by what they benefit from and activities they engaged in during history subject panel meetings. Participants did not distinctly conceptualise subject panels as a vehicle for their professional development even though they benefitted from them in many ways. Another finding is that history subject panels play various roles such as teacher induction, development of teacher leadership, providing

instructional guidance and creating communities of learning for students. Many of these identified roles concurred with those in the literature except perhaps for the two on teacher induction and the creation of communities of learning for students. These latter two were exceptional and distinct for subject panels in Zimbabwe.

Theme 2 findings revealed that history subject panel activities were effective in terms of improving teachers' instructional practices and student achievement. Facilitators at history subject panel meetings are examiners who are selected by the teachers themselves.

Theme 3 findings showed that History subject panels are led by teachers who are selected by teachers themselves as an executive committee comprising of the Head-In-Charge (HIC), chairperson, vice-chairperson, secretary and two committee members. The participants reported that this structure was effective in carrying out its mandate of coordinating the activities of history subject panels. The participants identified a lack of funds as a major obstacle to their professional development. An interesting finding was that the teachers collaborated on issues aligned to their classroom work. Overall, the study established that history subject panels were an effective vehicle for their professional development.

Theme 4 findings established that teachers faced several challenges in their professional development that needed urgent attention. The main challenges pointed out include few meetings, poor funding and congestion at seminars. Participants suggested that NASH should provide adequate resources for teacher professional development activities, divide schools into smaller groups for seminars and that there should be a constitution to direct the operations of History subject panels.

5.3 MAIN FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The study sought to explore teachers' understanding of history subject panels and their role in professional development, activities they engaged in during history subject panel meetings, the effectiveness of history subject panels as a professional development innovation and the challenges teachers faced in using history subject panels for their professional development and how they can be addressed. Findings on each objective are thematically presented.

5.3.1 Teachers' understanding of history subject panels and their role in professional development

Locally and internationally, the term subject panel is rarely used in the literature on teacher professional development. Different terms are used in various contexts to describe the current non-traditional forms of teacher professional development being implemented in most developing countries. These terms include 'subject panels', 'clusters', 'teacher networks' and 'teacher communities of learning' (Bray, 1987; Delport & Makaye, 2009; Giordano, 2008; Dittmar *et al.,* 2002). Chikoko (2007) argues that these terms are related concepts though they have their own nuances and implications.

Literature reviewed for this study revealed two ways of conceptualising clusters, which are the 'administrative view' and the 'collaborative view' (Jita & Mokhele, 2012:5). The administrative perspective seems to view 'clusters' as "a group of schools brought together for educational and/or administrative purposes" (Giordano, 2008:25). Such a view is also shared by several scholars, among them Bray (1987), Chikoko (2007), Delport and Makaye (2009) and Dittmar *et al.* (2008).Educational authorities who view clusters as extensions of the administrative arm mostly hold this perspective.

The main characteristics of subject panels, when viewed as extensions of the educational administration, are that the clusters are established by the education authorities through some form of legal instrument and are subjected to stringent administrative controls, being guided by elaborate guiding frameworks. The frameworks clearly spell out how they should be formed and how they should function (Dittmar *et al.*, 2002; Jita & Mokhele, 2012). The teachers are expected to push the policy agenda (De Clerq & Phiri, 2013; Giordano, 2008).

Jita and Mokhele (2012) seem to be quite critical of such a conceptualisation of teacher clusters and rather provide what they call the 'collaborative view' of clusters. Their understanding of clusters is that they are a 'group of teachers' (Jita & Mokhele, 2012:5) who work together on some specific subject matter issues. This view regards subject panels/clusters as vehicles for teacher collaboration and sharing. Teachers from different schools come together to give and receive help from their peers. The main focus of subject panels from this perspective is on teachers learning

from each other and pushing their own instructional professional development agenda (Githara, 2010; Jita & Ndlalane, 2009). In this case, the subject panels are also characterised by what Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) describe as collaborative cultures as opposed to contrived collegiality.

The findings of this study suggest that the teachers' understanding of history subject panels seem to partly support the second perspective, which views clusters as 'groups of teachers' coming together for purposes of learning from each other. For example, Chambara understood history subject panels as, "The coming together of teachers to improve their teaching". In the same vein, Zvaita also understood them as, "...the bringing together of teachers to discuss problems they encounter in teaching 'A' level history". However, the way teachers understand history subject panels was not only limited to one of these two perspectives. There appears to be a variety of ways of understanding history subject panels, as illustrated by the above sentiments of the participants in the study. The teachers' understanding of history subject panels has two key components. Firstly, it seems to be shaped by what they benefit from participating in history subject panel activities. For example, Zhou said, "...they helped me [subject panels] because when I started teaching 'A' level I didn't know how to actually tell pupils, how the content itself, to interpret the syllabus, all I got that information from those panels". Secondly, it is shaped by their actual experiences of what they do during their history subject panel meetings. For example, Mberi pointed out that,

> Right, it means coming together of teachers and students within the district right, when the teachers come together they present the questions that they have ... the markers present on the most important aspect that has to be considered when writing essays because we find problems when writing 'A' level essays. They are demanding so those people with the knowledge will assist teachers and students on how they can improve pass rate.

I cannot suggest from this study alone that this is definitely a new way of conceptualising history subject panels but it is something that seems to be different from previous research findings. It may be that we need to do a lot more research to explore this particular way of understanding history subject panels a little bit more. We now know that it is different in two respects but we are not sure how significant

these differences are and what their implications are. That is a suggestion for further research in this field.

Locally and internationally, subject panels are assigned various roles in teacher professional development. The study established four key roles of history subject panels in professional development that are similar to those in the literature, namely the provision of instructional guidance, development of teacher leadership, curriculum analysis and teacher collaboration (Delport & Makaye, 2009; Githara, 2010; Gwekwerere *et al*., 2013; Maphosa *et al*., 2013; Jita & Mokhele, 2014). History subject panels provided a space for teachers to come together for the purposes of learning from each other about what Jita and Mokhele (2014) referred to as the 'how', 'what' and 'when' to teach their 'A' level history students. Jita and Mokhele (2014) further assert that these are critical tenets of any instructional guidance system. It is important to note that the provision of instructional guidance through history subject panels is especially critical in countries such as Zimbabwe where the school curriculum is centrally developed and introduced into schools without much support for teachers. It appears that subject panels fill this critical void in the management of curriculum implementation in schools. History subject panels provide instructional leadership through three key activities, which are the drawing of a common school syllabus, providing common mid-year examinations and drawing common marking guides for student assessment for all schools in the Masvingo district (Jita & Mokhele, 2014; Maphosa *et al.,* 2013). This type of instructional leadership is different from the norm where such guidance tends to be provided internally in each school instead of across schools, as is the case here.

The study established that history subject panels are critical in the development of teacher leadership. Literature established that in other contexts teacher leaders are trained to provide leadership to other teachers (Jita & Mokhele, 2014). This seems to be slightly different from the way teacher leadership roles are enacted through history subject panels. The study established that teacher leaders for history subject panels are selected by the teachers themselves and do not receive any form of training for such an important responsibility. This suggests that the development of teacher leadership using the history subject panels take place almost by default since it is unintentional. The executive committee is made up of teachers responsible for organising the history subject panel meetings by coordinating all the activities

such as coming up with agendas, selecting facilitators, inviting teachers for the meetings and finding venues for the meetings. This is no mean task for full-time teachers who are busy with their classes and who are not trained for this task. Further research is needed on the issue of training and preparation of such teacher leadership roles within the subject panels.

History subject panels provide teachers with a space to engage in curriculum analysis. This finding is in accordance with what Jita and Mokhele (2014) found concerning the Mpumalanga clusters in South Africa. History teachers engaged in activities such as syllabus and question interpretation. In the process, they identified topics that are difficult for them to teach. Observations of history subject panel meetings clearly revealed that teachers engaged much more deeply with the 'A' level history syllabus and in the process, they identify and learn from each other about those areas that challenge them in their teaching. This is important as teachers develop a common understanding of the intentions of the curriculum developers.

The history subject panels have been found to create spaces for teacher collaboration through the sharing of ideas. Teacher collaboration as a central feature of teacher CPD through subject panels seems to be well documented in the literature (Jita & Ndlalane, 2009; Mokhele, 2013; Shah, 2011). Interview data seems to suggest that history subject panels engenders networking and the building of lasting professional relationships where teachers seem to have what Jita and Mokhele (2014) referred to as a "live database" which they fall on when they find challenges in their teaching. For example, Mberi noted that, "...you become very friendly to colleagues who you can ask after or if you face some problems you tend to have friends in these subject panels". This has been interpreted to mean that subject panels provide opportunities for teachers to locate and solicit help from their more knowledgeable peers whenever they face challenges after their meetings.

Whilst there are similarities between findings of this study and the literature on the role of history subject panels in professional development as shown above, there seems to be two critical findings that have not been well documented in the literature. These two unfamiliar roles of history subject panels are teacher induction and the creation of communities of learning for students.

In some contexts, the induction of new teachers into service is done through attaching the new teacher to a mentor (Kennedy, 2011). Jita and Mokhele (2014) simply mention that teacher clusters in South Africa also play an important role of inducting new teachers without providing details about how this is done. Findings of this study provide details about how teacher induction is enacted through subject panels. This is how Mberi described how this happens,

> In fact the panel play a significant role since we started it. Eeeh many, many teachers benefitted from these panels, especially the junior teachers, those from universities. Some of them they did not do the topics we are teaching so we need to talk to them ... we need to teach these new teachers ... those who have just joined service on how to interpret the syllabus and how to answer some of the questions because some of the questions are very tricky...

Other participants also mentioned how they have been empowered to teach 'A' level history through their participation in the activities of the history subject panels. The induction of new teachers seems to take the form of discussions and engaging with the actual content, almost like learning anew. This suggests that history subject panels provide a classroom for continuing professional learning of teachers post-certification. This is an important finding since there are no formal programmes in place for the induction of new teachers in the Zimbabwean context. We now know about the role of subject panels in teacher induction although this seems to be happening by default. An important question to ask is, "How could this teacher induction role be structured such that it does not happen by default but by design?"

Another unique role of the history subject panels that emerged from this study is the creation of communities of learning for students. This finding does not appear anywhere in the literature reviewed for this study. When Jita and Mokhele (2014) discuss leadership, they only focus on adults coming together to share knowledge and instructional practices. This study seems to provide something slightly different from the norm. The fact that there are students coming in, taking part in the activities of history subject panels makes this finding unique. Whenever scholars talk about communities of learning they never think of students but teachers.

The study established that students got involved in the activities of history subject panels through what Chambara referred to as *"seminars".* This is what Chambara was referring to when he said,

> ...so what happens is that schools are given different question...so what happens is that schools are given different questions to present and the presentation should be done by pupils and not teachers. So we will be having teachers at these seminars with students presenting, you are given different topics with different questions... so, me as a teacher I will assign different pupils to research on those questions so that they can present at the seminars.

'A' level history students from all schools in the district are brought to a central venue for seminars. Each school is given a set of questions set by examiners for students to research and then present to other students during their seminars. This is what Mberi was referring to during interviews when he said, "At seminars both students and teachers attend, but in most cases students or examiners present at these seminars". Students learn from each other and where they seem not to agree then teachers come in and help them. The teachers seem to be of the view that these seminars are important to the students and teachers. For example, Zhou pointed out that, "Pupils learn many things at these seminars and we the teachers also learn from the pupils and contributions from other teachers and examiners". The students learn from each other and they have the opportunity to meet teachers who mark their public examinations.

5.3.2 Effectiveness of the activities of history subject panels in professional development

In order to address the issue of the effectiveness of history subject panels activities in teacher professional development, four key aspects have been investigated namely the activities teachers engaged in during their history subject panel meetings, selection of facilitators, agenda setting and finally, teachers' overall assessment of the effectiveness of the activities of history subject panels in professional development. This was critical as it provided a holistic picture of what goes on when teachers come together for their history subject panel meetings.

This study established that teachers engaged in a variety of job-related activities during their meetings. They engaged in activities such as syllabus and question

interpretation, essay writing, drawing of common schemes and setting common mid-year examinations for their students. These activities are similar to those documented in the literature (Dittmar *et al.,* 2002; Gwekwerere *et al*., 2013; Maphosa *et al.,* 2013). In addition, these activities seem to be what Jita and Mokhele (2014) collectively refer to as 'curriculum analyses'.

