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**Exploring the use of professional learning communities to enhance history
curriculum implementation in the FET phase**

By

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DECLARATION

I, Asanda Nompumelelo Mbanjwa, declare that the thesis entitled “Exploring the use of professional learning communities to enhance history curriculum implementation in the FET phase” (two articles) is my own work. All references that I have used have been indicated and acknowledged by means of references. I declare that this work has not been submitted previously at any institution. I hereby declare that I am aware that the copyright is vested in the University of the Free State.

Handwritten signature of A.N. Mbanjwa in black ink.

11/07/2023

SIGNED

DATE

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my late grandmother “Bongisile Mbanjwa” and mother “Bonakele Mbanjwa”. I still live by your words. My aunt, Thembelihle Mbanjwa, siblings and Mbanjwa family at large for allowing me to further my studies. I am just at the beginning of my academic journey. I would like to thank everyone for their role.

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ABSTRACT

South Africa's education system has changed drastically since the country's turn to democracy in 1994. The curriculum is anticipated to evolve as the educational system changes. This means that teachers must always adjust to a system that is constantly changing because they are responsible for teaching and helping students learn. However, there has been a significant concern that teacher development has not been supported by these reforms. More effective teacher development initiatives are thus necessary because the main objective of teacher development is to improve classroom practice and learning outcomes in South African schools. This study investigated professional learning communities as a new teacher development initiative in the FET phase. The aim was to explore the use of professional learning communities to enhance history curriculum implementation in the FET phase. The study was positioned within the constructivism paradigm and a qualitative approach was adopted. Semi-structured interviews were used. Five history teachers were purposively selected and interviewed. The study was based at UMgungundlovu district in KwaZulu-Natal.

Findings reveal that teachers use professional learning communities (PLCs) as a form of collaboration, mostly in cluster meetings. Findings also show that teachers understand PLCs as they engage in different activities during PLCs. This includes content discussion based on content knowledge of a subject. Several researchers agree on the following features of professional learning communities: shared vision, values and goals, collegiality and collaborative learning, supportive conditions, shared personal practice, a collective focus on student learning, and shared trust and leadership. Findings also revealed that strategies for PLCs are workshops, peer learning, lesson study and integrating ICT as well as assessments. However, clusters do not demonstrate all the features of professional learning communities. As a result, it is vital for the Department of Basic Education to build clusters so that they operate as professional learning communities.

Keywords: PLCs, CoP, Asset-based, Curriculum, Curriculum implementation

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LIST OF ACRONYMS/ABBREVIATIONS

CAPS	Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement
CoP	Communities of Practice
DBE	Department of Basic Education
FET	Further Education and Training
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
PLCs	Professional Learning Communities'

CHAPTER 1

ORIENTATION AND INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1. INTRODUCTION

Since the inauguration of the democratic dispensation, South Africa's education system has undergone unprecedented changes. As a result of curriculum reforms, the education system has become more intricate. This study aims to explore and understand the function of professional learning communities. The purpose of this study is to explore the use of professional learning communities to enhance history curriculum implementation in the FET phase. According to Pemberton (2018), history is when we learn about how society has changed and grown over the years. Tosh (2019) defines history as an area of study where historians analyse the past in order to understand it better. It also provides us with a sense of self-identity. McDonald (2019) adds that, as we study history, we better understand who we are and where we came from. According to Trif (2020), curriculum means everything that students experience during their education. The term usually means a planned set of lessons or how educators see what students learn in relation to their goals. In addition, a curriculum is a collection of lessons and tests that teachers will teach at school. (Stauffer, 2020). In order for them to do this, history teachers need to work and operate within a group of the same teachers teaching the history subject in order to share and learn from one another and to be supported to enhance history curriculum implementation practice through initiatives such as support programmes to share their experience, working with mentor teachers, getting regular feedback from the school management, have an opportunity to observe experienced teachers, and through workshops (Clayback, Williford and Vitiello, 2023). One other powerful way of enhancing the history curriculum implementation is through the use of professional learning communities (PLCs).

Professional learning communities are collaborative learning communities that are fundamentally social and established to involve all stakeholders in improving school teaching and learning (DBE, 2011). Townley (2020) defines professional learning communities as a group of teachers with similar objectives for developing teachers and improving the quality of education. It is a group of teachers that work together to share their teaching experiences to improve their teaching skills and student's achievements. A PLC can take place at different levels, namely, at the individual teacher level, school

level and cluster level (Admiraal, Schenke, Dedong, Emmelet and Sligte, 2021). There can be different forms of PLCs for different things, but this study will focus on the PLCs formed by history teachers in a particular town in KZN to enhance their curriculum implementation practice at the FET phase.

According to Schaap and Bruij (2018), the need for PLCs is necessitated by the rapid change in the education space. This means that educators and school leaders need to learn faster than ever. Prenger, Poortman and Handelzalts (2019), supported by Zheng, Yin and Li (2019), maintain that PLCs are meant to improve subject knowledge, teaching knowledge, teaching skills, teacher identity and learner performance. Mahimuang (2018) avers that PLCs build a strong positive relationship between history teachers within the school, reflecting on ideas and teaching skills. This is in line with curriculum implementation as the act of working out the plans and suggestions that curriculum specialists and subject experts have made in a classroom or school setting (Ololube, Kpolovie and Makewa, 2015). They further suggest that the PLCs process unfolds through exchanging their academic knowledge and through shared roles and responsibilities by observing values and principles such as shared experience, shared values and vision, collective responsibility, shared teaching methods and teachers learn from one another (Brown, Horn and King, 2018).

Although the literature shows that some research findings have identified good practices in schools as a result of the creation of professional learning communities, there are also challenges identified in the literature (Handayani, Wilujeng, Presetyo and Triyanto, 2019). However, on the other hand, there is still evidence that history teachers are still struggling with basic curriculum implementation strategies, such as proper use of teaching and learning resources, choosing and using appropriate teaching strategies, and proper assessment approaches (Brown, Horn and King, 2018). Some research done on PLCs includes Carpenter and Munshower, (2020) whose research examined international and South African literature to see how existing professional learning communities in schools can improve the education for South African children. A study by Borko and Brodie (2016) found that history teachers still experience challenges in effective teaching and learning and that to be successful in implementing PLCs in the South African context requires an understanding of its purpose and how it will benefit school effectiveness. Another study by Nkengbeza and Heystek (2017) shows that there has not been a lot of focus in South Africa on the perception of teachers and the

principals of their schools as professional learning communities. A study by Borko and Brodie (2016) found that history teachers in South Africa face difficulties when it comes to teaching and learning effectively. To make PLCs work well in this context, it is important for teachers to understand why they are doing it and how it will help improve the school. Another study by Nkengbeza and Heystek (2017) shows that in South Africa, not much attention has been given to how teachers and principals see their schools as places where they can learn and grow professionally. Hence, policymakers should address the problem in the current education policies. A study by Brodie (2021) about building professional learning communities to enhance continuing professional teacher development in South African schools shows that it provides teachers with learning and developing opportunities. This study seeks to contribute to the use of PLCs by history teachers for history curriculum implementation in the FET phase for students' achievement.

1.2. PROBLEM STATEMENT OF THE STUDY

Professional learning communities have been used in the South African education system with conflicting results. According to Schaap et al.(2019), schools that engage in PLCs have clear purpose, adopt a collective culture, use collaborative inquiry to examine current reality, are action-oriented and committed to continuous improvement and are able to empower teachers to be leaders. Moreover, the research shows that teachers who are part of PLCs produce better student results. However, on the other side, there is still evidence that history teachers are still struggling with basic curriculum implementation strategies such as using teaching and learning resources, choosing and using appropriate teaching strategies, and using proper assessment approaches. Hence, this study explores the use of PLCs by history teachers to enhance history curriculum implementation.

1.3. THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Adom, Hussein and Agyem (2018), define theoretical framework as a framework that relies on an already established theory within a particular domain of study, it reflects the hypothesis of a particular study. Varpio et al., (2020) argue that a theoretical framework is the “blueprint” for the entire dissertation enquiry. It is also a natural extension of the literature review (Nord, Koohang and Paliszkiwicz, 2019). It provides the theoretical

assumptions for the large context of a study and is the foundation or lens by which a study is developed (Anfra and Mertz, 2014). Furthermore, a theoretical framework connects researchers to existing literature so as to formulate the guiding hypothesis for the research and to instruct them in appropriate data collection methods.

According to Braidotti (2019), the use of frameworks involves establishing theories aimed at elucidating, forecasting and comprehending various phenomena. This can also push the boundaries of the existing knowledge and challenge assumptions. Finally, a theoretical framework supports a research study's theory (Anfra and Mertz, 2014). Conceptual framework shows what will be discovered through the research (Collins and Stockton, 2018). It defines the relevant variables for your study and maps out how they might relate to each other (Ravitch and Riggan, 2017). A conceptual framework is a method for visually representing or documenting an anticipated correlation among various elements. Variables are objects that you desire to acquire further information about (Nord, Koochang and Paliszkievicz, 2019). Hence, the conceptual framework is usually made by looking at what other people have already studied and thought about the topic. The theoretical framework used for the study is assert-based theory.

1.3.1. ASSET-BASED THEORY

The asset-based approach is a paradigm shift towards a new way of thinking and conceptualising the world (Celedon-Pattichs et al., 2018) According to Phillips, Trevan and Kraegerthe asset-based approach involves acknowledging and valuing the talents, knowledge, relationships and capabilities of community members. It assists individuals in improving themselves, building connections and fostering stronger relationships. Asset-based approach focuses on fixing the imbalance between helping people and communities meet their needs and supporting their strengths and resources (Garoutte, 2018). This approach relies on the things and resources available within a community to promote development, it gives power to the people in the community by encouraging them to make use of what they already have (Mathie, Cameron and Gibson, 2017). The asset-based community development approach was developed by John L. McKnight and John P. Kretzmann at the Institute for Policy Research at North- Western in Evanston, Illinois (Gonzalez, Fernandez and Wilson, 2020). Asset-based community development is all about discovering and using the talents and resources that already exist in a community.

Principles that guide asset-based community development are: everyone in a community has something to offer, communities know themselves well, building relationships is important for community growth, asking questions helps find solutions and support should come from the community itself first.

First, every individual has something to give a community. Every member of a community has a gift (Phillips, Trevan and Kraeger, 2020). In this case, everyone has something valuable that they can offer, whether it's a skill they have, a passion they enjoy, their education or something else. Asset-based community development is all about looking at what a community already has instead of focusing on solving problems. A group of people can take control of their own progress by using these resources. History cluster as a form of PLC for history teachers, come together using different methods and resources to improve their teaching as well as professional development.

Second, communities understand themselves best. Having strong local leaders is very important for the lasting growth of asset-based community development. Local residents not only know what assets are available and where they can be found but they are also trusted by their communities (Gonzalez, Fernandez and Wilson, 2020). However, long-term impact will be achieved through citizen-led development and community self-empowerment. In addition, citizens are viewed as actors rather than recipients in development. Within the PLC every members is an active member as they make sure that everyone leaves PLC with better knowledge and will implement the knowledge in their teaching practice.

Third, relationships drive community development. When a community works together, it grows stronger as a whole. Therefore, a community developer should find people in the community who can encourage and inspire others, bring together different groups of people and create strong relationships between them. (Gonzalez, Fernandez and Wilson, 2020). Therefore, for sustainable community development to happen, people need to be connected. The PLCs consist of diverse group of people, which includes experienced and inexperienced educators, from different school interms of quintale categorization of schools with one aim of professional development.

Fourth, questions lead to solutions. The community developer's aim is to help the people in the local community realize their own abilities (Phillips, Trevan and Kraeger, 2020). Moreover, it is better to ask for ideas than provide solutions in the long run. Fifth, support

should initially be provided by people within the community. Every input should always come from the community. Outside assistance should only be used to supplement local initiatives. local community members are in control of activities taking place with the community. It is relevant to the study as it will improve the history curriculum by providing strengths and diversity through culture and traits as positive assets of the curriculum

Asset-based theory helps create student-teacher-contrad classroom (Lalor, 2020). It creates an atmosphere where students are empowered to learn, collaborate and produce the best results. Asset-based theory promotes classroom engagement, which draws on students' interests. Asset-based theory identify the protective factors that support the health and wellbeing of the learning environment. It offer the potential to enhance both the quality and longevity of life focusing on the resources that promote positivity and coping abilities of teachers and learners. Asset-based theory eliminate negative thinking and harmful biases that hold back teachers from giving quality results of the history subject. Therefore, learning about students' interests is the benefit of getting to know your students' ability to learn and retain learning. The theory connects to prior knowledge (MacSwan, 2020). Hence, the use of asset-based theory to my study it makes visible and values the skills, knowledge, connections and potential in the history PLCs.

1.3.2. COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

For the purpose of this study, 'communities of practice' will be used as a conceptual framework. The use of CoP as a conceptual framework in the study it will drive strategy of teaching, generate new lines of teaching, solve problems, promote the spread of best practices and develop teacher's professional skills. The theorists of communities of practice are cognitive anthropologist Jean Lave and educational theorist Etienne Wenger. They came up with the concept when studying apprenticeships as a learning model. According to Wenger (2015), the term refers to a community that acts as a living curriculum.

According to Wenger (2015) and supported by Pyrko, Dorfler and Eden (2019), communities of practice are groups of people that come together because they care about a certain problem, topic or anything they enjoy doing. They get together and help each other learn and improve, so that they can each achieve their own personal goals and also accomplish things as a group. Bouchamma, April and Basque (2018) support

the above assertions by stating that CoP is a group of people who have the same interest in a particular field or business. In order to meet the set goals and objectives of the group we learn the domain. Modden-Dent and Oliver (2021) state that people in CoP have similar interests, work together, meet to share information, get better at what they do and actively work on growing their knowledge in their field. Furthermore, the fact that members of a community of practice interact on a regular basis is a crucial component of these communities, which they practice during face-to-face meetings and when collaborating (Pyrko, Dorfler and Eden, 2016).