The findings in this study are important not just because the activities teachers engaged in align with those in the literature but because they are closely related to their daily work with students in the respective schools. This seems to support De Luca *et al*. (2014) and Kennedy (2011) who strongly argues in favour of providing teachers with professional development sessions that are closely aligned to their classroom work in schools. More importantly, this is the first research in Zimbabwe to focus specifically on teacher professional development using history subject panels. The findings are thus critical in that the history subject panels play an important role especially in Zimbabwe where the school curriculum is centrally designed with little resources for implementation being provided for most teachers in schools.

On the issue of facilitators, the study established that teachers themselves selected them. Facilitators selected to lead discussions at the history subject panel meetings were mostly teachers and not external non-teaching experts. These facilitators seem to be selected using an unwritten criterion. Whether facilitators were selected or they volunteered to lead discussions, it seems they were expected to be teachers known for producing high quality results at their schools. This seems to be what Chingeve was referring to when he said, "it's like teachers are well informed that at Muchetu there is one who is well versed in the subject so that one can as well facilitate the teaching of the subject based on the results themselves". In the same vein, Mberi also pointed out that, "When we are selecting a marker, then the committee will select who to call. Right, at times as I have said we can choose somebody with the knowledge who has been producing better results in the district".

The use of local expertise in teacher professional development seems to be critical in two respects. Firstly, it empowers teachers to shape their own professional development (Stacy, 2013). Secondly, local experts, in this case, more knowledgeable teachers are less expensive and more relevant than external experts who may be out of touch with what happens in schools (Guskey & Yoon, 2009;

Patton *et al*., 2015; Stanley, 2011). However, this seems to be contrary to the views of Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (2011) and Jita and Mokhele (2014) who argue in favour of using local and external experts as facilitators at teachers' professional development sessions. In this context, using local expertise rather than external experts seems to make more sense in that the majority of the schools seem to be struggling to provide teachers with funds to attend history subject panel meetings. The use of examiners to lead discussions at history subject panel meetings seems to be appropriate in that it allows teachers to share what works in similar contexts.

This study also established that teachers led by the executive committee are responsible for coming up with agendas for their history subject panel meetings. The teachers thus seem to be advancing their own professional development agenda. This differs from the findings by De Clercq and Phiri, (2013) and Jita and Mokhele (2012) about teacher clusters in South Africa where teachers were diverted from their original focus to peddle the policy agenda. Much of the literature supports that teachers should be involved in determining what they want to learn as this increases their commitment and ownership of the professional development initiative (Bayar, 2014; Stanley, 2011). This is critical, as teachers are not forced to engage in what Hargreaves and Fullan (2011) referred to as 'contrived collegiality' where they are forced to collaborate on issues determined by their superiors.

The non-interference by education authorities in Zimbabwe in the activities of history subject panel can be explained from two angles. Firstly, the use of subject panels in professional development activities seems to be wholly funded by the schools themselves under the direction of NASH and not the Ministry of Education. Secondly, 'A' level history requires a certain level of expertise that is seemingly lacking among most of the education inspectors in Masvingo district who are mostly former primary school teachers. This makes the role of these subject panels all the more important.

Subject panels have been in operation as vehicles for teacher professional development for a while now but there seems to be no study in Zimbabwe that has focused on their effectiveness, especially from the perspective of history teachers themselves. The findings of this study suggest that the history subject panels are effective as vehicles for teacher professional development. This supports findings by

Bayar (2014) that teachers define those professional development activities that are anchored on their classroom work as effective.

The conceptual framework for this study (see chapter 2) has content focus, active learning, coherence, duration and collective participation as the characteristics of high quality professional development (Birman *et al.*, 2000; Desimone, 2011; Garret *et al.,* 2001; Mokhele, 2014). The findings of this study have demonstrated the presence of these characteristics of high quality professional development in history subject panel activities though with slight differences. For example, the participants did not delve much into the subject matter of 'A' level history. Mapakise pointed out that,

> ...we mainly focus on technicalities to answer questions, the learning part of the questions. I think this is the main aspect... the content part of it, they have a general assumption that every practising teacher of course might have the content here and there pertaining to the subject so the issue of content is given very little attention.

Observations of history subject panel activities also confirmed what Mapakise had said during interviews. This seems to be a slight deviation from the norm as teachers largely focused on the identification of key aspects to be emphasised during teaching and ways of interpreting questions instead of digging deep into the content itself.

Observations of the history subject panel activities revealed that teachers actively participated in their activities. The interactions took the form of open discussions or dialogues. Of interest is that teacher interactions were not characterised by what Hargreaves and Fullan (2011) referred to as comfortable collegiality. The findings of this study show that teachers engaged in deep and serious discussions where they interrogated their colleagues' views.

The history subject panel activities teachers engaged in support findings from literature where such activities are supposed to be closely related to policy documents (national syllabus) and the goals of the subject (Garret *et al.,* 2001). Duration is one of the key characteristics of high quality professional development (Mokhele, 2014). Literature shows that professional development activities should be ongoing and sustained over time (Desimone, 2011). The study findings on this component seems to suggest that teachers did not meet as frequently as they

wished but they seemed to be satisfied with what they covered in each session. The issue of adequate time for teacher interactions were found to be an obstacle. Collective participation is critical for teacher professional development (Birman *et al.,* 2000). The study findings on this component suggest that the participants collectively took part during sessions. The teachers did not come to receive information but to share; hence, their history subject panel activities took the form of discussions.

The above characteristics of high quality teacher professional development are often used to assess the effectiveness of teacher professional development activities (Birman *et al.,* 2000; Mokhele, 2014). However, the findings of this study seem to suggest that teachers had a different way of assessing the effectiveness of their history subject panel activities. Participants assessed the effectiveness of the history subject panels in terms of the good results their students were producing in public examinations. For example, Chingeve pointed out that, "They are very important if you look at the results they are super... then it shows that the subject panel activities are very important". Similarly, Nyota also pointed out that, "they are very effective since from my own experience the pass rates I produce have been improving due to the discussions gained from these panels..."Others like Zhou and Chambara assessed the effectiveness of the history subject panel activities in terms of how these transformed them into competent 'A' level history teachers. This seems to suggest that there is another way of assessing the effectiveness of professional development activities other than the characteristics of high quality professional development espoused in the conceptual framework. Overall, the participants concurred that the history subject panel activities were effective in improving their instructional practices and student achievement.

5.4 EFFECTIVENESS OF THE HISTORY SUBJECT PANELS AS AN INNOVATION FOR TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In order to address this objective, the research focused on three key components namely evidence provided by the participants about the effectiveness of the history subject panels in professional development, the structure of professional development offered through the history subject panels and teacher collaboration.

The evidence provided by the participants on the effectiveness of the history subject panel as an innovation for teachers' professional development seems to revolve around four important components namely, provision of effective instructional guidance, curriculum analysis, personal transformation and the history subject panels as a platform for sharing resources. These key components seem to concur with the key roles of clusters that emerged from the literature (Caena, 2011; Bray, 1987; Giordano, 2008; Jita & Mokhele, 2012).

The provision of effective instructional guidance to teachers in schools seems to be problematic in most countries (Jita & Mokhele, 2012; 2014). The findings of this study suggest that the history subject panels adequately fill this vast gap in the management of curriculum implementation at the micro level (school and classroom levels). Teachers need adequate instructional guidance for them to execute their teaching duties effectively (Fullan, 1991). The findings of this study on this component seem tell us that the history subject panels effectively provide teachers opportunities to learn what Jita and Mokhele (2012) refer to as "what to teach", "when and how" to teach and "with what resources". For example, this is what two of the participants were referring to,

> Chingeve: The activities focus on what teachers do in their class, so they are relevant and that shows their importance. Many teachers benefitted from these panels including myself.
>
> Chambara: ...right now because I have interacted with examiners I know what to mark, what to expect from an essay. I can actually deliver to my pupils, when writing this type of question examiners expects you to do this and that.

The study established that teachers seem to regard the history subject panels as effective because of the instructional guidance they received during their meetings. This is critical especially in Zimbabwe where provision of such instructional guidance seems to be inadequate or non-existent for many teachers in schools. This instructional guidance seems to assist teachers in improving their classroom instructional practices.

Curriculum development in most developing countries is centrally designed and teachers find it difficult to implement (Fullan, 1991). The findings of this study suggest that teachers regarded history subject panels as an effective innovation for

their professional development because it allows them opportunities to engage in curriculum analysis. Teachers need to understand the syllabus documents they use to teach their students (Maphosa *et al.,* 2013) and provision of spaces for teachers to come together and help each other to understand these policy documents seem to make history subject panels an effective innovation for teacher professional development. Furthermore, the present study suggests that history subject panels provided teachers with opportunities to engage much more deeply with the technicalities of implementing the 'A' level history syllabus and in the process identify and address their deficiencies. This seems to be what Zvaita was referring to during the focus group discussion when he said,

> Syllabus interpretation has helped me and my students to be acquainted with specific needs/requirements in form of aims, goals, content, activities, methodology and assessment and evaluation techniques. This has helped my students pass as they will face relevant questions in exams from the relevant syllabi.

This finding is critical, as it seemingly suggests a clear departure from the norm where curriculum developers prescribe a syllabus, push it into schools and expect teachers to understand it clearly and enact it as intended. This seems to be a new way of managing the implementation of the school curriculum in schools by providing spaces for teachers to engage in curriculum analysis.

Effective teacher professional development innovations help teachers to improve their instructional practices and student achievement (Guskey, 2002; Mokhele, 2013; Patton *et al.,* 2015). The findings of this study suggest that history subject panels help teachers to improve their teaching and increase student performance in public examinations. The above two excerpts from Chambara and Zvaita support the argument that history subject panels are beginning to reshape teachers' professional identities forever – transforming them into effective 'A' level history teachers. The fact that teachers reported being transformed into effective 'A' level history teachers is important in demonstrating that the history subject panels are meeting their intended goals.

Subject panels provide teachers with rare opportunities of not only sharing expertise but also spaces for sharing resources (Giordano, 2008; Delport & Makaye, 2009;

Maphahlele & Rampa, 2015). The findings of this study seem to suggest that teachers shared resources because of collegial relationships established during history subject panel meetings. This is what Nyota was referring to during the focus group discussion when he said, "You get sources from other teachers which are useful therefore it is effective". Throughout the study, participants made constant reference to the importance of history subject panels as an innovation promoting sharing resources among teachers. This is a critical finding as the shortage of resources in schools, especially in Zimbabwe, seems to be a perennial problem (Chikoko, 2007; Delport & Makaye, 2009) and subject panels seem to provide a way out.

The structure of the history subject panels' professional development is critical for understanding how teacher professional development is enacted (Jita & Mokhele, 2010).History subject panels utilise two approaches to teacher professional development namely teacher workshops and seminars.

Locally and internationally, teacher professional development initiatives in the form of workshops have been criticised for being disconnected from teachers' classroom work and ineffective for improving their instructional practices and student achievement (De Clercq & Phiri, 2013; De Luca *et al*., 2014; Dichaba & Mokhele, 2012; Gatawa, 1998; Kafyullilo, 2013; Selemani-Meke, 2013). Criticisms levelled against teacher workshops also include their failure to offer teachers opportunities for discussion and co-construction of meanings about issues pertaining to their craft. The role of teachers in workshops seems to be that of passive listeners (Villegas-Reimers, 2003).

The findings of this study seem to suggest that teacher workshops through history subject panels were effective in improving their instructional practices and student achievement. The teachers reported on how history subject panel sessions transformed them into competent 'A' level history teachers and how they managed to improve student achievement in public examinations. Zhou reports how history subject panels transformed him from a primary school teacher into a competent 'A' level history teacher.