In an attempt to further deepen the understanding of CoP, different authors have identified several of their principles. They include that communities of practice are made up of the domain, community and practice (Trenholm and Peschke, 2020). Firstly, there is the domain in which members of the group share a common purpose, values and dedication that sets them apart from others. According to Tummons (2022),

the domain gives a sense of belonging and identity to communities of practice. She continues by adding that people in a community have similar interests and the topic of discussion in that community is determined by the type of information. Therefore, the shared domain establishes a common ground for participants and motivates them to engage, guiding their learning and giving meaning to their behaviour (McLoughin et al., 2018) add that continuous mutual relationships, shared ways of doing things and quick problem-framing are part of the domain. Under continuous mutual relationships, members strictly discuss related matters and relationships are only work-related. Through shared ways of doing things, members share a common practice and have the same beliefs about it. In addition, within the history PLC problems are quickly framed as members bring a common understanding to resolve conflicts.

Secondly, according to Wenger (2015), the community of practice is framed by circumstances in which members pursue an interest through cooperative events, discussions, problem-solving opportunities, knowledge exchange and the development of relationships. Vollenbroek (2019) asserts that a community consist of individuals with shared interests and willingness to provide mutual support by exchanging information. As such, communities of practice are a community that comes together to share their knowledge about a specific topic through activities such as group discussions and meetings. History cluster is viewed as a form of PLC where teachers of the subject come together to share knowledge of the subject.

Thirdly, members of a community are actual participants in practice. According to Romeo and Vasilopoulos (2020), practice means the different methods of working in areas like communication and problem solving. Hence, practice focuses on what the community develops and shares. A CoP has a clear focus on a shared problem of practice. Bowman (2016) adds that active learning means asking questions, everyone taking responsibility, working with different people, being committed to making it work and having a good way of deciding things. () this is what makes a good practice.

Adlere and Faubert (2022) explain that participation, commitment to practice, understanding boundaries and scales reflection using evidence and creativity as energy sources for practice are principles of communities of practice. Sarid and Levanon (2022) add that CoP involves the participation of everyone in the community: having a voice, being able to be heard and contributing to the practice. Commitment to practice is uncovering what the work is, why it is done, how it is done, and reciprocity

with others wanting to learn (Brown and Peck, 2018). Bond and Lockee (2018) state that boundaries and scaling are influenced by the way things work in a particular situation and how they change as the size or scope of that situation changes. For example, if the limits or boundaries of a community change, it can impact how things operate within that community. Creativity is like a power that helps us when we practice, it means using our imagination, being allowed to try new things and finding different ways to do our work (Gijbels, Endedijk, and Hirschler, 2021). Mehdizadeh, Pourhaji, and Derakhshan (2023) assert that communities of practice are group of people who are dedicated to learn and improving in a specific area, building connections to learn from each other. They also work to figure out what information is important to generate and share within the group. According to Bannister (2018), the key principle is owning what you create.

The way in which communities of practice relate to this study is that they help history teachers improve their curriculum and teaching and learn from other colleagues. Both communities of practice and professional learning communities focus on those who are learning as well as improving their teaching while learning (Mercieca and McDonald, 2021). Meanwhile, history teachers are faced with challenges such as facilitating, planning for a lesson, teaching-learning resources, and using proper assessment approaches (Suh and Jensen, 2020). These result from the lack of a planned curriculum and lack of guidance and support from the school. I used communities of practice as the conceptual framework, as it will greatly help history teachers use professional learning communities to enhance their curriculum implementation. CoP will be a great benefit to teachers working on the challenges faced in the curriculum as well as in teaching history. Therefore, this conceptual framework is relevant to the study as it adds the value of collaboration, personal and professional development, shared knowledge, as well as learning from mistakes.

Asset-based approaches involve community development work, they aim to bring people and community together to make positive changes by using their own knowledge, skills and experiences related to the problems they face in their own lives (la Velle, 2020). Both asset-based theory and communities of practice work together to show and appreciate the abilities, understanding, relationships and potential within a community. They both stress the importance of balancing meeting the needs and supporting the strengths and resources of communities. Asset-based and CoP help to explore the use of PLCs to enhance history curriculum implementation. Generating data will help find the

depth of how PLCs working with CoPs enhance the history curriculum implementation. Analysing the findings of the study will give different findings from different history teachers.

1.4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.4.1. MAIN QUESTION

How are history teachers experiencing PLCs as an enhancement of history curriculum implementation in the FET phase?

1.4.2. SUB-QUESTIONS

- How do History teachers understand professional learning communities?
- How are professional learning communities used to enhance History curriculum implementation?

1.5. RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The study aims to explore History teachers' experiences in PLCs as a mechanism to enhance History curriculum implementation in the FET phase.

- Determine how History teachers understand PLCs.
- Suggest the strategies of PLCs that can be used to enhance History curriculum implementation.

1.6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is positioned within the constructivist paradigm. Kamal (2019) defines a paradigm as a loose, coordinated concept, assumptions or propositions following the study. Davies and Fisher (2018) define a paradigm as a set of beliefs that guide research and practice. The constructivism paradigm states that human beings build their knowledge and understanding of the world by experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences (Bogna, Raineri and Dell, 2020). The strand of constructivism that is influencing the study paradigm is social constructivism. The paradigm is used in this study to understand the history curriculum implementation. In addition, the constructivism paradigm recognises new understanding and knowledge, integrating with prior knowledge; this includes knowledge gained prior to entering school (Pilarska, 2021)

1.6.1. RESEARCH DESIGN

This study uses a qualitative research approach that focuses and engages individuals or groups of people's views, feelings and patterns without control or manipulation (Asenahabi, 2019). This means gathering and studying information that is not in numbers, to better understand ideas, viewpoints or personal encounters (Flick, 2022). Maher and Dertadian (2018) emphasise that a research design is the strategy for conducting a research study. Research design is a plan for data generation techniques, selection of participants and analysis of data in a manner that combines relevance with the research procedure and purpose (Sileyew, 2019). It also includes instructions for collecting, measurements and data analysis. An exploratory methodological design was used in this study. An exploratory design is a methodology approach that explores research questions that have not previously been studied in depth (Blokdyk, 2018). It provides opportunities for in-depth understanding of phenomenon and can also explain cause and effect in real life contexts (Cohen et al., 2018). The FET history cluster in UMgungundlovu District as a PLC is the exploratory. Interview was conducted with five history teachers to obtain a detailed understanding of the PLCs and to examine data in a precise context (Bertram and Christiansen, 2014). In this study, the researcher is seeking to establish views held by history teachers on the use of PLCs to enhance history curriculum implementation.

1.6.2. DATA GENERATION

Data for this study was generated through individual interviews. In qualitative research, data generation is intended to provide evidence of the experience being investigated (Clark and Vealé, 2018). As a result, evidence provides answers to research questions. According to Barrett and Twycross (2018), interviews are verbal surveys administered either individually or in groups. In Khoa, Hung and Hejsalem- Brahmi (2023), the purpose of interviewing is to gather more detailed, descriptive data and gain an in-depth understanding of the teachers' perspectives. In this study, I generated data primarily through semi-structured interviews.

1.6.3. SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Semi-structured interviews may contain open and closed questions (Adeoye-Olatunde and Olenik, 2021). Open-ended questions are “grand tour questions”. They allow the participants to answer comprehensively (Magaldi and Berler, 2020). Brown and Danaher (2019) agree that semi-structured interviews often use question that allow people to give detailed and different answers. The semi-structured interviews will permit the researcher to find out the participants’ knowledge, values and preferences, approaches, attitudes and beliefs in relation to the phenomenon.

To obtain an accurate record of each interview, I audio-recorded each interview. I obtained permission from each participant to use my cell phone to record interviews. Audio-recording of interviews is useful because it allows for accurate transcription and analysis at a later stage. Following Husband's (2020) recommendation, I also wrote down participants’ words and descriptions during interviews if the recording was unclear or inaudible. Before conducting the interviews, I explained the purpose of the interview to the participants. during the use of semi-structured interviews, it was important for me to guide the conversation to produce a complete account of the experience being studied (Ruslin et al, 2022). Husband (2020) recommends that the order of questions be carefully considered beforehand. Therefore, the interview questions were systematically examined and received the approval of my supervisor. I conducted the interviews at the school library during after- school hours. I chose the above setting for the interviews to follow Brinkmann and Kvale's (2018) advice to find a quiet and appropriate place to conduct an interview.

1.6.4. SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

The study adopted purposive sampling. Sampling is the process of choosing the specific group from which you will gather information for your study (McCombes, 2019). Purposive sampling means selecting certain individuals or groups on purpose for a research study (Gill, 2020). It often goes hand in hand with qualitative research. To define purposive sampling, the researcher decides what they want to learn and looks for people who have the information through their knowledge or experience and are willing to share it (Husband, 2020). For the purpose of this study, I selected participants from five different schools in the UMgungundlovu District of KwaZulu-

Natal. The five teachers were purposefully selected . The use of purposive sampling enabled me to determine who should be the research participants. The selected schools and teachers were diverse, coming from different locations and classifications. In my sample, I selected five teachers for interviews based on their in-depth knowledge, teaching experience and participation in the PLC meetings. I used pseudonyms (not real names) in the descriptions of the participants.

1.6.5. DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis means interpreting and making sense of data (Richards and Hemphill, 2018). Elliott (2018) refers to data analysis as organising findings, considering whether the questions of generalisation are appropriate for a study and whether there is a question of theory development. Data generated through semi-structured interviews was analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a way to study and understand information that is not in numbers, using specific methods, it is commonly used for a group of written conversations, like interviews (Caulfield, 2020). Different ways to do thematic analysis include getting to know information, give codes to parts of it, create themes, checking the themes, giving definition and name to the themes and writing it all down (Caulfield, 2020). I transcribed my interview and presented the interview transcript to my supervisor. First, I created detailed descriptions of the interviews to initially organise the data. I followed Lowe et al., (2018) advice that similar responses should be grouped into clusters once data is collected. Cassell and Bishop (2019) refer to this process as coding and define it as putting tags, labels or names to the data. I read the interview transcripts to look for responses that were similar. I was then able to group similar responses. The findings were grouped according to common themes that emerged during the analysis of data.

1.7. VALUE OF THE STUDY

The study explored how the use of PLCs can enhance history curriculum implementation. The value of the study is that it may help understand complex questions and dilemmas of history. Different groups may benefit from my study: teachers, history teachers, school management team, subject advisors, the Department of Education and education researchers.

1.8. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Before starting the research, I sought clearance from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education, University of the Free State. I also sought permission from the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) Department of Education, five schools in the UMgungundlovu district and five history teachers from the schools in the district to conduct my research. It is ethical to ask permission from authorities before conducting the study (Creswell, 2014). I further explained the research to the history teachers and why I sought their participation in the research. I assured them that I would protect their identity and there was no harm in the research. The names of the teachers and schools were kept anonymous. I explained to the participants that the interview would be individual and that they had the right to withdraw at any time.

1.8.1. TRUSTWORTHINESS

Adler (2022) states that four aspects need to be considered to ensure the trustworthiness of qualitative research: transferability, confirmability, dependability and credibility. I tried different ways to study and understand the phenomenon. The main aim was to gather dependable information that accurately represented history teachers who participated in PLCs. The data generated were carefully recorded, transcribed and interpreted based on the meanings. The individuals who participated in the interviews willingly volunteered and were assured of their freedom to withdraw if they felt uneasy.

1.8.1.1. TRANSFERABILITY

Stahl and King (2020) argue that transferability requires researchers to provide enough detail about the context of the study so this way, the reader can decide if the results can be used accurately in other settings. Transferability refers to how the findings of a study can be used in other situations outside of the specific study (Munthe-Kaas et al., 2020). In this qualitative research, results are not generalised because the sampling is not random and the participants are not representative of the entire district. Thick description in the study can improve the transferability of the findings to other contexts.

1.8.1.2. CONFIRMABILITY

Confirmability pertains to the capacity of multiple individuals to reach a consensus on the accuracy of the data (Forero et al., 2018). The analysis of data was conducted objectively, without any inclusion of the researcher's personal opinions or biases.

1.8.1.3. DEPENDABILITY

Janis (2022) explains dependability as the constancy of data over time. Korstjens and Moser (2018) agree that dependability in a qualitative study means assessing the quality of how data is collected and analysed. To increase dependability, the participants were asked similar questions.

1.8.1.4. CREDIBILITY

Credibility means that the results show the truth and experiences of the people involved (Closa, 2021). Shufutinsky (2020) define credibility as being able to trust the results of a study. I used interviews to strengthen the credibility of the research. I interviewed history teachers who are members of the PLCs.

1.9. DEFINITION OF OPERATIONAL CONCEPTS

This section will provide a brief overview of the concepts used in this study to help the reader understand what they mean and how they will be used.

1.9.1. HISTORY

History is the exploration of how society has changed and grown through the years (Collins and Stearns, 2020). Studying history helps us see how things people did in the past still affects us now and shape what will happen in the future (Chapman, 2021). Therefore, history is about learning how to think carefully about the past so that people understand why things are the way they are and how they can deal with them (Collingwood, 2020). According to Runeckles (2018), history involves politics, society, economics, science, technology, medicine, culture and religion. History provides a wealth of knowledge on how people and society behave (Pemberton, 2018). Tosh (2019) asserts that history seeks to achieve and influence students and individuals with an understanding of people and society. History seeks to help learners understand change and how their societies came to be (Collin and Stearns, 2020). Through teaching and learning history, learners can understand how things change and present the facts that cause change and understand that aspects of society remain constant

despite change (Runeckles, 2018).

The influence of school history is to cultivate in learners an interest in the past and a level of comprehension that allows them to appreciate all that history has to offer. It provides learners with knowledge of important events that have taken place in British and African history, for example, with an understanding of how things have changed over time to develop a chronological sense of time (Retz, 2018). It also develops learners' skills of questioning, researching, investigating, interpreting, and presenting things in order to help them understand culture and their place within society and develop their heritage.

We encourage and value the importance of the past in teaching history, as we see it as a powerful tool for stimulating students' interest in it. This subject enable learners to interpret past events in a variety of ways by asking questions such as how and when. In history classes, teachers recognise that learners have different abilities and seek to provide appropriate learning experiences for all of them by working with their abilities.

Teaching history in South Africa follows the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for curriculum implementation and planning. The curriculum has a local context, both African and British. It ensures that learners' needs are met and their skills are developed (McCulloch, Goodson and Gonzalez-Delgado, 2019). History contributes to teaching other subjects like English, mathematics and religion education. For example, the English reading texts used are sometimes historical. History also develops learners' reading, writing, speaking and listening skills (Retz, 2018). Learners develop speaking skills through historical questions and presentations to their peers. They develop writing skills through essay writing. History contributes to teaching mathematics by teaching learners' chronology and interpreting graphs and diagrams. By teaching history, students develop a sense of understanding of their African culture.

1.9.2. CURRICULUM

Charles ((2019) defines curriculum as experiences that individual learners have in a program of education whose purpose is to achieve broad goals and related specific objectives, which is planned in terms of a framework of theory and research or past and present professional practice. According to Alexander (2018), curriculum is the experiences learners have under the guidance of the school. The term usually refers to

a set plan for teaching or a way of looking at students' experiences based on what educators or schools wants to achieve. In addition, a curriculum is a group of lessons and tests given by teachers in a school (Stauffer, 2020). A curriculum is a plan that includes what students should learn, how they will learn it, what material will be used and how the learning will be tested.

Therefore, the parts of the curriculum are what we want to achieve, how we will do it, what we will use and how we will measure it (Luckett and Shay, 2020). First, the goals within a curriculum are the standards or expectations for teaching and learning. In most cases, goals are created to determine the specific skills that need to be focused on and the order in which they should be addressed. Second, methods are the ways teachers teach that help all students learn (Hopmann, 2023). These choices help you learn to understand and use information and skills. Teaching and learning methods are different depending on what students need and are interested in, the work they have to do and the place where they are learning. Hence, the way we do things will change as we keep checking how well students are doing towards reaching the goal (Jupp et al., 2018).

Third, materials are things we choose and use to help us teach and learn and reach our goals in school (Alexander, 2018). We carefully chose the materials to help students learn better. The materials chosen are based on what students are interested in and also take into account their cultural diversity and different ways of looking at the world. Fourth, assessments include a variety of ways to document what students know, understand and can do with their knowledge and skills (Ang, 2020). Results from tests will be used to make teaching and learning better. Teachers will make decisions about how to teach and what materials to use based on the results. This will help students have more chances to succeed and get the support they need.

1.9.3. CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION

According to Ololube, Kpolovie and Makewa (2015), curriculum implementation refers to the practical application of educational plans and concepts developed by professionals within a classroom or educational institution. For Nevenglosky, Cale and Aguilar (2019), curriculum implementation means how teachers teach and evaluate students using the materials given in the curriculum. Ngwenya (2020) and Aneke (2015) viewed curriculum implementation as turning the curriculum idea into curriculum that teachers and society work together to put in place. In this case, curriculum implementation is part of the

curriculum process where student, with the help of a teacher, engages in learning activities to enhance learning by trying out new ways to solve problems (Nevenglosky, 2018). In curriculum implementation, the learner who the programme is for uses the content and materials to learn skills, attitudes and abilities they need (Luckett and Shay, 2020). Curriculum implementation, therefore, refers to the planned or formally designed documents transferred by the teachers into the syllabus and lessons delivered to students.

1.9.4. PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Professional learning communities are receiving considerable attention from scholars and practitioners in higher education. In the Department of Basic Education (2015), professional learning communities (PLCs) provide support to teachers, school managers and subject advisors figure out how they can grow and improve in their roles. They also help them come up with ways to encourage and support that growth. Admiraal et al., (2021) assert that PLCs effectively promote teacher learning and success through active participation, collaboration, and sharing of information, skills and knowledge. Doğan and Adams, 2018) coined principles for effective professional learning communities: shared values and vision, collective responsibility learning, collaboration, openness, mutual trust, respect and support. Other scholars, Olsson (2019) also describe a number of characteristics of professional learning communities, which are collaboration, shared values and goals, mutual trust, collective responsibility, openness, development and strong leadership support.

Meeuwen et al., (2020) the purpose of professional learning communities is to foster collective learning and improvement among teachers and schools, ultimately leading to enhanced learning outcomes and success. According to Widodo and Allamnakhrah (2020), most professional learning communities include active and collaborative learning activities along with complementary academic and social activities. Additionally, Valckx, Devos, and Vanderlinde (2018) found that such methods are linked to positive behaviours, such as increased academic effort. Professional learning communities include clusters. It is not the structure (PLCs) itself that provide development opportunities, but the interaction among teachers, trust relationships and identity between teachers that make PLCs effective vehicles for challenging and changing teachers' professional knowledge and practice (Khan, Razak, and

Kenayathulla, 2021). Professional learning communities foster collaborative learning and responsibility sharing. Olsson (2019) underlines this by highlighting six characteristics that make PLCs successful: shared values and goals, joint responsibility, real assessment, reflection, stable settings and firm leadership support.

The PLCs are guided by the policy document, "Professional Learning Communities- A guide for South African schools" of 2015 by the Department of Basic Education. Furthermore, the PLCs with the subject context and provinces is guided by the DOE policy document. The documents further highlights the purpose of PLCs as well as the key characteristics. It also provide the key [layers of PLCs and their roles. In addition, the activities that can be done in a PLC are well articulated in the document. The practice of PLCs by the teachers lead to professional teacher development. Professional teacher development include activity that is aimed at improving skills and knowledge of teachers. There are also challenges faced with PLC namely, insufficient time, conflict and unwilling to learn in the PLCs. Teachers are faced with administrative and cocurricular activities, which makes it difficult to make time for PLCs within the school and neighbouring schools. Teachers attend PLCs but they don't implement what they have learned from the PLCs. This is regarded as conflict and unwilling to learn.

1.10. LAYOUT OF CHAPTERS

THE NON-TRADITIONAL FORMAT AND ORGANISATION OF THIS ARTICLE-STYLE OF THE STUDY

The presentation of this study differs from the traditional format, as it uses the article option instead of the traditional dissertation approach. Chapters 2-3 present two related articles. Therefore, it is important to note that these articles were independent for the purpose of publication; they all contribute to the study are interrelated and work together to achieve the aim of the study, which is to explore the use of PLCs to enhance history curriculum implementation in the FET phase. The framework used in this study is asset-based theory and communities of practice as a conceptual framework.

This study contains four chapters as follows:

Chapter 1

Introduction and orientation to the study, including methodology, theoretical framework, relevance of the study, acronyms and definition of terms.

Chapter 2

Article 1: “Exploring history teachers' understanding of the role of professional learning communities in enhancing curriculum implementation”.

Chapter 3

Article 2: “Strategies of professional learning communities that can be used to enhance history curriculum implementation”.

Chapter 4

This chapter includes a research overview, a presentation of findings, recommendations, discussions and implications.

1.11. CONCLUSION

This chapter introduced a research study on the use of professional learning communities to enhance history curriculum implementation in the FET phase. This chapter outlined the study's aim, objectives, selection of participants and key concepts underpinned this research study. The research questions, theoretical and conceptual framework as well as methodological approach were also discussed. The chapter presents an overview of the four chapters that make up the study.

CHAPTER 2

ARTICLE 1

Exploring history teachers' understanding of the role of Professional Learning Communities in enhancing curriculum implementation.

Abstract

As in many countries, the education system in South Africa has undergone a number of curriculum, policy and structural changes. This has prompted the Department of Basic Education to conduct orientation workshops for teachers to improve their professional knowledge and skills. Teachers gain and enhance these professional skills by participating in formal professional development programmes or learning from fellow educators. South Africa has predominantly emphasised formal types of development initiatives such as workshops and seminars for enhancing professional growth and skills. The current empirical study aims to explore history teachers' understanding of the role of professional learning communities in enhancing curriculum implementation. The study uses a qualitative research approach, where five history teachers in the FET phase from five schools in the UMgungundlovu district were purposefully selected. Data generated through individual and focus group interviews was analysed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal that teachers understand the role of professional learning communities. This is through history content discussion and workshops, which usually take place at different levels based on content knowledge of history as a subject. The study also revealed that the history cluster exhibited most of the characteristics of professional learning communities. The implication is that professional learning communities may not develop teachers beyond what is required by the CAPS curriculum. Hence, by engaging in professional learning communities, teachers will achieve better knowledge of the subject.

Keywords: History teaching, professional learning communities, curriculum implementation

INTRODUCTION

Nevenglosky (2019) defines curriculum as all the experiences learners have under the guidance of the school. In addition, Pak (2020) states that curriculum implementation is carrying out the officially created course and process. McLachlan (2018) argues that it is using new ideas and ways of doing things to teach what we know, can do, understand and how we see things. Therefore, having a strong understanding of the curriculum enables teachers to effectively plan lessons and improve their teaching abilities (McLachlan, 2018). When collaboration is used in teaching history, it means that teachers are able to make lessons more interactive. Students work together and discuss cause and effect. They also communicate and share ideas with each other. This is a very complex and challenging task that requires thorough training and development during preservice teacher education and when they are in service (Olam, 2019). Different strategies are used to support teachers in practice, such as meetings, workshops, training, and short learning programmes and through professional learning communities. Professional learning communities are communities that work together to improve student learning by committing to continuous improvement of teaching strategies, subject knowledge and content through collaboration (Ninkovic and Knezevic, 2018). They serve an important role in student achievement and stimulate changes in teaching practices. They are beneficial to teachers because they create pedagogical skills in teaching and adopt different teaching practices.

Globally, history teaching is undergoing regular changes and transformations that require teachers to regularly make decisions about how to teach, assess, what resources to use and how to manage their classrooms (Dlamini, 2019). Making these decisions in an ever-changing environment greatly benefits history teachers' ability to engage, collaborate and discuss with their peers, experienced colleagues in their immediate school environment, curriculum and subject advisors and other relevant stakeholders working in the field of history education (Chimbunde and Masondo, 2012). Different studies have been done on the role of professional learning communities to enhance curriculum implementation. (Dlamini, 2019) looked at teachers' collaboration in instructional teams and student achievement and found that high student achievement in schools is closely related to the level of collaboration between teachers in practice, such as evaluation of the curriculum and selection of appropriate teaching strategies for students. A study by Selcuk and Alyson (2018) showed that when

teachers start to actively participate in professional learning communities, they can create a strong professional culture where they learn new things through inquiry and sharing. This can benefit both teachers and students. A study by Feldman (2020) and Zulu and Mukuredzi (2021) focused on the role of professional learning communities to support teacher development. Some studies that focused specifically on history teachers were conducted by Dlamini (2019), Sebbowa (2021) and Oldham (2020). These studies focused on history teachers' experiences. There is a gap in the literature on history teachers and professional learning communities. This study wants to add to this growing body of knowledge by focusing on history teachers' understanding of the professional learning communities and their role in enhancing curriculum implementation.

RESEARCH PROBLEM STATEMENT

Professional learning communities have been used for some time in the South African education system as a form of clusters with conflicting results of teachers not partaking. However, there is still evidence that history teachers are still struggling with basic curriculum implementation strategies such as proper use of teaching and learning resources, choosing and using appropriate teaching strategies and proper assessment approaches (Moreeng and Du Toit, 2013). Curriculum changes implemented over the years are detrimentally affecting history teachers. In addition, curriculum coverage is most challenging aspect still affecting history teachers in the FET phase. Insufficient training and vague instructions on modifying the curriculum contribute to a lack of knowledge on effective teaching methods (Zulu and Mukuredzi, 2021). History teachers in the FET phase failed to employ effective teaching methods and when they attempts to do so, they still failed to do it properly. In history classes, materials are hardly ever used because they either do not exist or are not good enough (Chapman, 2021).

Although schools can give support like books, maps and other teaching tools, these material are hardly ever used. There are too many topics in the subject for teachers to teach (Zulu and Mukuredzi, 2021). These challenges can be reduced by using professional learning communitie effectively, whereby history teachers come together to discuss important maters of the subject such as content, assessments, marking guide and notes. Hence, my interest is to explore the understanding of PLCs by history teachers. A thorough understanding of this might assist in strengthening how PLCs are used to support history teachers in improving their history teaching.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

According to Adom, Hussein and Agyem (2018), a theoretical framework is like a guide that is based on a theory already established in a specific area of study. The framework shows the main idea of a research study (Agyem, 2018). The framework used in this study is Asset-based theory and Communities of Practice (CoP) as the conceptual framework. According to Phillips, Trevan and Kraeger (2020), an asset-based approach means recognising and appreciating the abilities, knowledge, connections and potentials in the community. It helps to enhance the community's skills, relationships and social connections. This method uses the things that the community already has to help it grow and develop. This helps people in the community by motivating them to use the things they already have (Kirst-Ashman and Hull, 2019). The relevance to my study is that Asset-based theory and communities of practice work together regularly to improve their skills and increase their general knowledge of the (area) education sector. Asset-based community development is a way of working that focuses on improving and using the skills and resources that already exist in the community. Communities of practice are groups of people who come together because they have a shared interest in a certain subject or field of work (World Bank Group, 2021). Knaster (2018) defines communities of practice as a gathering of individuals motivated by the desire to cross organisational boundaries, relate to one another, and build a body of actionable knowledge through coordination and collaboration. Communities of practice are organised groups of people who have a common interest in a particular topic and work together to accomplish specific objectives. Asset-based theory and communities of practice provide the tools to understand how people operate in a community of practice, such as history teachers in professional learning communities and how they make sense of what they learn. Therefore, understanding the perspective of history within professional learning communities will be better enhanced by the use of asset-based theory and communities of practice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMITTEES

Conceptualisation of professional learning communities

Professional learning communities are group of people who come together to share and discuss their work in a thoughtful and cooperative way, with a focus on personal growth and improvement (Dubey and Kothari, 2022). In the education context, professional learning communities are groups of teachers who work together to help students do better in school, they do this by asking questions and doing research to find ways to improve (Kumar, 2019). Professional learning communities emphasise that teachers should reflect on their teaching practices rather than taking them for granted and fill the gaps in their knowledge. The crucial element of professional learning communities is a collective focus on professional learning, where teachers reflect collectively on their teaching practices and act as professionals to improve their practices in positive ways. In other words, professional learning communities are groups of teachers, school leaders and subject advisors who work together to decide how they want to improve and create activities to help them grow (Culp, 2019). In support, Datnow and Pak (2019) contend that professional learning communities are nearly always an international school environment strategy designed to reduce professional isolation, foster teacher collaboration and spread the expertise and insights of individual teachers throughout a school.