What attracts teachers to history subject panel workshops seems to be the way they are structured. Teachers from different schools meet and discuss issues pertaining

to the teaching and learning of ‘A’ level history. This is what Nyati was referring to during the focus group discussion when he said, “At panels history teachers from different schools in the district come together to discuss about improving teaching and pass rates”. The facilitators at these workshops are mostly examiners and teachers known for producing high quality student results in the district. The fact that history subject panels involved teachers of the same subject and are led by more knowledgeable teachers seems to provide opportunities for teachers to be comfortable and free to open up to their colleagues. Observation of history subject panel activities revealed that teachers were free to speak about what they did not understand and in turn received the help they needed. This is different from traditional workshops where teachers are not given opportunities for open discussions (Bruce & Flynn, 2013). The study findings suggest that what is critical is not the term workshop but the form the professional development takes once it is organised. The evidence from this study suggests that history subject panel workshops are organised in the form of what Porter *et al.* (2003) describe as “reform type”. The history subject panels took the form of “study groups” dominated by dialogues among teachers. This is in accordance with Penuel *et al*. (2007) who argue that what matters most is not the type of professional development activity but its design.

The second approach used by history subject panels are, what the participants referred to as “seminars”. These seminars involve students and teachers and this seems to be a unique approach in professional development literature. This is what Mberi was referring to during interviews when he said, “At seminars both students and teachers attend, but in most cases students or examiners present at these seminars”. The involvement of students as participants at professional development sessions intended for teachers is not mentioned anywhere in literature. Chambara pointed out that,

> ...what happens is that schools are given different questions to present and the presentation should be done by pupils and not teachers. So we will be having teachers at these seminars with students presenting, you are given different topics with different questions... so, me as a teacher I will assign different pupils to research on those questions so that they can present at the seminars.

‘A’ level history students are given different questions by the executive committee, they research and then present to their peers at the seminars. Wherever students fail to agree, teachers come in to help them. Seminars provide students with a space to learn from each other and from examiners. The findings of this study suggest that the students and teachers benefit from the interactions they engage in during seminars. Students seem to develop confidence in their studies and research skills. This seems to be a unique approach in improving teachers’ instructional practices and student achievement and is not documented anywhere in the literature.

Teacher collaboration is an important component of effective teacher professional development (Shah, 2012). Locally and internationally, teacher collaboration is a hallmark for quality professional development (Datnow, 2011; Field, 2013; Garet *et al*., 2001; Hargreaves, 1994; Kennedy, 2016; Little, 2006).The focus on this component was on issues teachers collaborated on, how they collaborated and in what way teachers benefitted from such collaboration.

The literature reviewed and the findings of this study seem to suggest that teachers collaborated on issues closely related to their classroom work (Lauer *et al*., 2014). In unison with the findings of Komba and Nkumbi (2008) and Maphosa *et al*. (2013), the teachers worked together on various issues such as syllabus and question interpretation, how to assess students’ work and writing common mid-year examinations.

Teacher collaboration largely took the form of presentations followed by what Park and So (2014) alled “candid discussions” about issues affecting them in their teaching. Observations of history subject panel activities revealed that dialogues among teachers was characterised by openness, trust and support (Patton *et al.,* 2015). Teachers engaged in very serious debates and did not quickly concur on contentious issues. This suggests that there was no comfortable collaboration as teachers did not avoid criticising or disagreeing with colleagues (Hargreaves, 1995). This is a departure from the traditional norm where teachers were regarded as consumers of other people’s truths (Villegas-Reimers, 2003). Teachers appeared to be knowledge creators as they engaged in these discussions as equals and did not just come to receive knowledge but to collectively construct knowledge and distribute that knowledge among peers.

However, the findings from observations of the history subject panel activities suggest that the quality of interactions seemed to be affected by the large numbers of teachers taking part in each session. I observed that some teachers' genuine concerns were left unattended because of too many issues calling for attention. This finding seems to be contrary to Bayar (2014), who strongly asserts that teachers must work together in small groups.

What seems to emerge from the findings of this study is that learning through history subject panels is socially situated and that teachers create new forms of relationships characterised by interdependence (Kennedy, 2011). Equally important is the fact that teacher collaboration, through history subject panels, seem to solve problems of teacher individualism and isolation, which normally characterise teachers' lives (Dittmar *et al.,* 2002). Teacher collaboration focused on curriculum analysis and this was critical in overcoming the perennial curriculum implementation problems, such as a lack of clarity that is associated with centrally designed curricula (Tan & Nashon, 2015).Teachers reported developing a greater understanding of the requirements of the 'A' level history syllabus through engaging in sessions that focused on syllabus interpretation.

The findings of this study as far as teacher collaboration is concerned seem to suggest that teachers adjudged history subject panels as an effective vehicle for their professional development.

5.5 CHALLENGES FACED IN USING HISTORY SUBJECT PANELS AS AN INNOVATION FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Local and international scholars on teacher professional development agree that teachers themselves (Day, 1999; Hargreaves *et al.*, 2012; Sachs, 2005) should lead subject panels. The findings of this study on the composition of the executive committee shows that it comprises the HIC, chairperson, vice-chairperson, secretary and two committee members. Resonating with insights from Jita and Mokhele (2012), all the executive committee members, except the HIC, are 'A' level history teachers selected by the teachers themselves. This seems to contradict De Clercq

(2015), who found that in South Africa the selection of teacher cluster leaders was a contentious issue. Against this backdrop, it is not far-fetched to suggest that members of the executive committee enjoy the full support of the teachers they lead.

Resonating with positions of such scholars as Patton *et al.* (2015), most participants argued that the executive committee is constrained by a number of challenges in the execution of their history subject panel coordination roles. The study findings show that participants felt that the control by NASH, in terms of limiting the number of meetings to be conducted and accompanying budgetary restrictions, was stifling the effectiveness of the executive committee and the whole teacher professional development initiative. This brings to the fore the ongoing discourse about the autonomy/control debate in education (Sachs, 2005). In unison with findings by Smith and Gillespie (2007), the findings of this study suggest that information gaps result in members at some schools failing to attend history subject panel workshops. Some members of the executive committee who were full-time teachers felt that they were overloaded and could not operate as expected. This is what Mapakise was referring to during interviews when he said, "... I don't see any advantage to have this structure because they are failing in many ways. At times meetings are conducted without facilitators.... At times facilitators are not informed in time so they will not come". During focus group discussions, most participants agreed that it is critical for the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to reconsider bringing back DRTs whom they had sent back to schools.

Resonating with previous studies such as Chikoko (2007), Delport and Makaye (2009) and Jones (2009), the findings of the present study confirmed that using history subject panels in teacher professional development is riddled with such challenges as poor funding, infrequent meetings and inadequate time for discussions during history subject panel meetings. It emerged from observations and is confirmed by findings by Battersby and Verdy (2015) that there is a tendency for teachers from schools far away from venues in Masvingo town to arrive late for meetings and leaving early before the end of the sessions. This scenario calls for an immediate solution to address equity concerns.

The participants proffered a couple of suggestions to improve the operations of the executive committee in leading teacher professional development using history

subject panels. Among the suggestions for improvement was a call for NASH to come up with very clear policies to guide teacher professional development using history subject panels. A suggestion by one of the participants during interviews, also agreed to by other participants during the focus group discussion, was that NASH should have a constitution that compels school heads to allow teachers to attend history subject panel workshops and seminars. The participants agreed that NASH should make funds available for history subject panel activities in the same way as they support sports. The issue of poor funding confirmed findings from previous scholars such as May (2013), who argues for more money and resources to be made available to teachers undertaking professional development activities.

On the issue of overcrowding, the findings of this study concur with the views of Barttersby and Verdi (2015) who argue that for effective professional development, teachers should work in smaller groups. From observations, it emerged that students were overcrowded at seminars resulting in disciplinary problems and many of them leaving without their concerns being fully addressed by facilitators.

5.6 SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

The following are the main findings of this study:

1) Teachers conceptualise history subject panels differently from the education authorities (administrative perspective) who perceive them as extensions of the administrative arms. They partly understood subject panels in terms of “a group of teachers” coming together for the purposes of learning from each other. The findings of this study on this issue were interpreted to suggest that teachers’ understanding of history subject panels is shaped by what they benefit from participating and their actual experiences.
2) History subject panels play five critical roles in teachers’ professional development. These roles are the provision of instructional leadership to ‘A’ level history teachers, development of teacher leadership and the provision of space for teachers not only to engage in candid discussions about their instructional practices but also to engage more deeply in curriculum analysis. Unique findings not fully explored in previous studies are the provision of

teacher induction and the creation of communities of learning for students through history subject panels.

3) Teachers engaged in a variety of activities that are closely aligned to their classroom work such as syllabus interpretation, question interpretation, drawing of common schemes of work and common progress assessment procedures for their students. These activities have been found to have a positive impact on teachers' instructional practices and student achievement.
4) History subject panels have been found to be an effective innovation as a vehicle for teachers' professional development. Teachers selected their own executive committee to coordinate history subject panel activities. If supported financially, subject panels can be a more promising alternative to traditional approaches to teachers' professional development. In addition to that, the teachers selected their own facilitators who are mostly examiners and they have the privilege of coming up with their own professional development agendas with no interference from education authorities. History subject panels utilise two approaches in conducting professional development activities, namely teacher workshops and seminars involving both teachers and students.
5) An executive committee comprising the HIC, chairperson, vice-chairperson, secretary and two committee members leads the history subject panels. The teachers themselves select the executive committee. This structure has been found to be crippled in a number of ways so much that members find it difficult to function properly. The major challenges raised by participants include a lack of adequate funding, poor communication, overcrowding at seminars causing student disciplinary problems, long distances teachers travel to workshops or seminar venues putting undue strain on budgets of small schools.
6) Participants proffered suggestions for improvement that are critical if taken seriously by the relevant stakeholders. They suggested that NASH should come up with clear policies that should make it mandatory for school heads to allow their teachers to participate in the professional development activities organised through history subject panels. To curb the problem of long distances travelled by teachers outside Masvingo town, they suggested that venues for teacher workshops be rotated. On the problem of overcrowding at

seminars, the participants agreed that it was necessary for three or four neighbouring schools to have separate meetings.

5.7 CONCLUSIONS

History subject panels represent some form of a paradigm shift in teacher professional development in Zimbabwe and not much has been documented about their effectiveness in improving teachers' instructional practices and student achievement. The teachers' understanding of these non-traditional approaches to teacher professional development is shaped by what they benefit from them and their actual experiences of what they engage in during subject panel meetings. The study established that the way teachers understand these history subject panels is determined by the type of activities they engage in during their sessions and vice versa. This was interpreted to mean that there could be another way of conceptualising subject panels as these teachers seems to suggest. In addition, when discussing subject panels, we may need to consider context as a factor. This is critical, as context seems to have far-reaching implications on the role teachers assign to history subject panels in their professional development.

History subject panels play an important role, especially in Zimbabwe where they are assigned to provide an instructional/curriculum guidance system. In Zimbabwe, the curriculum is centrally designed and teacher support systems are weak. The study therefore established that history subject panels fill in this void by engaging teachers in curriculum analysis. History subject panels are also critical for the development of teacher leadership. Unfortunately, teachers who are not trained for such important curriculum or instructional leadership responsibilities often lead the history subject panels. Experienced and new teachers attend the same history subject panel activities and learn from each other. It is therefore not far-fetched to conclude that history subject panels are a new way of inducting new teachers into the profession. The induction of new teachers using subject panels is not fully explored in the literature reviewed for this study. Equally important is the fact that history subject panels are instrumental in the creation of communities of learning for students. The study established that students learn from each other during seminars organised by the subject panels. This has not been found anywhere in the literature on communities of practice.

History subject panels provide spaces for teachers to work together collaboratively for the purposes of improving their practice and student achievement. From the findings of this study, it is not far-fetched to conclude that the activities teachers engaged in during their history subject panel meetings helped them to improve their instructional practices and student achievement. Most of the teachers' self-reports indicated that the professional development activities provided through history subject panels transformed them into competent 'A' level history teachers and helped in raising student achievement in public examinations.

Evidently, history subject panels are an effective innovation for teacher professional development. This is an important finding since teachers, who are direct beneficiaries, pronounced the verdict about their efficacy. The study revealed that history subject panels provide a relaxed environment where the more experienced and knowledgeable teachers share effective practices with their less knowledgeable and less experienced peers. Therefore, it may be safe to conclude that history subject panels provide teachers with an opportunity to open up and be ready to learn from each other as equals. If well supported by NASH and other stakeholders, they may become vehicles for teacher professional development in Zimbabwe. Another conclusion is that teacher-led professional development is effective as it focuses on real teacher professional development concerns. The study established that the teachers set their own professional development agendas and selected their own facilitators. Teachers selected to facilitate at history subject panel meetings are those who are knowledgeable with a good record of producing students with quality 'A' level results in public examinations. This was interpreted to mean that teachers shared experiences of what works in the teaching and learning of 'A' level history in schools.