Forms of professional learning communities

Professional learning communities operate at different levels of the education system. They can be at individual teachers' level, school level and cluster level. At the individual level, teachers teaching the same subject help one another by teaching the topic where one of them is uncomfortable with. Therefore, teachers meet regularly every week or a month, working together to improve and diversify their teaching techniques. However, the meeting time slot depends on the teachers' plan and the effort they put. Teachers identify the learning needs of their students, observe their colleagues' teaching methods and provide beneficial guidance. They collaborate to develop and enhance teaching methods with the aim of providing better assistance to students. Collaboration is a key aspect of professional learning communities. Goodyear, Parker and Casey (2019) assert that teacher collaboration is when teachers work together as equals to make

decisions and work towards a common goal. At this level of collegiality, teachers discuss, design, implement, analyse, evaluate and experiment with their teaching (Khan, Razak and Kenayathulla, 2021). The key characteristics of collaborative cultures are spontaneity, teacher orientation and unpredictability and they are development-oriented.

At the school level, professional learning communities help to increase the capacity of the school to achieve sustainable improvement in the learning that takes place in the school. Most professional learning communities are organised and formed at the school level (Fox and Poultney, 2020). Hargreaves and Rolls (2020) state that the school provides spaces where new teachers share innovative ideas with experienced teachers and where experienced teachers monitor young teachers. Professional learning communities can be organised between schools as well. Some schools do not have the space to accommodate the number of teachers and they are small in size. Therefore, they team up with neighbouring schools. Between schools professional learning communities are very effective in exchanging ideas and aligning the organisational culture of PLCs between the schools. According to Fieldman (2017), at the school level, teachers talk, plan, put into action, study, assess and try out different methods of teaching. A learning space where teachers collaborate and engage in ongoing debates to examine practice and student performance and to develop and implement more effective teaching practices in their specific content while sharing their individual knowledge and expertise of the subject. The effectiveness of professional learning communities at the school level, it brings together the teachers of the subject. There is an ongoing discussion in schools about improving teachers' skills and enhancing students' learning outcomes.

At the cluster level, different schools meet and collaborate in sharing experiences. The cluster must ensure that the professional learning communities are established within the schools and should support them. However, the cluster functions as PLCs as well as a space creating opportunities for teachers to develop by creating workshops for teachers. In addition, clusters provide teachers with development, subject support and standardisation of school-based assessments (Park and Cooc, 2019). Furthermore, they demonstrate a willingness to work together, sharing and developing content knowledge and content notes (Ismail et al., 2021). The effectiveness of cluster meetings is that teachers meet to share content knowledge, subject notes, teaching methods,

how to mark source-based and essay questions, discussion of the memorandum and classroom management strategies.

Value of professional learning communities to enhance history curriculum implementation

Professional learning communities have been noted to have a variety of benefits for history teachers and schools where they are being used. History teachers who participate in professional learning communities report an improvement with regard to their teaching and assessment skills (Tai and Omar, 2021). Serviss (2021) mentions that professional learning communities provide an opportunity for history teachers to exchange their most effective strategies and develop innovative approaches to enhance learning outcomes and support student achievements. Therefore, professional learning communities enhance teacher reflection on history teaching and student outcomes. Professional learning communities further allow history teachers the opportunity to directly improve their teaching and learning skills. History teachers not only improve their teaching skills but also improve classroom management skills, communication, lesson facilitating and lesson plan writing. Literature argues that professional learning communities develop teachers with different skills, such as teaching, assessment, marking and critical thinking (Brennan and King, 2022). However, basic teaching skills are the skills or abilities of history teachers to explore concepts related to learning materials (Admiraal et al., 2021). Moreover, professional learning skills can foster a number of skills, such as reflection, critical thinking and self-awareness, as well as skills in answering source-based and essay questions and better problem-solving skills to history teachers.

In addition, professional learning communities provide the opportunity to encourage history educators to grow their personal learning networks. The value of these learning communities lies in shared experiences, shared values and visions, collaboration and responsibility, shared teaching methods and learning from one another (Harris and Metzger, 20128). The shared experiences of history cluster are the basis for the basic information of culture and history teachers collaboration. Moreover, they improve each person's individual experience, which significantly affects school socialisation. Kennedy (2020) asserts that in professional learning communities, teachers share their experiences and increase their experience by learning from their colleagues. One benefit of professional learning communities is that history teachers become more effective and

improve their lesson planning, marking guide, setting of standardised question papers and classroom management.

The other value of professional learning communities is that they enhance history teachers with knowledge. The literature explains that experienced history teachers have many qualities that set them apart, these include knowing a lot about teaching methods, being good at work with different types of students, making good choices, being aware of what's happening in the classroom, understanding the situation well and showing respect (Lee et al., 2022).

METHODOLOGY

This research is positioned within the constructivism paradigm as it seeks to establish the views held by history teachers on the use and understanding of professional learning communities to enhance the implementation of the history curriculum. This paradigm is used in this study to understand the history curriculum implementation. In addition, this study is a qualitative research approach that focuses and engages individuals or groups of people's views, feelings and patterns without control or manipulation (Dubey and Kothari, 2022). It involves collecting and analysing data to gain insights into concepts, convictions or individual experience (Bhandari, 2020).

In the case of this study, qualitative research is used to answer questions, meanings and experiences through interviews to understand experiences of history teachers in PLCs. In this study, the researcher seeks to establish the views held by history teachers on the use of PLCs to enhance the implementation of history curriculum. Research design is a plan for data generation techniques, selection of participants and analysing of data in a manner that combines relevance with the research procedure and purpose (Morgan, 2019). Therefore, exploratory research is appropriate for achieving the aim and objectives of the study. According to Blokdyk (2018), exploratory research is a way of studying new research questions that have not been studied much before.

According to Pandey and Pandey (2021), sampling means the process of selecting a smaller, more manageable number of participants for the research study. Jalali (2020) argues that the main consideration in qualitative research studies is to select a representative sample capable of providing adequate answers to the research questions. I used purposive sampling to select participants for this research study. Berndt (2020) mentions that purposive sampling is used when the researcher knows

that the participants selected are information-rich and best understand the phenomenon being studied. For the purpose of this study, I selected history teachers from five different schools in UMgungundlovu District in KwaZulu Natal and five history teachers were purposefully selected. The selected schools, as well as teachers, were diverse, coming from different locations and different classifications. In my sample, I selected five teachers for interviews based on their in-depth knowledge, teaching experience and participation in the PLC meetings. I used pseudonyms (not real names) in the descriptions of the participants. Teacher A is an African male and head of the department of humanities at his school. He has been teaching history in a township school (quantile 2) for 25 years. Teacher B is a member of PLCs and teaches history at a semi-urban school (quantile 3). He holds a BED degree and his teaching experience is 15 years. Teacher C has been teaching history for two years in a township school (quantile 2). He holds a BED degree and has only two years of experience. Teacher D is a member of PLCs and teaches history in a township school (quantile 2). She holds a BED Honours and has seven years' experience. Teacher E teaches history in a semi-urban school (quantile 2). He holds a BED Degree and has taught history for ten years. I generated data from individual and semi-structured interviews, from five history teachers who gave their understanding and experience in professional learning communities. The interviews took place in the schools of the participants after school and on Saturdays. As a researcher, we met once with the participants for only two hours. The researcher digitally recorded the interviews in which the participants expressed their views and individual interviews. I transcribed the interview. I used thematic analysis in this study. I first created detailed descriptions of the observed professional learning communities to organise data. Bhardwaj (2019) defines this process as coding as attaching tags, labels or names to data. I read the interview transcripts to look for similar responses. I then grouped similar responses.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This section provides an overview of the ethical considerations followed when conducting a research study. The data collection phase raises a number of ethical issues that are of great importance when conducting research (Husband, 2020). Furthermore, Suri (2020) explains ethics as a way to eliminate abuse and help researchers understand their roles as ethical scholars. Brittain et al., (2020) argue that educational researchers must consider all ethical issues related to their research. This

study complied with the ethical standards of the Department of Basic Education in South Africa and The University of the Free State in conducting research. Before embarking on my research, I applied for approval to conduct research with the Department of Basic Education and The University of the Free State research ethics committee.

FINDINGS

This study aimed to explore history teachers' understanding of the role of professional learning communities in enhancing curriculum implementation. The study employed individual and semi-structured interviews as its strategies for data generation. Among the research study participants were five history teachers from five different secondary schools. The purpose of this detail is to provide a clear description of the observed data. The researcher identified the following themes: defining PLCs, the purpose of PLCs, what activities are done or supposed to be done, where they take place, participants and principles.

Theme 1: Defining PLCs

In presenting their understanding of PLCs, history teachers used words like a group of teachers and meetings. As depicted in the following responses: Teacher C, *“Professional learning communities are cluster meetings”*. Teacher A: *“Professional learning communities are communities of practice, whereby teachers, teaching the same subject, would come together at regular intervals”*. This aligns with Fox and Poultney's (2020) observation that PLCs are collaborative learning among teachers sharing inclusive practice. The coming together of teachers with the same interest was further emphasised by Teacher B, who defines it as: *“teachers teaching the same subject, in this case, history”*. Being in the same subject allows teachers to contribute as equal partners in debates and discussions. Teacher D further emphasises teachers' ability to be viewed as *“a collaborative group of educators”* as this will further allow conversations, discussions and debates.

The ability to have a say and make a contribution has also been illuminated by Dumbuya (2019), who emphasised collaboration as collective wisdom, which appeals to teachers who desire communication and valuable input from colleagues as they develop their teaching practice. When more teachers collaborate, they are able to engage in debates about theories, methods and processes of teaching and learning, therefore improving their school performance (Hargreaves and O'Connor, 2018). Another important issue

emphasised by the participants is that these meetings or gatherings are supposed to happen regularly as depicted in words such as “regular meetings” and at “regular intervals”. Teacher E even gave the number of times: “*In this case, we meet five times a year, orientation workshop at the beginning of the year and then meet quarterly.*” This agrees with how Yoon (2022) conceptualise PLCs when saying PLCs are effective in promoting teacher learning and success through active participation, collaboration, sharing of information, skills and knowledge.

The above discussion indicates that teachers understand the concept of professional learning communities. I observed that most teachers engage in professional learning communities at the cluster level. However, the culture of collaboration and helping one another results in achieving better history results. At the cluster level, they share resources, for example, content notes, marking guides and history videos. They also share knowledge such as content knowledge, skills in answering questions and setting examination question papers. It also helps to eliminate the isolation of teachers and ultimately strengthen the substantive knowledge of the subject.

Theme 2: Purpose of the PLCs

The next issue that emanated from the interviews with participants was the purpose of the PLCs. This is summarised by keywords such as *engage, collaboration, sharing* and *helping*. This was found very interesting and felt it was closer to how the PLCs purpose has been presented in the literature, as epitomised by Mertler (2018), who says that the purpose of PLCs is sharing information during content discussion, sharing their expertise in content delivery, and asking clarity seeking questions. Harris, Huffiman and Jones (2019) support this by asserting that the purpose of PLCs is to share teaching skills and tips and sharpen each other’s teaching methods and knowledge in developing content notes. To further illustrate the purpose of sharing, Teacher A stated: “*As teachers, we share views, experiences and teaching methods*”. Teacher B supports this view by saying: “*Teachers from different schools who share expertise in content delivery and teaching skills*”. In addition, Teacher C states: “*Gone are the days when teachers struggle on their own; that is called teacher isolation. When you have a problem, you go to another teacher within your professional learning community where you share knowledge, problems, and content knowledge*”. Different teachers meeting this way seem to align with Zhang's (2022) principles of shared knowledge, collaboration and collective responsibilities. Furthermore, teacher D adds to the sharing focus of the PLCs

by saying: *“We sharpen each other’s teaching methods and also share knowledge in developing content notes. We also share knowledge and information on how to structure a good essay and to sustain a line of argument in essays”*.

The concept of PLCs as spaces for helping, improving practice and improving curriculum implementation in history was mainly shared by novice teachers who claimed: *“They assist struggling schools to achieve good history results”* and supported by Teacher E, who explained that: *“They come together to improve their teaching practice in order to enhance learners learning”* and even further to assist in *“developing programmes, get more information and instill new teaching methods”* as articulated by Teacher B. A response by Teacher B seems to summarise the purpose of PLCs well by mentioning that the PLC’s purpose is: *“Having the common aim the learner’s achievement. What is of greater importance is the quality of results. We aim to improve the quality, not the quantity, in terms of symbols and stuff. In most cases, the practice of professional learning communities is within a cluster”*. This way of understanding how PLCs work is very interesting because it agrees with the idea that teachers can learn and grow in different ways, like through workshops of teachers, learning communities and networks (Chen, 2023).

The researcher observed that teachers collaborated and shared information, teaching skills and methods. The teachers freely expressed their experiences. This shows that the purpose of PLCs is to support and encourage teacher collaboration. Cherrington and Thornton (2015) assert that when teachers have the same values, vision and goals they can agree on a vision that focus on students’ learning, they can also talk and have discussions to understand each other’s perspectives. These are important pillars of professional learning communities. The history subject advisor made it clear that the main goal is to develop professional learning communities, empower professional learning community members and foster critical thinking skills.

Theme 3: What activities are done or supposed to be done?

In the previous theme, the focus was on the generic purpose of the PLCs. In pursuance to exemplify this purpose, a follow-up question sought to drive participants into providing specific activities that take place during PLCs. A variety of activities were mentioned, such as teaching strategies, assessment practices, content meaning, marking and ways to enhance history curriculum implementation.

The issue of sharing knowledge about teaching strategies was raised by different participants, such as Teacher A, B and C, respectively, when they said: *“We are combined as different teachers, share teaching ideas, on how to teach history and historical knowledge to use pedagogically!”*. *“We address issues such as teaching grade 12 learners on how to write a paragraph”*, and *also guide teachers what to teach using Annual Teaching Plan (ATP)”*. This focus on sharing teaching strategies seems to align with what was found by Datnow (2021), sharing knowledge and skills to teach, solve problems or collaborate on a project. Teachers felt more empowered after attending the PLCs and became more confident in how they facilitated their history lessons. This is done in the spirit of sharing and collaboration and is highly contextualised. This is emphasized by haung (2019), who claimed that through sharing knowledge (collaboration), teachers are encouraged to generate knowledge about teaching, therefore improving teaching practice. Atwal (2019) supports this by stating that teachers become more open to new ideas, teaching strategies and resources. When teachers experience PLCs in this manner, they actualise the clusters which shows that teachers are open to talk intensely about methods and processes of learning, adding that this improves their teaching.

Assessment practice seems to be dominated during these PLC meetings. When addressing these, participants identified the powerful nature of PLCs as reflective spaces where *“there is a discussion of which areas learners performed well as well as challenges encountered by learners”* (Teacher C) and, by extension, on the teachers’ own teaching and assessment practice. Specifically, participants further indicated that PLCs are spaces where they get an *“opportunity to improve their marking competencies”*, and the ability to get their work moderated by other colleagues, as espoused by Teacher C when asserting that: *“we exchange work to understand how to mark grade 12 before they write their finals”*, and Teacher D: *“Moderately give each other new ideas, ways of marking and assessing”*. Improved assessment practices are key in enhancing history curriculum implementation.

Furthermore, PLCs are spaces where support on content to be covered is provided and collective meaning on how to implement the curriculum is formulated. This is illustrated in the following responses from Teachers A, B and C: *“PLCs afford us an opportunity to discuss history,” “how to develop history content notes”, “sharing of audio-visual aids and resources on different topics, for example, Road to democracy and TRC hearing”*.

Teacher D further emphasised that the process is made easier by the fact that as teachers in a group: *“they know each other’s strengths and know very well who is good at essay-type questions and source-based questions”* and that *“most teachers do not like certain topics such African history, so we concentrate on USA, Germany and other countries. Through PLCs, we get to share knowledge on how to tackle such themes.* Fisher et al., (2019) assert that in the PLCs, members use each other’s abilities and skills to improve student learning and their teaching practice. This means that teachers are more willing to try new things, like different ways of teaching and using different materials. When teachers participate in PLCs like this, they form groups and have deep discussions about how students learn. This helps them become better teachers.

When conducting interviews, the researcher observed that teachers usually share knowledge as they (common focus) have one goal: learner’s achievement. They would work with neighbouring schools, teaching different topics, sharing notes, marking guides and advice on how to teach certain topics. Within these PLC meetings, teachers engage in activities such as source-based and essay questions, memorandum and marking guide.

Theme 4: Where it takes place

According to Eaker and Marzono (2020), PLCs can take place at different levels, such as clusters, schools and districts. When it happens at the cluster level, it is usually centrally initiated shared experiences, content knowledge, teaching methods, and skills. Unlike when it is initiated at the school level in trying to understand how history teachers experience where the PLCs are taking place in their space, it became clear that they experience them differently and at different levels. The most common responses from most participants were that *“they happen at cluster level”* and that *“they are a form of cluster meetings”*. At this level, the coordinator is usually a departmental official in the form of a history subject advisor who will arrange these meetings and determine what will be discussed. Pang and Wang (2018) maintain that clusters are teacher communities of learning or teacher networks. In some cases, there is involvement of some senior and experienced teachers in the arrangement and facilitation of such gathering. Lenning, Hill, Sounders, Stokes and Solon (2023) seem to agree and validate this approach to PLCs when saying clusters may serve as the support mechanism for schools, putting together material and other resources so that the schools can optimally benefit.

Some teachers also indicated that they experienced PLCs as self-initiated processes where they formed their own collaborations with their neighbouring schools. Teacher C explained this well: "We take initiative of combining neighbouring schools to explain content and provide learners with relevant and important strategies to answer questions and set *question papers*. He was supported by Teacher A, who said: "Also, as teachers, we invite each other to tackle different topics". This is in line with the principle of PLCs, which is an element of trust and no isolation of teachers and also strengthens the assertion by Fulton and Britton (2011) that self-initiated means individuals taking the initiative to figure out what they need to learn, setting goals for themselves, finding resources to learn, choosing the best strategies for learning and assessing their progress. The process can involve others helping them along the way

It was interesting to note that history teachers in the area where the study was conducted also kept contact beyond the formal cluster and even initiated their own sessions which are more direct and contextualised to their own personal challenges. Teacher A said: "We call each other to share information and resources" and is supported by Teacher C, who mentioned that "I went to another school to teach about the Cold War". This demonstrates the self-intuitiveness and willingness encouraged by collaboration with regards to how PLCs are supposed to function. In this case, history teachers are able to identify areas where they need help and to act accordingly but are also able to freely share their knowledge and skills amongst themselves for the collective results of achieving what Teacher C called: "improved results and performance in our subject."

The researcher observed that teachers are prepared to sacrifice their time developing each other in the PLCs. The subject advisors render the necessary support to the professional learning communities. Neighbouring schools visit one another and members of the PLCs visit struggling schools to help.

Theme 5: Participants

According to Collet (2019), PLCs are structures that are usually comprised of departmental officials, subject advisors and educators. These individuals usually have common knowledge about the subject at hand but are different with regard to experience and expertise. These different areas of expertise are mainly knowledge, skills, sharing of information and collaboration, but all members' contributions are

valued and respected as they add a particular dimension to issues at hand. In the responses received, most participants indicated that they have a history subject advisor, heads of department, senior teachers and novice teachers in their cluster. Teacher A: *We are fortunate as we have subject advisors who are keen to help; they guide and share with us new knowledge about the subject*". Teacher B also adds that: *"in our cluster, we also have a PLC coordinator who is an experienced teacher and helps with communication within our PLC."*

In addition, Teacher D asserted *"there are other experienced and knowledgeable teachers with a wealth of information who are always willing to share and demonstrate how things are supposed to be done"*. Furthermore, Teacher C, said that new and novice teachers, also felt valued in these types of gatherings as they are usually given the responsibilities ranging from *"coming to share how to use ICT to teach certain topics"* and also *"how to use movies and videos"*. One participant even emphasised the value of having some history examiners and markers in their cluster who are willing to share their expert advice with everyone. Teacher E elucidated: *"during the cluster meetings, we have the history examiner, who is very resourceful, supportive and always willing to share information with us"*.

The researcher observed that PLCs are organised by the PLC coordinator, who invites experienced and knowledgeable teachers to the PLC meetings. Some teachers are willing to share how things are supposed to be done, and the subject advisor is keen to help, guide and share new knowledge of the subject.

Theme 6: Principles

Brodie and Borko (2016) argue that PLCs help teachers and schools improve learning and achievement by providing support and opportunities for learning and development, they promote things like trust, responsibility, openness and support. Teachers have raised different principles that guide their PLC practice. Teacher B stated: *"one of the strengths of the professional learning communities is that there is open discussion, there is inclusion and information is not withheld"*. In this case, it provides an opportunity for development among teachers, a relationship of trust and identity that makes PLCs effective. This is supported by Teacher A: *"As teachers in the practice of professional learning communities, we help and motivate one another and create a spirit of healthy*

competition and this helps us to maintain good history results.”

Furthermore, the principles of PLCs help schools improve their teaching methods by sharing knowledge and creating a common understanding and standards within the community (Datnow and Park, 2019). Teacher D argues: “In the PLCs, there is an element of trust and we have confidence *in our PLC members*”. Supported by Teacher C: “*We share collective responsibility, providing one another with teaching tips and critical thinking skills*”. In addition, Teacher E suggests: “*There is no isolation of teachers; PLC members are open and willing to share information and trust each other*”. However, there is interdependent learning; teachers learn as individuals and also help each other through sharing (Datnow and Park, 2017).

The researcher observed that PLCs operate under principles. In this case, teachers are open, sharing information and trust each other. They motivate one another and create a healthy environment that maintain good history results.

DISCUSSION

This study found that teachers had a good understanding of what professional learning communities referred to and most participants described PLCs as “collaboration”. The study found that teachers learned both individual and collaborative capacity. The findings suggested that teachers learned on their own by researching content on the internet. This helped them create classroom tools and achieve professional development. The study found that history cluster meetings received valuable information from the history subject advisor. Teachers receive content notes (materials) and moderated tasks to ensure that standardization took place across schools in the circuit. During cluster meetings, teachers formed network groups with other teachers. Teachers networked during and outside of cluster meetings. Networking among teachers led to an exchange of ideas on teaching, classroom management, resources, assessments, curriculum coverage and learners. Lui, Bellibas and Gumus (2021) support teacher collaboration as a systemic process in which a group of people works together collaboratively to analyse and influence professional practice to improve individual or collective results. This discourse focused on task setting, teaching strategies, content coverage and moderation.

The main purpose of this research study was to explore how selected history teachers understand professional learning communities. Data analysis from interviews shows that

teachers now engage with subject content and assessment issues largely through PLCs. During the content discussion, it became clear that teachers are able to share content knowledge, teaching skills and methods. Furthermore, you also learn skills in answering source-based and essay questions. Teachers who attended PLCs felt that it had enhanced their knowledge, skills and teaching practice for history curriculum implementation.

RECOMMENDATION

Most participants in the study used history clusters as a way of teacher learning and for developing their teaching practices. Teachers interact across many social media platforms with whatsapp being the most widely used and accessible. This form of communication bypasses the teacher isolation barrier and impedes teacher learning in a PLC. The study recommended that virtual learning for teachers should be developed to allow teachers to engage more often with each other from the cluster groups. This allows teachers and subject advisors to engage with one another outside of cluster meetings. More time should be allocated for teachers to address concerns in the PLCs, as this is a popular method of collaborative learning. Prenger et al. (2019) discovered that the contributions of teachers in a professional community, adds immensely to social provision for achievement and higher levels of pedagogy.

CONCLUSION

This chapter summarised the key findings of the study. There were six key findings in the study discussed namely, defining PLCs, purpose of the PLCs, activities done, where it takes place, participants and principles. Professional learning communities contributed to teachers' professional development that enhanced their knowledge, skills and teaching strategies.

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CHAPTER 3

ARTICLE 2

Strategies of Professional learning communities (PLCs) that can be used to enhance history curriculum implementation in the FET phase

Abstract

This paper investigates the PLCs strategies that can be used to enhance the history curriculum implementation. The research concentrates on collaboration and communication, goal-setting and action planning, ongoing assessment and feedback as well as technology intergration into the history curriculum implementation. The aim of this research study was to explore strategies of professional learning communities that can be used to enhance history curriculum implementation. The study draws on asset-based theory as a theoretical framework and communities of practice as conceptual framework to identify strategies in PLC and how it leads to history curriculum implementation. The study adopted a qualitative research approach and was located within the constructivism paradigm. An exploratory research design was used in this study. Purposive sampling was used to select five history teachers as the participants for this study. Data generation method included individual and semi-structured interviews with five history teachers. Data was analysed using thematic analyse.

The findings of the research study revealed that teachers use strategies such as, workshop, peer learning, collaborative assessment and lesson study to enhance history curriculum implementation. The study showed that professional learning communities contributed to teacher professional development and enhanced their knowledge, skills, teaching strategies as well as their confidence. The findings highlight that PLCs create spaces for teacher learning and contribute to history curriculum implementation. the study also draws attention to the need for virtual teacher learning to take place to allow teachers to engage more often in to PLCs. The study recommended that teachers engage into professional development workshops during the school holidays to overcome the challenges faced with as those encourage teacher collaboration and development.

Keywords: Professional Learning Communities, workshops, peer learning, collaborative assessment, lesson study, ICT.

INTRODUCTION

The significance of history education in nurturing a profound comprehension of the past and developing student's critical thinking skills has been widely acknowledged (Shamshiri, 2018). In an era of accelerated globalisation and over changing information landscape, educators face challenges of adopting and enhancing history curriculum implementation to ensure that students are equipped to navigate the complexities of the modern world (Mamlok-Naaman, 2018). Professional learning communities (PLCs) have emerged as promising strategies for addressing these challenges by fostering educator collaboration and knowledge sharing (Haiyan and Allan, 2020). Professional learning communities have been further defined (Verdi, 2022) as a group of teachers who are dedicated to work together to help students succeed. (Tipping and Dennis, 2022) professional learning communities are groups of people who work together to improve schools, in these groups everyone takes turns being a leader, which helps make schools better. The idea behind professional learning communities is that teachers work together in groups to share and create ideas that will help students learn better (Endacott and Brooks, 2019). In recent years, professional learning communities have acquired popularity due to their potential to facilitate professional growth, support the sharing of effective teaching strategies and foster a culture of school improvement (Huijboom et al., 2021). Due to the interdisciplinary nature of history and the need for educators to employ innovative pedagogical practices to improve student engagement and learning outcomes, the implementation of professional learning communities in education is particularly pertinent.

Various researchers have conducted research on how clusters and professional learning communities work. A study by Myende (2016) showed that cluster learning activities promoted teacher learning. A study by Mxenge (2019) examined teachers clusters which are groups of teachers who teach the same subject in a school, they are led by a cluster leader and work together for educational and administrative reasons to meet specific teaching, learning and assessment needs. The goal is to improve teaching and learning by collaboration. The study by Slack (2019) focuses on using professional learning communities to enhance the accessibility of instruction for English learners. Therefore, the phenomenon of strategies of professional learning communities to enhance history teaching has not been adequately researched. However, there is evidence to suggest that there is a growing literature on this topic in

South Africa. This study wants to add to this literature.