The challenges faced by the executive committee in coordinating history subject panels are not of their own making. The study revealed that the major challenges constraining the effective provision of teacher professional development through history subject panels include poor funding, poor communication, a lack of resources, congestion at seminars and travelling long distances to and from subject panel venues. Closer analyses of these challenges suggest that they all centred on poor funding. Restrictions imposed by NASH on the number of meetings to be held

and failure by some teachers and students to attend workshops and seminars hinges on a lack of adequate funding. The suggestions proffered by participants to return DRTs to the district seems to make sense as this is likely to improve communication of messages to schools. Decongestion of students at history subject panels can be achieved through decentralisation of venues where two or three neighbouring schools are allowed to have separate seminars. The study concludes that there is a need for NASH and the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to come up with relevant policies to guide the provision of professional development through history subject panels effectively.

5.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The limitations of the present study presented in this section are intended to provide possible improvements when conducting similar studies in future.

This study was designed as a case study and its findings cannot be generalised to other contexts. The study was only confined to history subject panels and one district in a country with other subject panels at high school level and in all ten provinces. Similar studies in other subject panels or districts may yield similar or different findings.

Data collection was restricted to eight ‘A’ level history teachers, where five were interviewed and all eight were involved in a focus group discussion, four history subject panel sessions were observed and only a few documents focusing on history subject panel meetings were found. The inclusion of other stakeholders in a different study, such as school heads and district education inspectors may yield similar or different findings.

The period of six months of data collection for this study might also have confined the researcher to a few history subject panel seasonal events of which a longer period of data collection may be able to offset. The data collected from teachers only may have prevented the researcher from making authoritative claims about the study findings.

5.9 CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

The study has its own limitations as presented above and I am aware that research alone cannot provide answers to all questions about an issue such as teacher professional development. However, as a researcher I am convinced that this study begins to contribute to the scholarship on teacher professional development through history subject panels. Literature on subject-based teacher professional development in Zimbabwe is limited or non-existent. This study opens debate on the efficacy of these relatively new and non-traditional approaches to teacher professional development, especially in the high school education sector. This area has not been adequately explored and still has many unresolved issues. This paradigm shift from the old established norms of teacher professional development dominated by external experts to teacher-led professional development is yet to be fully explored. This study seems to break new ground for areas in need of further research.

My study was intended in part to provide a verdict on the effectiveness of history subject panels as an innovation in teacher professional development from the perspective of the teachers who are the direct beneficiaries. This study boldly attempted to fill this vast gap in the scholarship. Even though there were challenges encountered, the study established that teachers concurred that the history subject panels, as an innovation for their professional development, are helpful in terms of improving their instructional practices and student achievement.

This study begins to make a humble contribution to scholarship on the provision of new knowledge not only on teacher professional development but also on cost effective measures that can promote effective and more relevant instructional guidance, especially in countries such as Zimbabwe with weak teacher support systems and where the school curriculum is centrally designed. The study established that history subject panels provided teachers with a rare form of instructional/curriculum guidance system different from the norm. The norm seems to be that the curricula are centrally designed and pushed into schools without the much-needed support systems in place to help the struggling classroom practitioners. The study established that history subject panels provide a unique instructional guidance system for effective implementation of the history curriculum in schools.

Research on teacher professional development using subject panels has been largely informed by studies in Europe and North America and teacher clusters in developing countries. These studies largely focused on subjects that are more economical such as mathematics and science and the present study has broadened the field of study by focusing on teacher professional development using history subject panels.

The study has also added literature on subject-based and teacher-led professional development using history subject panels. Much of the literature on teacher professional development, especially in Zimbabwe, focuses on primary school teacher clusters negating subject panels characterising the secondary school education sector and this study makes a special contribution in that regard. This study sensitises and invites scholars to an important area in need of further research especially on the efficacy of subject panels in teacher professional development.

The study also informs NASH and education inspectors of two key roles history subject panels play. Firstly, the induction of new teachers into the profession and secondly, the creation of communities of learning for students through History subject panels. These two critical roles seem to be happening by default and this research suggests that curriculum managers and the teachers need to work together and come up with strategies where history subject panels are reorganised to become deliberate vehicles for the initiation of new teachers into the profession and platforms for deeper student learning.

The study also hopes to inform NASH and education inspectors further about the views of the teachers regarding the challenges they are facing in using history subject panels as vehicles for their professional development. Whilst the participants agreed that history subject panels were effective in improving their instructional practices and student achievement, they bemoaned the lack of adequate financial support and autonomy to make decisions about when to have their meetings. The study established that the teachers could not decide on the frequency of their meetings and this has been found to be one of the major challenges in terms of the effectiveness of history subject panels in professional development. This was interpreted to mean that teachers could not give or receive feedback on their practice

at opportune times. This brings to the fore the control-autonomy debate persisting in the scholarship on teacher professional development.

The study also hopes to generate debate and sensitise other researchers on new areas of research on appropriate policies and practices for promoting teacher-led professional development using history subject panels. The scenario is that history subject panels are operating without clear guiding policies. The study established that participants were beginning to make calls for policies that could make it mandatory for school heads to release teachers and students for history subject panel workshops and seminars. This study also challenges NASH to consider a budget for subject panels in the same way they plan and budget for other activities such as sports.

Finally, this study immensely contributed to me personally as an inexperienced researcher on teacher professional development using history subject panels. The interactions I had with my supervisor, other PhD students, education inspectors, school heads and 'A' level history teachers enabled me to grow as a person and a researcher. Professionally, I am now better informed about how to conduct research ethically and on the importance of collaboration with peers and specifically, on the subject matter around teacher-led professional development in general and in the Zimbabwean context specifically.

5.10 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND POLICY

The following recommendations are made regarding the improvement of teacher professional development using history subject panels.

5.10.1 Recommendations for practice

1) There is need for teachers to use student work as artefacts during history subject panel meetings. The study established that when teachers discussed how to assess 'A' level history essays effectively, they only used ZIMSEC marking guides without reference to student work. The marking guides provide mark

bands showing the marks to be allocated for each grade and the accompanying characteristics of essays under each specific mark band. Whilst this goes a long way in making teachers aware of the marks to be allocated for the different essay categories, it is recommended that teachers include student work as models to help increase teachers' understanding. Literature strongly recommends using student work in teacher professional development.

2) There is need to divide schools into smaller subject panels to reduce congestion during history subject panel seminars. The study established that history subject panels play a critical role of providing a space for students from different schools to learn from examiners and each other. Whilst students benefit a lot from these seminars, there is a need to reduce overcrowding to make them more effective. I observed that the majority of the students left seminars without their concerns being addressed because they will be too many. Teachers faced challenges in controlling students as some of them ended up causing disciplinary problems such as making noise during seminars. Literature reiterates that people learn more effectively when in smaller groups.

3) History subject panel venues need to be rotated or schools need to be divided into smaller groups such that neighbours have separate sessions. This reduces transport costs for teachers from distant schools and increases time for teacher discussions. The study findings revealed that teachers from distant rural schools arrived late and left early before the end of sessions. This recommendation is important as it also enables them to address equity concerns.

4) There is also a need for the executive committee to consider coming up with mechanisms for follow-ups after their meetings. Follow-up is very important as teachers who may be facing challenges in enacting agreed upon changes receive urgent support. The study established that teachers do not have frequent history subject panel meetings. This suggests that teachers take time to receive feedback from colleagues. Literature reiterates the importance of follow-up after professional development meetings.

5.10.2 Recommendations for policy

1) The study established that one of the key roles of history subject panels was the provision of induction of newly qualified teachers. Literature revealed that teacher development institutions do not provide their graduates with adequate skills to deal with the initial challenges of teaching effectively. In some contexts, newly certified teachers are attached to mentors before they are left to deal with their classes on their own. Therefore, I strongly recommend that the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education join hands with NASH and come up with policies and guidelines for the provision of teacher induction using history subject panels.
2) The development of communities of learning among students was one of the critical findings of this study. This finding by default is not something that happens at every subject panel that one attends. I advocate that this initiative should move from a situation where it happens by default to deliberately creating and fostering it. Therefore, I strongly recommend that NASH and the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education work together in reorganising history subject panels in such a way that they also begin to be a platform for deeper student learning.

3) There is need for the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to reconsider bringing back DRTs to the district education offices so that they coordinate teacher professional development activities. The study established that there is poor communication between the executive committee and the teachers in the various schools. Many teachers fail to attend history subject panel meetings because, in the majority of cases, they do not receive information about meetings in time. DRTs will help relieve pressure on the executive committee members who are also full-time teachers.

4) Finally, it is strongly recommended that the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education come up with clear policies governing teacher professional development through subject panels. The scenario is that teacher professional development seems to have been left to NASH with limited resources at their disposal. These policies also need to make it mandatory for school heads to release teachers for professional development meetings. The

study established that the school heads might choose to allow or disallow teachers to attend history subject panel meetings. As a result, many teachers fail to take part in the majority of the history subject panel meetings.

5.11 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

The following recommendations for further research on this topic are suggested:

- The study was confined to teacher perspectives of history subject panels as an innovation for teacher professional development in one subject area and district in Zimbabwe. Further studies may focus on other subject areas or districts and even other countries to provide a broader view on this topic.
- The study recommends that the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and NASH come up with policies that provide guidelines on effective teacher induction through subject panels. There is therefore a need to research the policies and practice for teacher induction through subject panels.

- It was established in this study that communities of learning among students happen by default. There is need for further research on the role of students in the subject panels and whether and how such a role can be deepened, if at all.
- In this study, it emerged that there are no clear policies guiding teacher professional development through subject panels. Further research is needed on the policies and practices of subject panels elsewhere and in other subject areas.

5.12 FINAL REFLECTIONS ON THE STUDY

This section presents my final reflections on this study on teachers' perspectives of history subject panels as an innovation for professional development.

As an innovation for teacher professional development, history subject panels clearly show a departure from traditional approaches. History subject panels are characterised by teacher collaboration on relevant issues that affect them in their

classroom work. The curriculum guidance system provided by history subject panels marks a paradigm shift from the norm where teachers are only provided with centrally designed curricula and are left on their own to chart the way forward in the labyrinth. I am now convinced that if adequately supported financially and provided with clear and more binding policies, history subject panels may go a long way in addressing equity concerns in our societies. There is a need for guidelines to promote effective teacher induction and deeper student learning through history subject panels.

I was surprised and humbled by the level of support teachers provided me during data collection. This was evident in how determined teachers were to see history subject panels improve as vehicles for their professional development and student achievement. Equally important was the willingness of the more knowledgeable teachers to share their experiences with novice teachers. I was also humbled by the determination of the facilitators to help students from various schools improve their learning without any form of payment. I learnt that at times people have to play certain roles as part of their social responsibility to their communities. As a result of these experiences, I have grown as a person and professionally. The interactions I have had with my supervisor and fellow doctoral students have been instrumental in my re-conceptualisation of teacher professional development in general in addition to the role of subject panels in that process. I have come to appreciate the importance of collaboration that includes not only subject teachers but also learners, for the improvement of teaching and learning.

REFERENCES

Ainscow, M. 2016. Collaboration as a strategy for promoting equity in education: Possibilities and barriers. *Journal of Professional Development,*1(2): 159-172.

Aldiabat, K. & Navenec, C.L. 2011. Philosophical roots of classical grounded theory: Its foundations in symbolic interactionism. *The Qualitative Report,* 16(4): 1063-1080.

Althauser, K. 2015. Job-embedded professional development: Its impact on teacher self-efficacy and student performance. *Teacher Development,*19(2): 210-225.

Anastas, J. W. 2012. Quality in qualitative evaluation: Issues and possible answers. *Research on Social Work Practice,* 14:57-65.

Atkinson, M., Springate, I., Johnson, F.& Halsey, K. 2007. *Inter-school collaboration: A literature review.* Bershire: National Foundation for Educational Research.

Bahous R., Busher, H.& Nabhani, M. 2016. Teachers' views of professional development in four urban Lebanese primary schools. *Teacher Development,* 1-6. DOI:10.1080/13664530.2015.1124137.