RESEARCH PROBLEM STATEMENT

Considering the interdisciplinary nature of the subject as well as the importance of content knowledge, teaching strategies, assessment strategies, lesson planning, and use of and integrating technology in the teaching of history, it can be enhanced through professional learning communities, improving the history curriculum implementation. This type of knowledge is necessary to develop expertise within a subject area and to teach students disciplinary thinking. Novice teachers are faced with instructional challenges, behavioural challenges and contextual challenges (Miller, 2020). Hence, novice history teachers can enhance their curriculum implementation skills through PLCs, supported by communities of practice, by connecting them with other teachers to share their knowledge and use different approaches to teaching and learning. According to Mompoin-Gaillard (2021), the learning environment nowadays is challenging, therefore we need new teaching methods and educators working together to improve how history is taught. Although teachers are starting to realise that professional learning communities can help them improve their teaching methods and help students do better in school, there is not enough research on how professional learning communities specifically help with teaching history. It is necessary to investigate how professional learning communities can contribute to the improvement of history curriculum implementation (Terrell, 2022). Although available literature argues that PLCs ultimately leads to increased teachers achievement (Voogt et al., 2018). Sims and Fletcher-Wood (2021) states that a PLC aims to improve collaboration between teachers teaching a particular subject and enhancing the quality of education. Gore and Rosser (2022) highlights the assumptions that using cluster as PLCs would increase teacher achievement and improve the value of education. In addition, clusters were mainly for moderation of scripts, they can still be used innovatively as sited of teacher learning (Chen et al., 2018). This study was significant since it aimed to examine the contribution of a history PLC to curriculum implementation while foregrounding how teachers learn in the PLCs. Therefore, this study aimed to address this gap and examined how history teachers learn in a history cluster (PLC).

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The framework used in this study is Asset-based theory as a theoretical framework and Communities of Practice (CoP) is used as a conceptual framework. The asset-based approach is a paradigm shift towards a new way of thinking and conceptualising the world (Miller, McIntyre and McKenna, 2018). According to Phillips, Trevan and Kraeger (2020), an asset-based approach helps to recognise and appreciate the abilities, knowledge, relationships and potential in a community. The Asset-based approach encourages the growth, connections and social well-being of the community (Gonzalez, Fernandez and Wilson, 2020). The asset-based theory focuses on finding a balance between helping people and communities meet their needs, while nurturing their strengths and resources.

The framework used in this study is Asset-based theory and Communities of Practice (CoP) is used as a conceptual framework. The asset-based approach is a paradigm shift towards a new way of thinking and conceptualising the world (Miller, McIntyre and McKenna, 2018). According to Phillips, Trevan and Kraeger (2020), an asset-based approach makes visible and values the skills, knowledge, connections and potential in a community; it promotes the capacity, connectedness and social capital. Asset-based approach emphasis the need to balance between meeting needs and nurturing the strengths and resources of people and communities (Gonzalez, Fernandez and Wilson, 2020). The asset-based theory focuses on honing and leveraging existing strengths within the community. According to Wenger (2015), and supported by the Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium (2016), communities of practice involves more than two people and would no necessary rely on confidentiality. CoP involves mutual engagement, understanding and tuning enterprise and developing repertoire, styles and discourse (Calderón-Larrañaga et al., 2021). According to Mathie, Cameron and Gibson (2017) this conceptual framework is informed by socio-cultural theories and the participation metaphor and learning takes place within a community of practice, where teachers learn from others creating new knowledge from combining several individuals' knowledge. Asset-based theory and communities of practice provide me with tools to understand how people operate in a community of practice such as history teachers in professional learning communities and how they make sense of what they learn.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The role of the teacher in teaching history

Teachers are the major pillars of the teaching-learning process (Killen, 2010). Teachers play a significant role in curriculum implementation with their knowledge and experience. Teachers have the job of teaching the curriculum both inside and outside the classroom. Teachers give information about what kind of things need to be included, like materials, activities and specific skills (Haydn and Stephen, 2021). Different factors influence teaching history, namely, teacher knowledge, subject knowledge, knowledge of how to teach, how to assess, selection and use of resources, as well as classroom management.

The first factor that impacts the teaching of history is the lack of teacher knowledge. Ibrahim (2013) and Nwanze (2015) state that teachers being part of curriculum planning help in creating a high-quality curriculum, it makes the activities more meaningful and valuable. Teachers are the key players to carry out curriculum implementation effectively and efficiently at all levels, so they should be given authority in their specific areas of expertise (Alsubaie, 2016). In this case, teachers should be competent and effective. The teacher should have a good understanding of the subject and know how to create a good classroom environment and teach lessons in a way that helps students learn. Therefore, the teacher should attend workshops and cluster meetings to acquire new knowledge.

Teaching is a complex act requiring many kinds of knowledge (Allender, 2020). This knowledge includes subject matter content knowledge and pedagogical principles. However, the subject is about teaching and learning of a subject. The teacher should engage students with various classroom tasks. Teachers must have the knowledge of the subject they teach. Therefore, Heggart (2016) states that subject matter, content knowledge is what someone who specialises in a particular subject knows. For example, what a historian knows about history. In addition, there will be a need for pedagogical content knowledge for teaching the subject, as in understanding the historical events and how they are understood by students. Furthermore, teachers know what materials and tools to use when teaching a specific subject. Teachers who know a lot about their subject usually focus on understanding the big ideas, solving problems

and asking questions about the subject (Putnam, Feiman-Numser and Calderhead, 2020). Therefore, teaching history aims to foster students understanding and meaningful learning.

Teaching means working with learners to help them use information, ideas and skills, this includes planning lessons, choosing what to teach, giving lessons, testing learners (Tallavaara and Rautiaine, 2020). To teach means to get learners involved in the curriculum. Therefore, teaching means making learners participate in a creative knowledge. A teacher needs to know the subject and how students learn in order to make them active learners (Caferro, 2020).

Without enough materials, teaching and learning cannot happen effectively (Bediako, 2019). This implies the teaching of history as well. In order for the curriculum to work effectively, the government should provide resources like books, classrooms, workshops and libraries, this will create a good environment for teaching the curriculum (Kennedy, 2019). However, schools still do not have enough textbooks and buildings. In such cases, students take turns using the same books because they live far away from each other, which can be difficult. Schools do not have enough resources and teachers have to teach different grade levels, which makes it hard for teachers to follow the curriculum. Hence, the amount and quality of materials available greatly affect how the curriculum is taught.

Hence, history teachers can enhance their curriculum implementation and overcome the challenges through professional learning communities, supported by communities of practice by connecting with other teachers to share their knowledge and use different approaches to teaching and learning. Connecting with other teachers is seen as a major source of new ideas (Miller, 2020). History teachers can enhance their teaching skills by collaborating with other teachers and exchanging ideas. They share their knowledge by attending workshops and participating in school meetings as well as clusters. They can improve their teaching skill through learning about new teaching approaches, group teaching, participating in PLCs at school and being supported by the management at school.

What are professional learning communities?

According to Homberger (2019), professional learning communities (PLCs) are groups of teachers who meet often, share knowledge and work together to improve students'

thinking skills and academic performance. The Department of Education (2011) argues that PLCs are groups where people work together to make schools better including stakeholders. Tsakui and Murase (2019) define professional learning communities as an approach to school improvement in which a group of teachers collaborate at the school level to improve students' outcomes. In addition, PLCs should be understood as a group of teachers working together to share their teaching experiences and improve their teaching skills and students' achievements. Professional learning communities are formed through shared vision, values and goals, collaboratively working together to achieve student's academic performance. They are also formed through mutual trust and respect. Teachers trust one another in sharing their teaching ideas and allow criticism from their colleagues. Collaboration, unity and a positive environment should be taken into consideration when creating professional learning communities.

Strategies of professional learning communities

Workshops

Govender (2018) defines workshops as a learning community or teacher network. Nkambule and Amsterdam (2018) argue that workshops are a mechanism for schools to bring together materials and other sources that benefit the schools. During workshops, teachers engage in activities such as answering source-based questions and essay-type questions as well as memorandum discussions (Suchyadi et al., 2019). In the workshop, teachers share best practices as they cascade the information to other teachers. The coordinator provides material and information in the form of an Annual Teaching Plan, subject guidelines and programmes of assessment. With the ATP, the subject advisor indicates the content that needs to be covered as well as the time frame to complete the content and assessment. The purpose of this is to equip teachers with more knowledge for curriculum implementation. This is a great benefit to teachers as they develop teaching strategies and writing skills, analysing source-based and visual questions and developing a line of argument and conclusion linked to the question (Merchie et al., 2018). In the curriculum implementation, workshops enable the discussion of current topics in the subject area or teaching practices in the classroom. There is an improvement in the curriculum implementation of history in the FET phase as history teachers practice new teaching methods in the PLCs and apply them to their teaching.

Peer learning

Peer learning is the acquisition of knowledge and skills through active help and support among equal partners (Levin and Flavian, 2022). Adams, Adams and Oliver (2019) state that peer learning involves people from similar social groups, who can be a professional group to help each other learn and thereby learn themselves. Peer learning is an educational method that helps teachers consolidate their knowledge by teaching each other (Woolhouse and Nicholas, 2020). Therefore, peer learning is essentially learning with and from your colleagues. When we bring people together through peer learning, all participants learn and develop their skills. Peer learning includes mentoring, shadowing and learning more (Shonfeld and Gibson, 2019). In the practice of peer learning, teachers put learning in their hands, creating pathways for knowledge sharing with other teachers. The purpose of peer learning is to build trust between colleagues, which benefits the working culture and improves teaching in the curriculum implementation. Peer learning is to promote social learning by bringing peers together to teach one another and strengthen learning for everyone. Within the practice of peer learning, teachers draw on existing expertise, share knowledge and experience, upskill other teachers and give feedback that fosters the opportunity for growth and development in history curriculum implementation.

Peer learning takes place within a school and cluster level. Within the school, teachers teaching the same subject come together and share knowledge of the subject; this includes one teacher at a neighbouring school teaching a particular topic that the other teacher does not have the knowledge of teaching. At a cluster level, subject advisors and expert teachers share and discuss content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, marking and moderation skills. Teachers become active agents as they are involved in activities that equip them with skills to apply in history curriculum implementation in the form of teaching methods, lesson planning, assessment and feedback.

Collaborative assessment

Collaborative assessment is the process when teachers of the same subject collaborate in designing assessments for students (Sharratt, 2019). Teachers work as a group and create assessments that meet the needs of their students (Le, Janssen and Wubbels, 2018). The subject specialists, Department of Basic Education and PLC coordinator train teachers in setting standardised question papers (McConlque, 2020). Collaborative

assessment can take place at school and cluster levels. Teachers of the same subject come together at a school level to create assessments that meet the needs of the students and their level of understanding. At a cluster level, they plan to find ways of assessing students with the same objective to meet the student's achievement. They partake in learning how to set a standardised question paper, especially common papers for exams in March, June and September. They also look at the skills of extracting answers from sources, comparing sources and evaluating the usefulness of sources. They discuss the key issues of points in writing paragraphs, marking guide and memorandum discussions for grades 10 and 11. The initiative of collaborative assessment is to accommodate novice teachers as they are not familiar with the process of assessments. The collaborative assessment empowers FET band history teachers with assessment knowledge for curriculum implementation. They are able to implement the curriculum as they give feedback to students. Hence, collaborative assessment contributes immensely to the high history pass rate.

Lesson study

The lesson study approach is a way to help teachers grow and improve by focusing on certain skills and qualities (Botes, Moreeng and Mosia, 2022). Lesson study is the teacher's roadmap of what students need to learn and how to implement it effectively during lessons (Kim et al., 2021). In addition, it is cognitive thinking about what will happen in the classroom during a lesson. Lesson study takes place in the school, where teachers of the same subject specify the objectives of the lesson, what information they want to pass on to students, what teaching methods they use, and whether they have achieved the aims and objectives of the lesson. Again, at the cluster level, teachers will meet and share information that best practices lesson study. During lesson study as a strategy to enhance history curriculum implementation, teachers come together to address learning objectives, activities, teaching methods, learning materials and assessments to check if students understand. They focus on what students need to learn, how to teach it and how to make sure students understand it. History curriculum implementation takes place in the form of the teacher's knowledge of the students, the content, the teaching resources and the teaching strategies (Collet, 2019).

MODELS OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Professional learning communities operate at different levels of the education system. They can be at individual teachers' level, at school and at cluster level. At the individual level, teachers teaching the same subject help one another by teaching the topic one is uncomfortable with. Therefore, teachers meet regularly every week or a month, working together to improve and diversify their teaching techniques. However, the meeting time slot depends on the teachers: how they plan and the effort they put in. Teachers identify what their students need to learn, observe experienced teachers and give them helpful advice.

They work together to create and improve lesson plans and teaching methods to better support students. Collaboration is a key aspect of professional learning communities. Goodyear, Parker and Casey (2019) assert that teacher collaboration is when teachers choose to work together and make decisions together towards a common goal. At this level of collegiality, teachers discuss, design, implement, analyse, evaluate and experiment with their teaching (Khan, Razak and Kenayathulla, 2021). The key characteristics of collaborative cultures are spontaneity, teacher orientation and unpredictability and they are development-oriented.

At the school level, professional learning communities help schools get better at teaching and learning. Most professional learning communities are organised and formed at the school level (Fox and Poultney, 2020). Hargreaves and Rolls (2020) state that the school provides spaces where teachers share innovative ideas with experienced teachers and where experienced teachers monitor young teachers. Professional learning communities can be organised between schools as well. Some schools do not have the space to accommodate the number of teachers and they are small in size. Therefore, they team up with neighbouring schools. Between schools, professional learning communities are very effective in exchanging ideas and aligning organisational culture of PLCs between the schools. According to Fieldman (2017), at the school level, it is an on-going dialogue that focuses on teacher development and improved student learning. A learning space where teachers collaborate and engage in ongoing debates to examine practice and student performance and to develop and implement more effective teaching practices in their specific content while sharing their individual knowledge and expertise. The effectiveness of professional learning communities at the school level is intended to provide space for the expression of

viewpoints; dialogue goes beyond individual understanding and allows participants to gain insights that they would not have been able to achieve individually.