Banda B. 2013.*Continuing professional development through sustainable in-service teacher training system in Kenya, Malawi and Zambia.* Berlin: Technische Universitat Berlin.

Barbour, R.C. 2013.*Introducing qualitative research: A student's guide to the craft of doing qualitative research*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

Battersby, S.L. & Verdi, B. 2015. The culture of professional learning communities to improve teacher efficacy and support student learning. *Arts Education Policy Review,* 116(1): 22-29.

Bayar, A. 2014. The components of effective professional development activities in terms of teachers' perspectives.*International Online Journal of Educational Science,* 6(2): 319-327.

Bazeley, P. 2013. *Qualitative data analysis: Practical strategies*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

Berg, B.L. 2001. *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Bett, H.K. 2016. The cascade model of teachers' CPD in Kenya: A time for change? *Cogent Education,* 3: 1-9

Birman, B.F., Desimone, L., Porter, A.C. & Garret, M. 2000. Designing professional development that works*. Educational Leadership,* 57(8): 28-33.

Blasé, J.& Blasé, J. 2000. Effective instructional leadership: Teachers' perspectives on how principals promote teaching in schools. *Journal of Educational Administration,* 38(2): 130-142.

Blaser, C. 2005. *Literature review on professional development of teachers*. Florida, Office of Accountability and Systemwide Performance.

Borg, W.B. & Gall, M.D. 1996. *Educational Research*. New York. Longman.

Bray, M. 1987. *School clusters in the third-world: Making them work*. Paris: UNESCO-UNICEF Cooperative Programme.

Bruce, C.D.& Flynn, T. 2013. Assessing the effects of collaborative professional learning: efficacy shifts in a three-year mathematics study. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research,* 58(4): 691-709.

Caena, F.2011*. Literature review: Quality in teachers' continuing professional development.* Brussels: European Commission.

Campbell, C.A., Lieberman, A. & Yashkina, L. 2016. Developing professional capital in policy and practice. *Journal of Professional Capital and Community,* 1(3): 219-236.

Caroll, T.G.2013.*Team up for 21st century teaching and learning: What research and practice reveal about professional learning.* Washington DC: National Commission on Teaching and America's Future.

Chance, L., 2000. *Professional development schools: combining school improvement and teacher preparation*. Washington DC: National Education Assocation of the United States.

Chikoko, V. 2007. The school cluster system as an innovation: Perceptions of Zimbabwean teachers and school heads. *Africa Review,* 4(1): 42-57.

Chong, W.H. & Kong, C.A. 2012. Teacher collaborative Learning and teacher self-efficacy: The case of lesson study.*The Journal of Experimental Education,* 80(3): 263-283.

Chung, R.,Darling-Hammon, L. Andree, A., Richardson, N. & Orphanos, S. 2009. *Professional learning in the learning profession: A status report on teacher development in the United States and abroad*. Dallas TX: National Staff Development.

Cochran-Smith, M. & Lytle, S.L. 2001. Beyond certainty: Taking an inquiry stance on practice. In A. Lieberman & L. Miller. (Eds).*Teachers caught in action: Professional development that matters.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Cohen, D. 1990. A revolution in one classroom: The case of Mrs Oublier. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis,*12(3): 311-329.

Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison, K. 2011. *Research methods in education*. New York: Routledge.

Cole, P. 2012. *Linking effective professional development with effective teaching practice.* Carlton South: Education Services Australia,

Craig, H. Kraft, R.& Du Plessis J. 1998.*Teacher development: Making an impact.* Washington DC: ABEL Clearinghouse for Basic Education, Academy for Education Development.

Creswell, J. 2007. *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks CA: Sage Publications.

Creswell, J.W. & Clark, V.L.P. 2010.*Designing and conducting mixed methods research.* Thousand Oaks CA: Sage Publications.

Creswell, J.W. & Miller, D.L. 2000. Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory into Practice,* 39(3): 124-130.

Creswell, J.W. 2012. *Educational planning, conducting and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research.* Boston: Pearson.

Creswell, J.W. 2013.*Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches.* Los Angeles: Sage Publishers.

Cutler, A.B.& Ruopp, F.N. 1999. From expert to novice: The transformation from teacher to learner. In M.Z. Solomon (Ed).*The diagnostic teacher: Constructing new approaches to professional development.* New York: Teachers College Press. pp: 133-161.

Dadds, M. 1997. Continuing professional development: Nurturing the expert within. *Professional development in Education,*40: 9-16

Darling-Hammond, L. & McLaughlin, M. 2011. Policies that support professional development in the era of reform*. Phi Delta Kappan,*92(6): 81-92.

Darling-Hammond, L. & McLaughlin, M.W. 1995. Policies that support professional development in an era of reform*. Phi Delta Kappan,* 76(8): 597-604.

Darling-Hammond, L. & Richardson, N. 2009. Research review/teacher learning: What matters? *How Teachers Learn,* 66(5): 46-53.

Datnow, A. 2011. Collaboration and contrived collegiality: Revisiting Hargreaves in the age of accountability. *Journal of Educational Change*, 12: 147-158.

Day, C. & Sachs, J. 2004.*Internationalhandbook on the CPD of teachers.* Berkshire: Open University Press.

Day, C. 1999*Developing teachers: the challenges of lifelong learning*. Philadelphia: Falmer Press.

De Clercq F. & Phiri, R. 2013. The challenges of school-based teacher development initiatives in South Africa and the potential of cluster teaching. *Perspectives in Education* 31(1):77-86

De Lima J.A. 2010. Thinking more deeply about networks in education. *Journal of Educational Change,*11:1-21.

De Luca, C., Shulha, J., Luhanga, U., Shulha, L.M., Christou, T.M. & Klinger, D.D.2014. Collaborative inquiry as a professional learning structure for educators: As coping review. *Professional Development in Education,* 41(4):640-670.

De Monte, J.2013.*High-quality professional development: Supporting teacher training to improve student learning.* Washington DC: Center for American Progress.

Delport, A.& Makaye, J. 2009. Clustering schools to improve teacher professional development: Lessons learnt from a Zimbabwean case study. *Africa Education Review,* 6(1): 96-105.

Dembele, M. & Miaro, B. 2003.*Pedagogical renewal and teacher development in Sub-Saharan Africa: A thematic synthesis*. Paris: ADEA.

Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. 2000.*Handbook of qualitative research.* Thousand Oaks CA: Sage Publications.

Desimone, L.M. 2011. A primer on effective professional development.*Phi Delta Kappan,* 92(6): 68-71.

Desimone, L.M., Porter, A.C., Garet, M.S., Yoon, K.S. & Birman, B.F. 2002. Effects of professional development on teachers' instruction: results from a three-year longitudinal study.*Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis,* 24(2): 81-112.

Desta, D., Chalchisa, D. & Lemma, L. 2013. School-based continuous teacher professional development in Addis Ababa: An investigation of practices, opportunities and challenges. *Journal of International Cooperation in Education,*15(3): 77-94.

Di Paola, M.& Hoy, W.K.2014*.Improving instruction through supervision, evaluation, and professional development.* Charlotte NC: Information Age.

Dichaba, M. M. & Mokhele, M. L. 2012. Does the cascade model work for teacher training? An analysis of teachers' experiences. *International Journal of Education and Science,* 4(3): 249-254.

Dittmar, F. Mendelson, J. & Ward, V. 2008. *The school cluster system in Namibia.* Windhoek: RAISON.

Drisko, J.W. 1997. Strengthening qualitative studies and reports: standards to promote academic integrity. *Journal of Social Work,*33(1): 185-198.

Eaton, P.T. and Carborne, R.E. 2008. Asking those who know: A collaborative approach to continuing professional development. *Teacher Development,*12(3): 261-270.

Feiman-Nemser, S. 2001. From preparation to practice: Designing a continuum to strengthen and sustain teaching. *Teachers College Record,*103:1013-1055.

Flick, U. 2014.*An introduction to qualitative research.*Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

Frost, D. 2013.*Teacher-led development work: A methodology for building professional knowledge*.Available at www.herts.org.uk[Accessed 10 May 2015].

Fullan, M.G.1991. *The new meaning of educational change.* London: Cassell

Fullan, M.J. & Hargreaves, A.1991*. What is worth fighting for in your school?* Toronto: Open University Press.

Fulton, K. & Britton, T. 2011.*STEM teachers in professional learning communities: From good teachers to good teaching.* Washington: National Commission on Teaching and America's Future.

Garet, M.S., Porter, A.C., Desmone, L., Birman, B.F. & Yoon, K.S. 2001. What makes professional development effective? Results from a national sample. *American Educational Research Journal,*38(4): 915-920.

Gatawa, B.S.M. 1998. *Quantity-quality dilemma in education: The Zimbabwean experience.* Harare: College Press.

Gathara, P.M. 2010. Continuing professional development (CPD) for secondary school teachers in Kenya: Policies, trends and practices*. Journal of Research in Education and Society,*1(2):1-10.

Gathumbi, A.W. Mungai, N.J. and Hintze, D.L. 2013. Towards comprehensive professional development of teachers: The case of Kenya. *International of Process Education,*5:3-14

Gay, L.M., Mills, G.E. & Airasian, P.W. 2011.*Educational research: Competencies for analysis and applications.* Boston: Pearson Educational International.

Ghamrawi, N. 2013. Teachers helping teachers: A professional development model that promotes teacher leadership. *International Education Studies,* 6(4):171-182.

Giordano, E.A. 2008. *School clusters and teacher resource centres.* Paris: UNESCO.

Glatthorn, A.1995 Cooperative professional development: Peer centered options for teacher growth. *Education Leadership,*45(3): 31-35.

Guskey, T.S. & Yoon, K.S. 2009. What works in professional development? *Phi Delta Kappan,*90(7): 495- 500

Guskey, T.S. 2002. Professional development and teacher change. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*8(3/4): 381-39.

Guskey, T.S. 2003. What makes professional development effective? *Phi Kappan,* 48(10): 748-750.

Gwekwerere, Y.N., Mushaikwa, E. & Manokore, V. 2013. Empowering teachers to become change agents through science education in-service teacher training project in Zimbabwe. *Canadian and International Education,* 42(2): 1-1.

Hancock, B., Windridge, K. & Ockleford, E. 2009.*An introduction to qualitative research.* Yorkshire: The NIHRR DSEM/YM.

Haralambos, M., Holborn, M., Chapman, S. & Moore, S. 2013. *Sociology: Themes and perspectives.* London: Harper-Collins Publishers.

Hardman, F., Ackers, J., Abrishamian, N. & O'Sullivan, M. 2011. Developing a system approach to teacher education in Sub-Saharan Africa: Emerging lessons from Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. *Journal of Comparative and International Education,*41: 669-683.

Hargreaves, A. 2010. Presentism, individualism, and conservatism: the legacy of Dan Lortie's school teacher: A sociological study*. Curriculum and Inquiry,*40(1): 143-154.

Hargreaves, A.& Fullan, M.2012*. Professional capital: transforming teaching in every school.* New York: NY Teachers.

Hargreaves, A.1994.*Changing teachers, changing times*: *Teachers' workplace and culture in post-modern age*. New York: Teachers' College Press.

Hargreaves, E., Berry, R., Lai, Y.C., Leung, P., Scott, D. & Stobart, G. 2013. Teachers' experiences of autonomy in continuing professional development: Teacher learning communities in London and Hong Kong.*Teacher Development,* 17(1): 19-34.

Harwell, S.H. 2003. *Teacher professional development: It's not an event, it's a process.* Florida: National Staff Development Council.

Hord, S. 1997. *Professional learning communities of continuous inquiry and improvement*. Austin TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Huberman, M. 2001. Networks that alter teaching: Conceptualisations, exchanges, and experiments. In J. Soler, A. Craft & H.M. Burgess (Eds).*Teacher development: Exploring our own practice.* London: Paul Chapman and The Open University.pp: 141-159.

Ingvarson, I.2014. Standards-based professional development and certification: by the profession, for the profession. In L. E. Martin, D.S. Kragler, D.J. Quatroche & K.L. Bauserman (Eds.).*Handbook of professional development in education: Successful models and practices, Pre K-12*. New York: Guilford Press.pp.385-411

Jita, L.C. & Mokhele, M.L. 2014. When teacher clusters work: selected experiences of South African teachers with the cluster approach to professional development. *South African Journal of Education,* 34(2): 1-15.