At a cluster level, different schools meet and collaborate in sharing experiences. The school management team motivates teachers to participate in the professional learning communities and create collaborative relationships with other teachers (DoE, 20219). The cluster must ensure that the professional learning communities are established within the schools and should support them. However, the cluster functions as a centre for exchanging professional learning communities within the neighbouring and surrounding schools as well as creating opportunities for them to develop by creating workshops for teachers. In addition, clusters provide teachers with development, subject support, standardisation of school-based assessments (Park and Cooc, 2019). Furthermore, they demonstrate a willingness to work together, sharing and developing content knowledge and content notes (Ismail et al., 2021). The effectiveness of cluster meetings is that teachers meet to share content knowledge, subject notes, methods of teaching, how to mark source-based and essay questions, discussion of the memorandum and classroom management strategies.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is positioned within the constructivism paradigm as it seeks to establish the views held by history teachers on the use and understanding of professional learning communities to enhance the implementation of the history curriculum. This paradigm is used in this study to understand the history curriculum implementation. In addition, this study is a qualitative research approach that focuses and engages individuals or groups of people's views, feelings and patterns without control or manipulation (Dubey and Kothari, 2022). It involves collecting and analysing data to gain insights into concepts, convictions or individual experience (Bhandari, 2020).

In the case of this study, qualitative research is used to answer questions, meanings and experiences through interviews to understand experiences of history teachers in PLCs. In this study, the researcher seeks to establish the views held by history teachers on the use of PLCs to enhance the implementation of history curriculum. Research design is a plan for data generation techniques, selection of participants and analysing of data in a manner that combines relevance with the research procedure and purpose (Morgan, 2019). Therefore, exploratory research is appropriate for achieving the aim and

objectives of the study. According to Blokdyk (2018), exploratory research is a way of studying new research questions that have not been studied much before.

According to Pandey and Pandey (2021), sampling means the process of selecting a smaller, more manageable number of participants for the research study. Jalali (2020) argues that the main consideration in qualitative research studies is to select a representative sample capable of providing adequate answers to the research questions. I used purposive sampling to select participants for this research study. Berndt (2020) mentions that purposive sampling is used when the researcher knows that the participants selected are information-rich and best understand the phenomenon being studied. For the purpose of this study, the researcher selected history teachers from five different schools in UMgungundlovu District in KwaZulu Natal and five history teachers were purposefully selected. The selected schools, as well as teachers, were diverse, coming from different locations and different classifications.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

The data collection phase involves a variety of ethical issues that are very important in conducting research (Husband 2020). Furthermore, Suri (2020) explains ethics as a way of helping to eliminate abuse and helping researchers understand their role as ethical scholars. DeRenzo, Singer and Moss (2020) argue that educational researchers must consider all ethical issues related to their research. This study complies with the ethical standards of the Department of Basic Education in South Africa and the University of the Free State in conducting the research. Before commencing my research, I applied for approval from the Department of Basic Education and the Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Free State.

FINDINGS

This section is going to present the findings in response to the question: “What strategies of PLCs can be used to enhance history curriculum implementation?”. The following themes emerged: workshops, integrating technology, assessment, and lesson study.

Theme 1: Workshops

In South Africa, the model of inviting teachers to workshops in which experts impart knowledge and skills has long been in place. In the educational context, Govender (2018) defines the term workshops as a type of educational programme, generally

designed for a group of people whose content is practical. Workshops typically consist of a series of specific-tailed activities presented in the form of intensive, interactive educational programmes or training, varying in length and content (Monyai, 2019). Workshops can take place at a school and cluster level. During workshops, participants are engaged in activities such as content discussion, developing content notes, writing and assessing source-based questions and essay-type questions, analysing visual questions. In response to the theme of workshops, the following responses were received from the participants.

Teacher A, with regard to workshops as a strategy to enhance history curriculum implementation, mentions that *during workshops, teachers learn skills in answering source-based and essay questions*. As cited by Jita and Mokhele (2014), the cluster workshops approach is one of the key ways to help teachers develop skills and thus gain confidence in their work. Teacher B asserts: “*smaller activities and practices during workshops allow you as the teacher to develop and identify skills*”. This enables teachers do develop higher thinking skills and also think hypothetically, which is essential for historians. Teacher C states: “*the administration has been supportive when there is a workshop for training history teachers; they send us to workshops*. Teacher D adds: *we help each other at workshops, exchange information, discuss content and develop content notes*. This is supported by Teacher E, who states that: “*workshop subject advisors provide knowledge and information about how to structure a good essay and maintain a line of argument in an essay*.” As a result, they are sharing expertise in teaching methods, solving problems and working together on a project.

The workshop strategy is an ideal means of engaging teachers, highlighting interaction and encouraging active participation and motivation to gain a deeper understanding of a topic in school. It offers teachers the opportunity to broaden teaching and develop a variety of skills and competencies. Furthermore, it is a dynamic and practical approach that helps teachers to be equal and active and learn from one another. This is supported by the literature by Mahlangu (2018), who contends that the main objectives of workshops are to develop group cohesion, create a positive atmosphere in the group and mutual respect and a sense of belonging to the group and promote participation and better acceptance of an individual. This aligns with communities of practice and asset-

based theory as they operate in a community of practice where they collaborate, share information, improve their skills and advance their knowledge in their domain.

Theme 2: Integrating ICT

Information and communication technology (ICT) in education uses information and communications technology to support, enhance and optimise the delivery of information (Dlamini and Mbatha, 2018). Schools use a variety of ICT tools to communicate, create, distribute, store and manage information. In addition, teachers collaborate online using tools such as Microsoft teams, zoom, skype, telegram messenger and WhatsApp messenger. Therefore, ICT can impact the professional development of teachers if they have digital literacy and know how to integrate it into the curriculum. In response to the theme of integrating ICT, the following responses were received from the participants.

Teacher A: states *“we have a WhatsApp group for history FET teachers where we share content notes, including word bank activities, past papers, lesson plans and marking rubrics”*. This is supported by Teacher B: *“we have a WhatsApp group where the facilitator provides us with onsite support visit memos to support the implementation of history curriculum as well as moderation tools as we have newly implemented moderation tools and she provides support on how to use them”*. Teachers value the shift towards professional development as it impacts their curriculum implementation. Furthermore, Teacher C asserts: *“every Friday afternoon between 14:30 p.m. and 16:00 p.m., we collaborate on Microsoft teams, where an expert teacher is facilitating a certain topic that is challenging to teach. For example, in grade 10, “The world around 1600”*. In addition, Teacher D states: *“in term 3, during the holidays, we had an online workshop for four days for History FET teachers, where the facilitator was sharing content notes, skills of how to answer source-based and essay-type questions, and how to facilitate a history lesson.”* The availability of resources during curriculum implementation is crucial as it contributes to the successful implementation of an innovation. Teacher E: asserts *“we also use emails to exchange information and question papers for sharing with the neighbouring school teacher how the question paper is.”*

Techniques for implementing technology in professional learning communities, such as collaboration and support amongst educators within PLCs, are crucial for successfully integrating technology into the history curriculum as they exchange experiences, resources and best practices for using digital technologies (Avalos, 2019). Supported by the literature (Masilela, 2019), offering professional development opportunities for

educators to improve their digital literacy and competence in utilising digital tools and resources for history teaching is one of the strategies for integrating technology inside professional learning communities. Creating and disseminating lesson plans, activities and evaluations that use digital technologies and resources to promote innovation and ongoing development in history curriculum implementation.

Theme 3: Assessment

The phrase assessment in education refers to the vast range of methods or tools used by educators to evaluate and measure learning progress, skill development and educational requirements (Black and Wiliam, 2018). Assessment is the process of gathering and discussing information from multiple and diverse sources in order to develop a deeper understanding of what students know, understand and can do with their knowledge as a result of educational experiences (Bryan and Clegg, 2019). Assessment takes place at individual and cluster levels. At individual-level, teachers assess students, mark and give feedback as teachers determine the students' progress and understanding. Cluster level subject advisors and expert teachers collaborate to give an insight into how to set formal and informal assessments, including standardised papers. In response to the theme of assessments, the following responses were received from the participants.

For Teacher A: *“the purpose of teachers coming together is to develop one another, provide subject support and ensure the standardised school-based assessment. They work together to achieve what they cannot achieve alone. Teacher B mentions that: “teachers are trained in how to set questions at all levels, ranging from the extraction of evidence from sources to the defining of historical concepts, interpretation of information form sources and the comparing of evidence.”* This view is supported by Teacher C who says: *“we also engage in several activities such as moderation of formal tasks, sharing of content notes, and, most importantly, we learn the skills of assessing.:* Teacher D asserts: *“collaborative assessment equips teachers with proper knowledge of marking and assessing using the correct marking/assessing guide.”* Collaborative assessment encourages teachers to work as a unit, improving their learning and professional development. Teacher E, *we set standardised papers for grades 10 and 11 in March, June and September.*

The above discussion illustrates the culture of collaboration that helps each other achieve better results in history. From these findings, teachers agree and are willing to

work together and share their skills and methods while leveraging their diverse expertise. This agrees with the literature, as Le Janssen and Wubbels (2018) argue that through collaboration, teachers are encouraged to generate knowledge about teaching and improve teaching practice and is in line with CoP and assert-base theory as they operate in a community of practice where they collaborate, share information, improve their skills and advance the knowledge of their domain.

Theme 4: Lesson study

Lesson study teachers come together to prepare lesson plans based on common goals to be achieved (Kusanagi, 2022). Fujii (2019) sees lesson study as a cycle of inquiry that helps teachers experiment, observe and improve their teaching. In this case, one teacher teaches the lesson while the others observe. Teachers then reflect on the lesson together to refine and improve it further. Initially, lesson study is used to improve teaching and learning. Lesson study takes place within the school and cluster level. In response to the theme of the lesson study, the following responses were received from the participants.

According to Teacher A: *“Teachers teaching history in my school come together during Fridays to help each other develop lesson plans for the week.”* This view is supported by Teacher B, who admits: *“It sharpened each other’s teaching skills as we came together and had an expert teacher present a lesson to us during history workshops as they shared knowledge of developing lesson plans for successful history curriculum implementation.* To Teacher C: *“Teachers from better-achieving schools meet with us during weekends and plan prior to lesson facilitating.”* Teacher D mentioned that: *“we share knowledge of and information on how to structure.”* For Teacher E: *“Lesson study is not about teachers as performers; it is about how teachers implement curriculum in the classroom and how students understand the information.”*

Lesson study provides valuable insight into professional development that leads to improvement in how teachers teach. This is in agreement with the literature by Kareemee, Suwannatthachole and Faikhamta (2019) that lesson study involves groups of teachers meeting regularly over a period of time to design, implement and test and improve the teaching. This is in line with the practice of assert-based theory and CoP as they illustrate the culture of collaboration to improve professional development.

DISCUSSION

According to Mphahlele (2014) clusters are only used for learner portfolio “moderation”. However, data showed that this is not the case for the history cluster. The interviews of the participants outlined different activities that take place in history cluster. All five participants agreed that assessment was a key activity. Teachers were given various question papers to evaluate their quality for assessing purposes of learners. Teachers were provided activities from past question papers to discuss, based on the required topic for answering the questions. Regarding peer learning, done in a form of moderation each teacher was expected to bring scripts from the previous term to be moderated by the cluster coordinators. The moderator is expected to comment on marking skill, whether learners were awarded proper results. Lesson study, teachers were divided into groups where each group given a topic from a textbook. Teachers were expected to discuss what was required by the topic and how the content could be delivered to the learners to ensure they understood.

The results imply that PLCs should emphasise the analysis and discussion of assessment data, allowing educators to share ideas, identify patterns, and cooperatively build strategies for resolving identified gaps and issues (Zhu, 2019). Moreover, fostering a culture of continuous improvement through ongoing assessment and feedback practices can enhance the overall effectiveness of history curriculum implementation.

The significance of technology in contemporary history teaching has been well-documented in the literature, with digital tools and resources presenting new options for engaging students and increasing learning experiences (Mamluk-Naaman, 2018). The findings suggest that PLCs play a crucial role in supporting the integration of technology into the history curriculum by promoting the exploration and evaluation of digital tools, providing professional development opportunities, and fostering a culture of innovation and risk-taking (Tipping and Dennis, 2022). Through these collaborative efforts, PLCs can help history educators effectively utilise technology to improve teaching and learning, contributing to the ongoing transformation of history education in the digital age.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of this research, the following recommendations are offered to promote the effective implementation of the history curriculum with professional learning communities. Educational institutions should prioritise the formation of PLCs

that foster collaboration and open communication among history professors. This involves giving educators frequent, organised chances to discuss materials, teaching practices and ideas on history curriculum implementation. It is also critical to foster an atmosphere of trust, honesty, and constructive criticism. They should also create action plans that explain the processes, resources, responsibilities, and dates required to achieve these objectives. PLCs in history teaching may benefit from regular evaluation and change of objectives and action plans based on feedback and changing conditions.

PLCs should emphasise the relevance of formative and summative assessment in history teaching, and assessment data should be incorporated into instructional choices. This entails frequent data analysis and discussion and the formulation of joint initiatives to address identified gaps and issues. Fostering a culture of continuous improvement via continual evaluation and feedback will help history curriculum implementation succeed. Educational institutions and PLCs should aggressively encourage technology integration into the history curriculum. This may involve providing chances for professional development for educators, investigating and analysing digital technologies and resources, and promoting an environment of creativity and risk-taking. History instructors may improve learning experiences, engage students, and foster the development of critical thinking skills and global awareness by skillfully harnessing technology.

More study is required to analyse the precise situations in which the suggested PLC tactics are most successful and investigate additional aspects that may influence the effectiveness of history curriculum implementation within PLCs. This might entail investigating the function of leadership, the impact of institutional culture, and the significance of external assistance in promoting PLC work in history instruction.

This research investigated Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) techniques for improving history curriculum implementation. The study's conclusions emphasise the need for clusters, workshops, teacher collaboration, and incorporating technology into the historical curriculum. PLCs may help the continual development of history teaching and better assist student learning by concentrating on these tactics.