Jita, L.C. & Ndlalane, T.C. 2009. Clusters in South Africa: Opportunities and constraints for teacher development and change*. Perspectives in Education,* 27(1): 58-68.

Jita, L.C.& Mokhele, M.L. 2012. Institutionalising teacher clusters in South Africa: Dilemmas and contradictions. *Perspectives in Education,* 30(2): 1-11.

Junaid, M.I. & Maka, F. 2014*. In-service teacher education in Sub-Saharan Africa: A synthesis report.* Dakar: UNESCO.

Kafyulilo, A.C. 2013. Professional development through teacher collaboration: an approach to enhance teaching and learning in science and mathematics in Tanzania. *Africa Education Review,* 10(4): 671-688.

Kanyongo, G.Y. 2005. Zimbabwe's public education system reforms: Successes and challenges. *International Education Journal*, 6(1): 65-74.

Kennedy, A.2011. Collaborative continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers in Scotland: Aspirations, opportunities and barriers. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 34(1): 25-41.

Kennedy, A.2014. Understanding continuing professional development: The need for theory to impact on policy and practice. *Professional Development in Education,* 40(5): 688-697.

Knamiller, G.1999.*The effectiveness of teacher resource centre strategy. Education research paper No.34*. London. Department for International Development (DFID)

Knight, S.L. Wiseman, D.L. & Cooner, D. 2000. Using collaborative teacher research to determine the impact of professional development school activities on elementary students' math and writing outcomes.*Journal of Teacher Education,* 5(5): 26-38.

Komba, W.L. & Nkumbi, E. 2008. Teacher professional development in Tanzania: Perceptions and practices.*Journal of International Cooperation in Education,* 11(3): 67-83.

Lauer, P.A., Christopher, R., Firpo-Triplett, R.&Butching, F. 2014.The impact of short-term professional development outcomes: A review of the literature*. Professional Development in Education,* 40(2): 207-227.

Lauwerier, T. & Akkari, A. 2015. *The teachers and quality of basic education in Sub-Saharan Africa.* Washington: UNESCO.

Lee, I. 2011. Teachers as presenters at continuing professional development seminars in English-as-a-foreign-language context: 'I find it more convincing'. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education,*36(2):30-42.

Leu, E. & Ginsburg, G. 2011.*First principles: Designing effective education programs for in-service teacher professional development.* Washington DC: USAID.

Leu, E. 2004. *The patterns and purposes of school-based and cluster teacher professional development programmes*. Washington DC: US Agency for International Development.

Levine, T.H. & Marcus, A.S. 2010. How the structure and focus of teachers' collaborative activities facilitate and constrain teacher learning. *Teaching and Teacher Education,* 26: 389-398.

Lieberman A. & Grolnick, M. 1998. Educational reform networks: Changes in the forms of reform. In A. Hargreaves,A. Lieberman,M. Fullan&D. Hopkins. (Eds.). *International handbook of educational change.* London: Kluver Academic Publishers.pp. 710-729.

Lieberman, A. & McLaughlin, M.W. 1992. Networks for educational change: Powerful and problematic. *Phi Delta Kappan,*74: 637-677.

Lieberman, A. & McLaughlin, M.W. 1992. Networks for educational change.*Phi Delta Kappan,* 73(9): 673-677.

Lieberman, A. 1990. *Schools as collaborative cultures: Creating the future now.* Bristol: The Falmer Press.

Lieberman, A. 1995. Practices that support teacher development: Transforming conceptions of professional learning. *Phi Delta Kappan,*76: 591-596

Lieberman, A. 2000. Networks as learning communities: Shaping the future of teacher development. *Journal of Teacher Education,* 51(3): 221-227.

Lietz, C.A.& Zayas, L.E. 2010. Evaluating qualitative research for social work practitioners. *Advances in Social Work,* 11: 188-202.

Lincoln, Y.S. & Guba, E.G. 1985. *Naturalistic inquiry*. Berverley Hills: Sage Publications.

Little, J.W. 2006. *Professional community and professional development in learning-centred school.* Washington DC: National Education Association.

Loh, J. 2013. Inquiry into issues of trustworthiness and quality in narrative studies: A perspective. *The Qualitative Report,* 18(65):1-15.

Mackinnon, G. 2005. Symbolic interactionism: A lens for judging the social constructivist potential of learner-centered chemistry software. *International Journal of Technology and Learning,*1(2): 89-102.

Madungwe, L.S., Mavesera, S., Moyana, D. And Seremwe, M. 2000. *Baseline study on clusters.* (Unpublished report) Harare: BSPZ.

Mansfield, C. & Thompson, G.2016. The value of collaborative rounds for teacher professional learning in Australia. *Professional Development,* (In press): 1-32 htt://eprints.qut.edu.au/94074/

Maphahlele L.K. & Rampa, S.H. 2015. Cluster system: An innovative network for teacher development. *Procedia-Social and Behavioal Sciences,* 116: 3131-3134.

Maphahlele, L.K.2012. School-cluster system: A qualitative study on innovative networks for teacher development*. Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences,* 41:340-343.

Maphosa, C., Mutekwe, E., Machingambi, S., Wadyesango, N. & Ndofirepi, A. 2013. School clusters in Zimbabwe: What issues do clusters tackle? *International Journal of Science*, 5(3): 293-300.

McMillan, J.H. & Schumacher, S. 2010. *Research in education: Evidence-based inquiry.* Boston: Pearson.

McNeil, J. 2004. *School and cluster-based teacher professional development: Bringing teacher learning to the schools*. Washington DC: United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

McNeill, P.& Townley, C. 1986.*Fundamentals of sociology*. Cheltenhan: Stanley Thornes Publishers.

Meirink, J.A., Imants, J., Meijer P.C. & Velop, N. 2010.Teacher learning and collaboration in innovative teams. *Cambridge Journal of Education,* 40(2): 161-181.

Merriam, S.B.1998.*Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Franscisco: Jossey-Bass.

Mertens, D.M. 2013.*Research and evaluation in education and psychology.* Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

Miller, C., Smith, C.& Tilstone, C.1998. Professional development by distance education: Does distance lend enhancement? *Cambridge Journal of Education,* 28(2): 221-230.

Miller, L. 2001. School-university partnership as a venue for professional development. In A. Lieberman & A. Miller (Eds.).*Teachers caught in action: Professional development that matters.* New York: Teachers College Press. pp: 102-117.

Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture.2000.*The better schools programme (Zimbabwe): A manual on clusters.* Harare: Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture.

Ministry of Education. 1995.*The better schools programme in Zimbabwe: Training and support for teachers, heads and education officers*. Harare: Ministry of Education.

Mitchell, C. & Jonker, D. 2013. Benefits and challenges of a teacher cluster in South Africa: The case of Sizabantwana. *Perspectives in Education,* 31(4): 100-113.

Mokhele, L.& Jita, L.C. 2010. South African teachers' perspectives on continuing professional development: A case study of the Mpumalanga Secondary Science Initiative.*Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences,* 9:1762-1766.

Mokhele, M.2013, Empowering teachers: An alternative model for professional development in South Africa.*Journal of Social Science*, 34(1): 73-81.

Mokhele, M.L. & Jita, L.C. 2012. South African teachers' perspectives on continuing professional development: A case study of the Mpumalanga Secondary Science Initiative, *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 9: 1762-1766.

Mokhele, M.L. & Jita, L.C. 2012. When professional development works: South African teachers' perspectives. *Anthropologist,* 14(6): 575-585.

Mokhele, M.L.2011. Teachers' perspectives on continuing professional development: A case study of the Mpumalanga Secondary Science Initiative (MSSI) project. Unpublished PhDthesis. Pretoria: University of South Africa.

Mokhele, M.L.2014. Reaching consensus on 'best practices' of professional development: A critical review of the literature. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences,* 5(27): 411-415.

Moonen, B.& Voogt, J.1998. Using networks to support the professional development of teachers. *Journal of In-service Education,* 24(17): 99-110.

Moons, B.2007*. Research analysis: Attracting, developing and retaining effective teachers: A global overview of current policies and practices*. Geneva: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

Moore, A.S., De Stephano, J., Terway, A. & Balwanz, D. 2008.*Expanding secondary education for Sub-Saharan Africa: Where are the teachers?* Washington: USAID.

Muijs, D. & Harris, A. 2006. Teacher-led school improvement: Teacher leadership in the United Kingdom. *Teaching and Teacher Education,* 1-12.

Muijs, D. 2008. Widening opportunities? A case study of school-to-school collaboration a rural district. *Improving Schools,* 11: 61-73.

Mulkeen, A., Chapman, D.W., DeJaeghere, J.G. and Leu, E. 2007.*Recruting, retaining, and retraining secondary school teachers and principals in Sub-Saharan Africa.* Washington DC: The World Bank.

Mulkeen, A.2010. *Teachers in Anglophone Africa: Issues in teacher supply, training, and management.* Washington: The World Bank.

Mundry, S. 2005. Changing perspectives in professional development. *Science Educator,* 14(1): 9-15

Ndamba, G.T. 2013.A critical review of policy on language in education for Africa: A case of Zimbabwe. Unpublished PhD thesis. Pretoria. University of South Africa.

Ngcoza K.& Southwood, S. 2015. Professional development networks: From transmission to co-construction.*Perspectives in Education,* 33(1): 1-11.

Nieuwenhuis, J. 2012. Introducing qualitative research. In K. Maree.*First steps in research.* Pietermaritzburg: Van Shaik. pp: 70-117.

Nwagbara, A.C. 2014. The effectiveness of teachers and school cluster model of primary school mathematics teachers' professional development in Cross River State, Nigeria.*Asia Pacific Journal of Education, Arts and Sciences,* 1(3):12-19.

Nyagura L.M. & Reece, J.L. 1989. The school head as an instructional leader in Zimbabwe secondary schools. *Zimbabwe Journal of Educational Research,* 1(3): 304-341

Nyagura, L.M. 1993. Quantitative developments, quality and equity concerns in Zimbabwean primary and secondary education sectors. *Zimbabwe Journal of Educational Research,* 5(1): 21-40.

Nziramasanga, C.T. 1999.*Zimbabwe: Report on the presidential commission of inquiry into education and training.* Harare: Government Printers.

Ono, Y. & Ferreira, J.G. 2010. A case study of continuing teacher professional development through lesson study in South Africa. *South African Journal of Education,*30(1): 59-74.

Orb, A., Eiesenhauer, L. & Wynaden, D. 2001. Ethics in qualitative research. *Journal of Nursing Scholars,* 33: 93-96.

Owen, S.M.2015. Teacher professional learning communities in innovative contexts: 'Ah hah, moments', 'passion' and' making a difference' for student learning.*Professional Development in Education,*41(1): 57-74.

Owens, M.A. Pogodzinsk, B. and Hill, W.E. 2016 Job-embedded professional development policy in Michigan: Can it be successful? *Professional Development in Education*, 42(2): 201-217.

Padgett, D.K. 2008.*Qualitative research for social work.* Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

Patton, K., Parker, M. & Pratt, E. 2013. Helping teachers help themselves: Professional development that makes a difference. *NASSP Bulletin,* 99(1): 26-42.

Patton, K., Parker, M.&Pratt, E. 2013. Meaningful learning in professional development without telling. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education,* 32:441-459.

Patton, M.Q.2002.*Qualitative research and evaluation methods*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Penny, A.J. &Harley, K. 1995. Broadening the experiences of teachers in training: A South African study.*Journal of Education for Teaching,* 21(2): 163-175.

Penuel, W.R. Fishman, B.J. Yamguchi, R.& Gallagher, L.P.2007. What makes professional development effective? Strategies that foster curriculum implementation, *American Educational Research Journal,* 44(4): 921-958

Picower, B. 2015. Nothing about us without us: Teacher driven critical professional development. *Radical Pedagogy,* 12(1): 1-26.

Pomuti, H. &Weber, E. 2012.*Decentralization and school management in Namibia*: *The ideologies of education bureaucrats in implementing government policies*. Hindoek, ISRN Education.

Porter, A.C., Garet, M.S., Desimone, L.M. & Birman, B.F. 2003 Providing effective professional development: Lessons from Eisenhower program. *Science Educator,* 12(1): 23-40.

Pryor, J., Akyeampong, K., Westbrook, J. & Lussier K. 2012. Rethinking teacher preparation and professional development in Africa: An analysis of the curriculum of teacher education in the teaching of early reading and mathematics. *Curriculum Journal,* 23: 409-502.

Rayn, F., Coughlan, M. & Cronin, P.2007. Step-by-step guide to critiquing research. Part 2: Qualitative research. *British Journal of Nursing,* 16(12): 738-744.

Ricon-Gallardo S. & Fullan, M. 2016. Essential features of effective networks in education. *Journal of Professional Capital and Community,* 1(1): 5-22.

Ritchie, J. & Lewis, J. 2013. *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers.* Los Angels: Sage Publications.

Roberts, J. 2006. Limits to communities of practice. *Journal of Management Studies,* 43(3): 623-638.

Rose, J. 2011. *Teachers' continuing professional development: A new approach.* Washington DC: International Congress for effectiveness and improvement.

Sachs, J. 2005. Teacher professional standards: A policy strategy to control, regulate or enhance the teaching profession? In N. Bascia, A. Cumming, A. Datnow, K. Leithwood & D.Livingstone (Eds). *International handbook of educational policy.* Springer Netherlands: 579-592.

Schwille, J., Dembele, M. & Schumbert, J. 2007.*Global perspectives on teacher training: Improving policy and practice*. Paris: International Institute for Educational Planning.

Scribner, J. 1999. Professional development: Untangling the influence of work context in teacher learning. *Educational Administration Quarterly,* 35(2): 238-266.

Selemani-Meke, E. 2013. Teacher motivation and implementation of continuing professional development programmes in Malawi. *Anthropologist,* 15(1): 107-115.

Shah, M. 2012. The importance and benefits of teacher collegiality in schools– A literature review. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences,*46: 1242-1246.

Shenton, A.K. 2004. Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research project. *Education for Information,* 22: 63-75.

Shulman, L. 1986. Those who understand knowledge growth in teaching. *Educational Researcher,*15(2): 4-14.

Silverman, D.2013. *Interpreting qualitative research: A student guide*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

Smith, C. & Gillespie, M. 2007. Research on professional development and teacher change: Implications for adult basic education. *Professional Development and Teacher Change,*2(2): 205-244.

Stacy, M. 2013.Teacher-led professional development: Empowering teachers as self-advocates. *The Georgia Social Studies Journal,* 3(1):40-49.

Stanley, A.M. 2011. Professional development within collaborative study groups: Pitfalls and promises. *Arts Education Policy Review,*112:71-78.

Starkey, L., Stevens, S., Taylor, M., Tolia, R., Yates, A., Hall, C., McKenzie, L. & Meyer, L. 2007.*School/cluster-based secondary qualifications professional development.* Victoria: Ministry of Education Research Division

Steiner, L.2004. *Designing effective professional development experiences: What do we know?* Illnois: Learning Point.

Stoll, L., Brown, C., Thomas K. & Taylor, C. 2015. Perspectives on teacher leadership for evidence- informed improvement in England. *Leading and Managing,* 21(2): 75-89.

Sugumarie, B., Abdullah, A. Razak, A.Z. & Ghavifekr, S. 2016. Relationship between teachers' in-service training and professionalism: Suitability aspects. *Malaysian Online Journal of Educational Management,* 4(2):57-63.

Timperley, H., Wilson, A., Barrar, H. & Fung, I. 2007. *Teacher professional and development: Best evidence synthesis iteration*. Wellington: New Zealand Ministry of Education.

Tour, E. 2016. Teachers' self-initiated professional learning through personal learning networks, technology, pedagogy and education. *Technology Pedagogy and Education: 1-14:* htt://dx.doi:org/10.1080/1475939x2016:1196236.

Vescio, V., Ross, D. & Adams, A. 2008. A review of research on the impact of professional learning communities on teaching practice and student learning. *Teaching and Teacher Education,*24: 80-91.

Villegas-Reimers, E. 2003.*Teacher professional development: An international review of the literature*. Paris: UNESCO.

Walter, C. & Briggs, J. 2012. *What professional development makes the most difference to teachers?* Oxford: Creative Commons Attribution.

Wayne, M.L., Yoon, K.S., Zhu, P., Cronen, S. & Garet, M.S. 2008. Experimenting with teacher professional development: motives and methods*, Educational Researcher,* 37(8): 469-479.

Wei, R.C., Darling-Hammond, L. & Andamson, P. 2010. *Professional development in the United States: trends and challenges*. Dallas TX: National Staff Development Council.

Weil, V. & Henk, Z. 2003. Networks of schools and constructing citizenship in secondary education. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Assocciation. 84th, Chicago, IL. April 21-25.

Well, M. 2014. Elements of effective and sustainable professional learning. *Professional Development in Education*. 40(3): 488-504.

Wideen, M.F. Holborn, P.1990.Teacher education in Canada: A research review. In R.P. Tisher & M.F. Wideen (Eds). *Reseach in teacher education: International perspectives.* London: Falmer Press.

Wiel, V. & Henk Z. 2003. Networks of schools and constructing citizenship in secondary education. *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association*, Chicago, IL.

Yates, S.M. 2007. Teachers' perceptions of the professional development activities. *International Educational Journal,*8(2): 213-221*.*

Yin, R.K. 2011.*Qualitative research from start to finish*. New York: The Guilford Press.

Zeegers, Y.1995. Supporting teachers to implement the national curriculum: A New Zealand perspective. *Australian Science Teachers Journal,* 41(4): 45-48.

Zepeda, S.J. 2012.*Professional development: what work?* New York: Routledge.

Zvobgo, R.J. 1996. *Transforming Education: The Zimbabwean experience*. Harare: College Press.

Zvobgo, R.J.1998.*The post-colonial state and educational reform: Zimbabwe, Zambia and Botswana.* Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House.

APPENDIX A: Interview invitation letter for participants and consent form

Morgenster Teachers' College

P. O. Morgenster

Masvingo

___/_____/2015

The A' Level History Teacher

…… High School

Masvingo

Re: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Dear Sir/Madam

I hereby invite you to participate in interviews on History subject panels. My name is Godwin Mumhure, and I am presently studying for a PhD with the University of the Free State. As part of my studies, I am required to conduct research on an aspect of interest and I am interested in the role of History subject panels in professional development.

The title of my thesis is: **Zimbabwean teachers' perspectives on History subject panels as an innovation for professional development.**

The purpose of my study is to explore A' level teachers' experiences with History subject panels in professional development with a view to improve the quality and efficacy of teaching and learning in high schools. The study will be confined to Masvingo district.

The interview will involve a face-to-face dialogue with me on your experiences of the role of History subject panels in teacher professional development. The interview will cover inter alia how teachers understand the role of the History subject panels; the effectiveness of History subject panel activities; viability of History subject panels as a collaborative professional development innovation; and how History subject panels can be improved to better serve as vehicles for teacher professional development. The interview is expected to last for no more than an hour and with your permission, I will audio tape our discussion(s).

You have been identified on the basis of your in-depth knowledge about History subject panel activities. I undertake to observe confidentiality and protect you from physical, social

and/ or psychological harm. At no time will your name or school be revealed in the report of this study- pseudonym or false names will be used. Your participation is voluntary and you will have the right to withdraw at any time you so wish. Results of the study will be used for educational purposes only.

In the event that you need any further information or you experience any discomfort with the interviews do not hesitate to inform me or contact my supervisor (Prof L.C. Jita).

Yours Sincerely

Godwin Mumhure Supervisor

O773998490 Professor Loyiso C. Jita

mumhuregodwin@yahoo.com+27514017522/ jilalc@ufs.ac.za

CONSENT FORM

If you agree to participate in the research study entitled:

Zimbabwean teachers' perspectives on History subject panels as an innovation for professional development.

Please complete the attached consent form

- *I hereby give free and informed consent to participate in the above mentioned research study.*
- *I understand what the study is about, why I have been approached to participate.*
- *I understand what the potential benefits and risks are'*
- *I grant the researcher permission to audio tape our discussion(s).*
- *I give the researcher permission to make use of the information collected from my participation, for research purposes only.*

Participant's Signature: ---------- Date: ----------

Researcher's Signature: ----------Date: ----------

APPENDIX B: Interview Protocol/Schedule

Responses will be audio tapped and transcribed, field notes will be written as well.

1. **Name and background**- how long have you been teaching? How long have been teaching A' level History? Where?
2. How is it like to teach A' level History?[Probe: is it demanding?In what ways is it demanding?). Can you tell me 2 or 3 challenges you are facing in your teaching of A' level History?]
3. For how long have you been involved in History subject panel activities? Can you tell me 2 or 3 things you like about History panel activities and why? Can you tell me 2 or 3 things that you dislike about History subject panel activities and why?

4. **Let's talk a little bit about the Masvingo district History subject panel and its role?**

    1. What can you tell me about the Masvingo district History subject panel?
    2. Can you tell me what the Masvingo district History subject panel means to you? [Probe: Can you explain a little bit more……?].
    3. Can you tell me 3 or 4 roles of the Masvingo district History subject panel?
    4. Let's talk about the difference(s) between this History subject panel and other forms of teacher professional development you participated in? (e.g. Workshops offered by outside experts)[Probes: If they see it as better: In what ways is it better/useful/helpful? Give me an example to show what you mean].

5. **Let's now talk about how you regard the effectiveness of History subject panels' activities?**
    1. Can you tell me 3 or 4 activities teachers engage in during the History subject panel meetings? How are teachers involved in these activities?
    2. Who facilitates at these meetings? How are the facilitators chosen? [Probe: why]
    3. Who sets the agenda(s)/ issues to be discussed during the History subject panel meetings? [Probe: why? How do they go about setting the agenda?].

4. Which activities do you find important to you? [Probe: why?]. Which activities do you find not very important to you? [Probe: why?]. What do you do when the focus is on activities that you find less important or useful to you? (Probe: To see what options they have to influence the agenda or opt in and out of the meetings].
5. As an A' level teacher, what is your overall assessment of the effectiveness of the History subject panel activities to you? [Probe: Can you explain a little bit more giving examples?].

6. I wish to focus a little bit on how you regard the viability of the History subject panels as an innovation for teachers' continuing professional development.

1. What 3 or 4 things do you think show that the Masvingo district History subject panel is **effective** in meeting its goal of improving teachers' instructional practices and student achievement? [Probe: How? Can you explain giving examples for each one of them?].
2. What 3 or 4 things do you think show that the Masvingo district History subject panel is **not effective** in meeting its goal of improving teachers' instructional practices and student achievement? [Probe: How? Can you explain giving examples for each one of them?].

7. Let's now focus on the challenges teachers face using the Masvingo History subject panel as a vehicle for teacher professional development and your suggestions/recommendations about possible improvements on its structure and function.

1. How is the Masvingo district History subject panel organized/structured?
2. What do you see as the advantages /benefits of using such a structure? [Probe: How? Can you explain giving examples?].
3. What challenges do teachers face in using this structure? [Probe: How? Can you explain giving examples? How can this structure be improved?].

4. What challenges are faced by the teachers using the Masvingo district History subject panel as a vehicle for their continuing professional development? [Probe: How? Can you explain giving examples?].
5. How can these challenges be improved in order to make the Masvingo district History subject panel better serve as a vehicle for teachers' continuing professional development? [Probe: Can you explain giving examples?].
6. Do you have opportunities to collaborate with other teachers during the panel meetings? [tell me more…Probe for: How it happens; how the collaboration is facilitated; who facilitates; around what issues or topics do teachers collaborate; does it always work; what makes it work or are there ground rules; how do they know the ground rules or are they implicit or explicit; how do they experience the collaboration (useful or not; cumbersome etc.)].
7. If you were in-charge of all the subject panel activities, what would you do differently that you think would make people say "wow, a new broom is in town!"? [Probe: Give me some examples and tell me why you would take this approach…].
8. Are there any other issues that you think we did not cover in our conversation about History subject panel that you think are important for me to know?

Thank you very much for participating in this study. I will phone or call again if I may need any further clarification(s) from you.