The study's suggestions help educational institutions, history instructors, and PLCs better history curriculum implementation and support continual innovation in teaching and learning. Stakeholders may develop a collaborative, data-informed, and digitally

enhanced approach to history instruction that equips students to manage the challenges of the contemporary world by implementing these ideas.

It is crucial to note that the study's results and recommendations are based on a systematic literature evaluation, which may be impacted by the extent and quality of the current research. More research is needed to determine the specific contexts in which these strategies are most effective, as well as to investigate other factors that may influence the success of PLCs in history curriculum implementation. Future research may continue to enhance our knowledge of the function of PLCs in history teaching and contribute to the field's continuing change by building on the findings of this study.

CONCLUSION

This study was conducted with the objective of identifying what strategies take place in history cluster (PLCs) and be able to draw conclusion as to whether they can be regarded as an enhancement for history curriculum implementation. The study used an exploratory research design. The individual and semi-structured interviews were used to generate data. The study discovered that the history clusters are regarded as professional learning communities because they show all the characteristics of professional learning communities. However, the identified characteristics were collaborative learning, supportive conditions and sharing of teaching resource.

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CHAPTER 4

BRIDGING THE ARTICLES

4.1. INTRODUCTION

This section provides a brief background, context, summary, concluding reflections, recommendations, and study implications. I also indicated how the two articles are connected to the study objectives and how each objective was addressed.

The study explored the use of PLCs to enhance history curriculum implementation. The study adopted asset-based theory as a framework and communities of practice as a conceptual framework and was implemented in two articles. I employed a data generation approach to provide relevant data to answer the study objectives, semi-structured interviews, and purposively selected five history teachers. Participatory techniques methods were used to allow concerned individuals to actively participate.

4.2. ARTICLE SUMMARY

4.2.1. Article 1

Article 1 responded to the research objective of determining how history teachers understand PLCs. The article is titled: "Exploring history teachers understanding of the role of PLCs in enhancing history curriculum implementation". Findings from this study show that teachers understand PLCs and take place at different levels: individual, school, and cluster.

4.2.2. Article 2

Article 2 responded to the research objective of suggesting strategies of PLCs that can be used to enhance history curriculum implementation. The article is titled: "Strategies of PLCs that can be used to enhance history curriculum implementation". Findings show that building a collaborative culture among history teachers is vital for successful curriculum implementation, as it allows the exchange of best practices, resources and teaching methodologies.

4.3. ANSWERING THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

4.3.1. Research objective 1: Determine how history teachers understand PLCs

Article one addressed this objective by the research question: How do history teachers understand professional learning communities? The findings of the study reveal that teachers understand PLCs through the practice of collaboration and share a common vision and goal. Teachers work together to develop each other, share knowledge, teaching skills and approaches and encourage critical thinking and, ultimately, better performance in terms of history results. Collaboration is one of the possible activities that can support teacher learning.

4.3.2. Research objective 2: Suggest strategies of PLCs that can be used to enhance history curriculum implementation.

Article 1 addressed this objective by the research question: How are PLCs used to enhance history curriculum implementation? The findings indicate that for successful curriculum implementation, history teachers should build a collaborative culture where best practices, resources and teaching methods can be exchanged. For history teaching and learning to improve, open and honest communication is vital in establishing trust and identifying challenges and solutions together. PLCs organise opportunities for teachers to participate in frequently, focused discussions regarding historical curriculum implementation and provide assistance in overcoming any obstacle.

4.4. REALISING THE AIM OF THE STUDY/ADDRESSING THE MAIN RESEARCH QUESTIONS OF THE STUDY

Through two connected articles, the study aimed to explore the experiences of history teachers in PLCs as a mechanism to enhance history curriculum implementation in the FET phase. To realise this aim, the main research question was formulated: How are history teachers experiencing PLCs as an enhancement of history curriculum implementation in the FET phase? Two objectives were pursued, with one article dedicated to each of the two objectives.

Article 1 helped me to determine how history teachers understand PLCs. The article revealed teachers' understanding through defining PLCs, the purpose of PLCs, activities done, where it takes place, participants and principles. It was evident from the findings

that teachers collaborate to engage in subject content and assessment discussions through professional learning communities. In the course of the content discussion, it became apparent that teachers have a wide range of content knowledge and teaching skills to share. Moreover, they learn skills for answering source-based questions as well as essays. Through PLCs, teachers are provided with skills for history curriculum implementation. Article 1 assisted me in understanding the use of PLCs to enhance history curriculum implementation.

Article 2 focuses on strategies of PLCs that can be used to enhance history curriculum implementation. The article revealed strategies such as workshops, integrating ICT, assessment and lesson study. The findings reveal that PLCs emphasise the analysis and discussion of assessment to allow teachers to share ideas, identify patterns and collaboratively develop strategies to address gaps and problems (Zheng, Yin and Li, 2019). Furthermore, the implementation of the history curriculum can be enhanced by fostering a culture of continuous improvement through ongoing assessment and feedback practices. By providing professional development opportunities, fostering a culture of innovation and promoting a culture of risk-taking, PLCs promote the integration of technology into the history of curriculum implementation (Tipping and Dennis, 2022).

4.5. RECOMMENDATIONS

This section focuses on recommendations based on the two objectives addressed in the study. Based on the study's findings, I encourage further research on professional learning communities to be conducted on a bigger scale, exploring and comparing PLCs from other provinces to get insights from a broader perspective. As this study focuses on history, further research can look at other subjects. This study was focused on understanding and strategies of PLCs to enhance history curriculum implementation. Research into the influence of PLCs or development is recommended. With regard to the findings in Article 1, I recommend that the PLCs need to have stipulated activities that need to be covered by the PLCs in a specific period. I believe that PLCs should have particular activities that must be completed within a certain time frame. Teachers must be fully educated on what is expected of them in their PLCS. Most participants appear not to comprehend the objectives of participating in PLCs. The second article's objective is to uncover the strategies that can be used to enhance history curriculum implementatio

4.6. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

As a whole, the study provides insight into the use of PLCs to enhance history curriculum implementation. Article 1 asked questions relating to the understanding of PLCs. Teachers provided evidence that they understand PLCs and the article came up with ways in which history teachers understand PLCs. Article 2 also asked questions relating to strategies of PLCs that can be used to enhance history curriculum implementation. It was very clear that teachers understand PLCs as they have engaged with them through clusters. Teachers should collaborate more to gain more insight into strategies for history curriculum implementation. Teachers work together to share information, teaching skills and methods. Teachers can learn from their mistakes with the support of teachers using PLCs. PLCs further demonstrate a supportive environment in which teachers exchange resources, such as content notes, textbooks, teaching media, question papers and marking schemes to help one another in the curriculum implementation.

4.7. LIMITATIONS

This research was carried out in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. Since data was obtained in one district, there may be an opportunity for my study to be expanded to other districts in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. This would allow policymakers to fully support teacher collaboration as a professional learning community and impact teacher learning and development. This study also encountered a few challenges throughout the participant selection process. Two members of the PLCs declined to participate in the study for reasons best known to themselves.

4.8. REFLECTIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

There is a lot of literature on PLCs and curriculum implementation. Various literature explains and promotes teacher development for teaching practices. Despite the fact that some teachers are rigid and unwilling to embrace change, change is inevitable, especially as technology evolves and learners become increasingly inclined. In the 21st century, traditional teaching methods are becoming absolute and history teachers should be flexible to learn from their mistakes, learners and other teachers. This study has shown me that teachers play an important role in curriculum implementation. Most

of the recommendations that emerged from the study's findings could be implemented in my practice to improve my teaching practice. Additionally, I realised the importance of collaboration and collective learning. Through the support and insight of my supervisor, the meetings, external academics who held workshops on different aspects of writing and my group members, I was able to complete this study. Teachers were willingly participating. I grew holistically as a person engaging with participants and supervisors. On a personal, professional and social level, I required scholarly knowledge, skills, values and attitudes. One should remember that academic writing is not an event but an ongoing process where one learns from mistakes, everyday experiences and other academics.

4.9. CONCLUSION

The study is positioned with the constructivism paradigm. Data was generated through semi-structured interviews. The study aimed to explore the use of PLCs to enhance history curriculum implementation. The study also revealed that, to some extent, the history clusters may be considered professional learning communities, even though they do not demonstrate all the characteristics of PLCs. However, the features are collaboration, shared vision and goals, mutual respect and supportive conditions. According to the Department of Basic Education Guideline for South Africa Schools (2015), a successful professional learning community requires its members to meet regularly.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: TITLE REGISTRATION



16 September 2022

APPLICATION FOR TITLE REGISTRATION

Applicant: Mbanjwa, AN

Student Number: 2016251999

Discipline: Curriculum Studies

Study Code: Masters (EDCI8900)

Dear Ms Mbanjwa

Your registered title is as follows: "Exploring the use of professional learning communities to enhance history curriculum implementation in the FET phase"

All of the best with your studies.

Yours sincerely,



Prof Patrick Mafora
Chair: CTR committee



Ms CS Duvenhage
Secretary: CTR committee

205 Nelson Mandela Drive | Park West, Bloemfontein 9301 | South Africa
P.O. Box 339 | Bloemfontein 9300 | South Africa | www.ufs.ac.za



APPENDIX 2: UFS ETHICAL APPROVAL



GENERAL/HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (GHREC)

31-Mar-2023

Dear Ms Asanda Mbanjwa

Application Approved

Research Project Title:

Exploring the use of professional learning communities to enhance history curriculum implementation in the FET phase,

Ethical Clearance number:

UFS-HSD2022/1907/23

We are pleased to inform you that your application for ethical clearance has been approved. Your ethical clearance is valid for twelve (12) months from the date of issue. We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your study/research project be submitted to the ethics office to ensure ethical transparency. Furthermore, you are requested to submit the final report of your study/research project to the ethics office. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension. Thank you for submitting your proposal for ethical clearance; we wish you the best of luck and success with your research.

Yours sincerely

Dr Adri Du Plessis

Chairperson: General/Human Research Ethics Committee

Adri
Du
Plessis

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signed by Adri
Du Plessis
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APPENDIX 3: PERMISSION LETTER TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN KWAZULU-NATAL



KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE
EDUCATION
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

169 HOUSEN HAFEEJEE STREET
ER BROWNE BUILDING
PIETERMARITZBURG, 3201
Tel: 033 394 9121

DIRECTORATE: UMSUNDUZ CMC
DISTRICT OFFICE: UMGUNGUNDLOVU DISTRICT

Enquiries: MA Mncwabe

Date: 20 February 2023

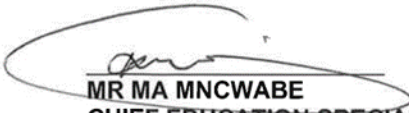
**TO: THE PRINCIPALS OF SCHOOLS
EDENDALE CIRCUIT**

**FROM: MR MA MNCWABE
CHIEF EDUCATION SPECIALIST
UMSUNDUZI CMC**

SUBJECT: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH ON YOUR SCHOOLS.

1. The above matter as reference.
2. Miss Mbanjwa who is currently doing a master's degree in Education from the University of Free State has requested permission to conduct research using our schools. The title of her research is *Exploring the use of professional learning communities to enhance history curriculum implementation in the FET Phase.*
3. Permission is thus granted to carry out the exercise and you are urged to assist her to conduct her work in a conducive environment.
4. Your support is always appreciated.

Yours in Education


**MR MA MNCWABE
CHIEF EDUCATION SPECIALIST
UMSUNDUZI CMC**

20/02/2023
DATE

APPENDIX 4: ADVERTISEMENT FOR THE RECRUITMENT OF PARTICIPANTS IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

Dear prospective research participant

I am Asanda Nompumelelo Mbanjwa, 2016251999, a student pursuing a Master's in Education with the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, in Social Sciences and Commerce Education.

I am interested in conducting a study based on "Exploring the use of professional learning communities to enhance history curriculum implementation in the FET phase". The purpose of the study is to explore the use of PLCs to enhance history curriculum implementation. The participants of this study were selected from the UMgungundlovu district. This was taken into consideration; participants need to be a teacher teaching history in the FET phase, under UMgungundlovu district, Edendale circuit. The identified participants will be required to engage in an interview. This will take place at school, after school hours.

The data will be generated through semi-structured interviews and observations, using audio recordings and writing. It will be transcribed by the interviewer and kept securely. Participating in this study is voluntary and participants may withdraw at any time for any reason. Your input will remain confidential, as your input will be attributed to you in person. Participation is strictly academic and there are no financial benefits.

My contact details: Email: mthembuasanda89@gmail.com. Cell: 0833441257.

Thank you for your contributions to this research.

APPENDIX 5: CONSENT FORM

Interviews scheduled for teachers

TITLE OF RESEARCH: Exploring the use of professional learning communities to enhance history curriculum implementation in the FET phase

- What do you understand by professional learning communities?
- What are the characteristics of professional learning communities?
- What are the benefits of professional learning communities?
- Where do professional learning communities take place?
- How long have you been attending history Professional learning communities?
- In what way does history professional learning communities contribute to professional development?
- What kind of knowledge do teachers acquire from the history of professional learning communities?
- What learning activities are you involved in during PLCs meetings?
- In what ways do you collaborate with other professional collaboration learning community members?

APPENDIX 6: INFORMED CONSENT

I..... (Full names of participants)
hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the
research project and I consent to participate in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time should I so
desire.

Participant's surname & initials:

Participant's signature:



Researcher's signature

Mbanjwa A.N

Researcher's name

APPENDIX 7: LANGUAGE EDITING CERTIFICATE

ERRCD Forum

Motto: *Rethinking Education Research for Inclusive Development*




Our ref: EDIT0351 Date: 28/10/2023

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This letter confirms that Mbanjwa Asanda Nompumelelo's article titled "Exploring the use of professional learning communities to enhance history curriculum implementation in the FET phase" was edited by a professional English-language editing staff at ERRCD Forum.

For further information, feel free to contact LangEditor@errcd.com


Anyakudo
Oluchi Anyakudo
English-language Editor
B. A. & M. A. English and Literary Studies

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APPENDIX 8: TURNITIN REPORT