APPENDIX C: Focus Group Discussions Invitation Letter for Participants

Morgenster Teachers' College

P. O. Morgenster

Masvingo

___/_____/2015

The A' Level History Teacher

……High School

Masvingo

Re: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION ON 11 JULY 2015 AT XXX HIGH SCHOOL: TIME 1000 HOURS

Dear Sir/Madam

I hereby invite you to participate in focus group discussions on History subject panels. My name is Godwin Mumhure, and I am presently studying for a PhD with the University of the Free State. As part of my studies, I am required to conduct research on an aspect of interest and I interested in the role of History subject panels in professional development.

The title of my thesis is: **Zimbabwean teachers' perspectives on the History subject panels as an innovation for professional development.**

The purpose of my study is to explore A' level teachers' experiences with History subject panels in professional development with a view to improve the quality and efficacy of teaching and learning in high schools. The study will be confined to Masvingo district.

The focus group discussion will involve a face-to-face dialogue with me and other History teacherson your experiences of History subject panels as an innovation for teacher professional development. The focus group discussion will cover inter alia how teachers understand History subject panels and their role in professional development; the

effectiveness of History subject panel activities; viability of History subject panels as a collaborative professional development innovation; and how History subject panels can be improved to better serve as vehicles for teacher professional development. The focus group discussion is expected to last for no more than two hour s and with your permission; I will audio tape our discussions.

You have been identified on the basis of your in-depth knowledge about History subject panel activities. I undertake to observe confidentiality and protect you from physical, social and/ or psychological harm. At no time will your name or school be revealed in the report of this study. Pseudonyms or false names will be used. Your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any time you so wish. Results of the study will be used for educational purposes only.

In the event that you need any further information or you experience any discomfort with the interviews do not hesitate to inform me or contact my supervisor (Prof. L. C. Jita).

Yours sincerely

Godwin Mumhure Supervisor

O773998490 Professor Loyiso C. Jita

mumhuregodwin@yahoo.com+27514017522/ jilalc@ufs.ac.z

CONSENT FORM

If you agree to participate in the research study entitled:

Zimbabwean teachers' perspectives on the History subject panels as an innovation for professional development.

Please complete the attached consent form

- *I hereby give free and informed consent to participate in the above mentioned research study.*
- *I understand what the study is about, why I have been approached to participate.*
- *I understand what the potential benefits and risks are'*
- *I grant the researcher permission to audio tape our discussion(s).*
- *I give the researcher permission to make use of the information collected from my participation, for research purposes only.*

Participant's Signature: ---------- Date: ----------

Researcher's Signature: ----------Date: ----------

APPENDIX D: Focus Group Discussion Protocol/Schedule

Each participant is given an exercise book to write own answers to given questions followed by group discussions.

PART 1 Introduction

- Introductions and setting of ground rules for the proceedings.

1. **Let's first discuss our understandings of History subject panels and their role?**
   (a) What does the Masvingo district History subject panel mean to us as teachers?
   (b) Can we identify 3 or 4 role(s) of the Masvingo district History subject panel?
   (c) What are the differences between the History subject panel and other forms of teacher professional development (e.g. Workshops conducted by outside experts).

2. **Let us now discuss how we regard the effectiveness of the History subject panels' activities?**
   (a) Let us list the activities we engage in during our History subject panel meetings.
   (b) Who facilitates at our History subject panel meetings? How and why are these people selected to be facilitators?
   (c) Who sets the agenda(s) for our meetings? Is this the best way to come up with issues to be discussed at our meetings and Why?
   (d) Which activities do we consider important and which ones are less important to us as teachers and our students? (Why?)
   (e) Overall, what can we say about the effectiveness of the Masvingo district History subject panel activities in improving our instructional practices and student achievement in our schools? How and Why?
3. **Let us now discuss about how we regard the viability of the Masvingo district History subject panel as an innovation for our continuing professional development.**
   (a) Let us list 3 or 4 ways to show how the Masvingo district History subject panel is helpful to us as teachers and our students. (Let us explain how for each one of them).

(b) Let us list 3 or 4 things to show how the Masvingo district subject panel is not effective in meeting its goal of improving our instructional practices and student achievement. (Let us fully explain how for each one of them).

(c) Overall, what can we say about the viability of the Masvingo district History subject panel as an innovation for our continuing professional development. (Let us explain our answer giving examples).

4. **Finally, let us discuss about the challenges we face in using the Masvingo district History subject panel structure and function, and improvements we think can be effected in order to better serve us as a vehicle for our continuing professional development?**
   (a) How is our History subject panel structured/organized?
   (b) What 3 or 4 benefits and what 3 or 4 challenges are we facing in using such a structure? Let us explain our reasons giving examples.
   (c) What 3 or 4 shortcomings do we find in the way our History subject panel operates? How can each of these shortcomings be improved?(Let us explain giving examples for each one of them).
   (d) Overall, what recommendations (3 or 4) can we come up with to improve the structure and function of our History subject panels in order to better serve as a vehicle for our professional development?

Thank you very much for participating in this very important research study.

APPENDIX E: Observation Protocol/Schedule

Observation process:

The principal researcher will take down field notes and a fuller version of the proceedings will be written within 24 hours of the event.

Observations will be informed by the following broad question:

What are the History teachers' perspectives on History subject panels as an innovation for professional development?

1. The following will be observed:
   (a) What form of activities do teachers engage in and artifacts they use during History subject panel meetings?
   (b) How do the teachers engage in the various activities? (Actively/passively/individually/collaboratively?).
   (c) Are the activities job-embedded in teachers' daily work? (in terms of subject matter content; teaching strategies; and collaborative)
   (d) What artifacts are they using? (e.g. students' work/ student results)
2. How the History subject panel meetings are conducted?
   (a) Who facilitates at the History subject panels?
   (b) What is nature of the interactions and how do the teachers resolve individual differences?
   (c) Who sets the agenda and how is it negotiated with the participants?
3. What are the various comments teachers raise about issues they are discussing?
4. Are there any other relevant happenings?

APPENDIX F: Document Analysis Protocol/Schedule

The analysis of documents will be informed by the following broad question:

What are the History teachers' perspectives on the role of History subject panels in professional development?

The following will be analysed:

1. What were the agendas teachers deliberated on during their History subject panel sessions?
2. What activities did teachers engage in during their sessions?
3. Who facilitated at these sessions?
4. How relevant to teachers' work were the various activities they engaged in during their History subject panel meetings?
5. Are there any other relevant aspects of these minutes/reports to my study?

APPENDIX G: Application Letter to carry out research

Morgenster Teachers' College

P. O. Morgenster

Masvingo

01 July 2015

The Permanent Secretary

Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education

P.O. Box 89

Causeway

Harare

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Request for permission to carry out research in Masvingo Province

I hereby request permission to conduct research in selected high schools in Masvingo Province, particularly in Masvingo district.

My name is Godwin Mumhure, and I am presently studying for a PhD degree with the University of the Free State. As part of my Doctoral programme, I am required to conduct research on an aspect of interest with a view to making a contribution to our knowledge and understanding of the issue under study. The title of my research project is:

Zimbabwean teachers' perspectives on History subject panels as an innovation for professional development.

The purpose of the study is to explore teachers' perspectives on the role of History subject panels in professional development. I am particularly interested in the teachers' experiences of History subject panels as an innovation for their professional development; the

challenges they face and how History subject panels can be improved to better serve as vehicles for teachers' continuing professional development in Zimbabwe and elsewhere. The study has the potential to benefit the A' level History teachers and policymakers by pointing out challenges, the successes and needs for supporting teachers in their professional development.

The study will involve 1) interviews with five A' Level history teachers, at a time that is convenient to them; 2) Focus group discussions with ten A' level teachers soon after their history subject panel sessions; 3) Reading and analysing minutes of past history subject panel meetings; and 4) observing history subject panel meetings in session. The interviews will not last for more than an hour per session. The observations of history subject panels in session will not disrupt the teachers' programme since I will be a non-participant observer.

I undertake to observe confidentiality and to protect participants from physical and /or psychological harm. No names of the schools and/or persons shall be used in any part of the research report. All participants will be asked to participate voluntarily in the study and may withdraw at any time should they so wish.

Upon the completion of the study, I undertake to provide the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture with a copy of the research report. I will also share my research findings with A' level History teachers in Masvingo district, and possibly with other districts as well.

I attach a letter of recommendation from my research supervisor regarding the study and my progress.

If you need any further information and/ or have suggestions, please do not hesitate to contact me and/or my research supervisor Professor Loyiso C. jitalc@ufs.ac.za or +2751401752

Thank you for your kind consideration of my request.

Yours sincerely

Godwin Mumhure

Cell: +263773998490 (E-mail: mumhuregodwin@yahoo.com)

APPENDIX H: Ethical Clearance Letter from the University of the Free State

Faculty of Education

30-Jun-2015

Dear Mr Godwin Mumhure

Ethics Clearance: Zimbabwean teachers' perspectives on the role of History subject panels in continuing professional development.

Principal Investigator: Mr Godwin Mumhure

Department: School of Education Studies (Bloemfontein Campus)

With reference to you application for ethical clearance with the Faculty of Education. I am pleased to inform you on behalf of the Ethics Board of the faculty that you have been granted ethical clearance for your research.

Your ethical clearance number, to be used in all correspondence is:

UFS-HSD2015/0291

This ethical clearance number is valid for research conducted for one year from issuance. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension.

We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your research project be submitted to the ethics office to ensure we are kept up to date with your progress and any ethical implications that may arise.

Thank you for submitting this proposal for ethical clearance and we wish you every success with your research.

Yours Sincerely

Dr M.M. Nkoane
Chairperson: Ethics Committee
Faculty of Education

APPENDIX I: Letter from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education Granting Permission to carry out the study

All communications should be addressed to "The Secretary for Primary and Secondary Education"
Telephone: 799914 and 705153
Telegraphic address : "EDUCATION"
Fax: 791923

ZIMBABWE

Reference: C/426/3 Masvingo
Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education
P.O Box CY 121
Causeway
ZIMBABWE

2 July 2015

Godwin Mumhure
Morgenster Teachers' College
P. O. Morgenster
Masvingo

RE: PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT RESEARCH IN MASVINGO PROVINCE: MASVINGO DISTRICT

Reference is made to your application to carry out a research at the above mentioned district in Masvingo Province on the research title:

"ZIMBABWEAN TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE HISTORY SUBJECT PANELS AS AN INNOVATION FOR CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT"

Permission is hereby granted. However, you are required to liaise with the Provincial Education Director Masvingo, who is responsible for the district which you want to involve in your research.

You are required to provide a copy of your final report to the Secretary for Primary and Secondary Education by December 2016.

MIN. OF PRY. & SEC. EDUCATION
POLICY PLANNING RESEARCH
AND DEVELOPMENT
02 JUL 2015
P.O. BOX CY 121, CAUSEWAY
ZIMBABWE

E. Chinyowa
Acting Director: Policy Planning, Research and Development
For: **SECRETARY FOR PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION**
Cc: PED – Masvingo Province

r/agmumhure5mkwala

APPENDIX J: Letter from the Provincial Education Director (Masvingo Province); Approved by the District Education Officer (Masvingo District) Granting Permission to carry the study

ALL communications should be addressed to
"The Provincial Education Director for Primary and Secondary Education"
Telephone: 263585/264331
Fax: 039-263261

ZIMBABWE

Reference: Godwin Mumhure

Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education
P O Box 89
Masvingo

03 July 2015

The Head
Masvingo District

RE: PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT AN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH IN MASVINGO DISTRICT: MUMHURE GODWIN: UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE: SOUTH AFRICA

The above matter refers.

Mr Godwin Mumhure a student at the University of the Free State: South Africa has been granted permission to carry out research on the above mentioned District on,

"ZIMBABWE TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVENESS ON THE HISTORY SUBJECT PANELS AS AN INNOVATION FOR CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT".

Please assist him wherever possible.

MINISTRY OF PRIMARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION
PROVINCIAL EDUCATION DIRECTOR
MASVINGO
03 JUL 2015
P.O. BOX 89, MASVINGO
ZIMBABWE
TEL : 039 - 264331
FAX : 039 - 263261

Z.M. Chitiga
Provincial Education Director
MASVINGO PROVINCE

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION OFFICER
-3 JUL 2015
MASVINGO DISTRICT
P. O. BOX 89
MASVINGO