

# Teacher Professional Development Outside the Lecture Room: Voices of Professionally Unqualified Practicing Teachers in Rural Zimbabwe Secondary Schools

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## Abstract

Attempts to address global pressure to achieve Education for All have been hampered by two fundamental challenges in developing countries, namely an acute shortage of teachers and large rural populations in these countries. In addition, qualified, competent teachers shun working in rural settings. While recruitment of professionally unqualified graduate teachers into the teaching profession has become recognized internationally as a way to address staffing rural schools and Education for All commitments, there remain outstanding questions regarding how such teachers professionally learn and grow in these rural contexts outside the Teacher Education Institution lecture room. An understanding of how they develop professionally is crucial. This study explored professional development experiences of professionally unqualified practicing teachers in rural secondary schools. A qualitative design was adopted and three-interview series complimented by photo elicitations were employed to explore the teachers' professional development experiences. Data were transcribed and manually analysed inductively utilizing open coding. Findings suggest that professional development experiences for these teachers occurred in four sites: school structures, wider professional sites, planned and unplanned gatherings, and the classroom. Drawing on concepts of professional development to describe, analyse and understand data, the author illustrates that professionally unqualified practicing teachers in rural secondary schools experience professional development outside Teacher Education Institutions in interaction, through domains of formality and experience: non formal, informal and experiential.

## Keywords

Rural education, unqualified teachers, professional development, experiential learning, Education for All

## Background to the Study

Of late governments have been experiencing global pressure to achieve Education for All (EFA) goals, consequently nations have made commitments to every child, indeed, every person having access to basic education (Mukeredzi, 2009). However, in developing countries, attempts to meet these EFA goals have been confronted by two significant challenges. Firstly, an acute shortage of

adequately trained teachers. UNESCO points out “rights of children within education internationally are compromised by untrained education systems cannot produce enough new teachers to meet projected demand and EFA

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and poorly trained teachers” (UNESCO, 2004, p. 138). Lewin, Samuel and Sayed add that “many development targets” (2003, p.133). Secondly, many developing countries have large rural populations. In Zimbabwe 80% of Black Zimbabweans live in rural areas (Chikoko, 2006) consequently most schools are located in these settings. Globally, close to 70% of all school age children are in rural schools (HSRC SA, 2005; UNESCO, 2004) which creates problems, as qualified, competent teachers generally shun working in these areas. Given these global problems, an understanding of these big issues becomes worthwhile. Through personal experience of teaching and coordinating the Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) in Zimbabwe and South Africa, governments recruit university graduates into teaching who have no professional teaching qualifications. This coincides with international trends where professionally unqualified graduates are being persuaded to join teaching and given special dispensations to develop them to qualified status (UNESCO, 2004).

The sample group in this study were professionally unqualified practicing teachers (PUPTs) in rural Zimbabwe secondary schools. In this study, PUPTs are practicing, possess content knowledge from undergraduate degrees, have teaching experience, but do not have a professional teaching qualification. It is the professional development experiences of this category of teachers outside a Teacher Education Institution (TEI) lecture room, which is investigated in this study. The PUPTs were enrolled in an Initial Teacher Education (ITE) Programme - PGDE offered by the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) in order to become qualified.

Knowing how such teachers professionally develop outside TEIs in rural schools is essential for reviewing professional development efforts undertaken by institutions, which is vital if

quality of teacher education provision is to be enhanced (Mukeredzi, 2013). This study sought to understand how the PUPTs in rural secondary schools professionally develop outside TEIs. The study addressed one research question: How do the PUPTs experience professional development outside TEIs in rural secondary schools?

## Conceptualising Professional Development

Professional development is understood as representing the growth of teachers in their profession. Villegas-Remers (2003) defined it as “a long-term process that includes regular opportunities and experiences planned systematically or unplanned to promote growth and development in the profession” (p.12). In many countries, proposals to reform/transform schools emphasize teacher professional development as pivotal for improving education quality and student achievement (Nakabugo, Bisaso & Masembe, 2011) as the success of any education reform for student improvement hinges on teacher professional development. However, as professional development is context dependent its nature remains diverse (Komba & Nkumbi, 2008; Villegas-Remers, 2003).

Professional development may be initiated by the ministry, school or teachers. Hurd, Jones, McNamara and Craig (2007) reported centralised government teacher professional development activities in the United Kingdom. Government funded school initiated professional development activities focussing on particular policies have also been recorded in Tanzania (Komba & Nkumbi, 2008). Other approaches have included meetings, workshops, conferences and seminars organised by school subject departments, school-to-school subject clusters and associations (Chikoko, 2006).

In developing countries, professional development has generally relied on

government, subject clusters, and associations for disseminating policy initiatives (Kruijjer, 2010). In South Africa however, Graven (2004) discovered that government workshops were ineffective, and in Zimbabwe, unproductive cascaded professional development workshops were reported (Mukeredzi, 2009). These multiplier styles were also adopted in South Africa in order to reach many participants within a short period (Harley & Wedekind, 2005). Critics of cascaded models of teacher professional learning argue that such models often have no meaningful impact on classroom practice.

There is concurrence on what effective professional development entails. But agreement notwithstanding, a mismatch still remains between speechmaking and practice. Hence, merely knowing what constitutes effective professional development is insufficient; what is important is to have it actively embedded in the cultures, practices and structures of schools. Similar observations were documented by Ono & Ferreira, 2010, p.63 who lamented that: "It is not so much about knowing what good professional development looks like; it's about knowing how to get it rooted in the institutional structure of schools." This study set out to investigate how the PUPTs in rural Zimbabwe secondary schools professionally develop outside Teacher Education Institutions. In other words, the study wanted to understand how these teachers professionally develop in rural secondary schools.

### **The Rural Context In Zimbabwe**

Defining rural is complex and difficult. Coladarci (2007) indicated that there is no singular definition to satisfy the research, programmatic and policy communities that use this concept. Some scholars have lamented that *rural* remains a transient concept dependent on either geographical or demographical conceptions

(Chikoko, 2008) which often reinforce deficiency scripts like poverty and unemployment (Ebersohn & Ferreira, 2012; Islam, Mitchell, De Lange, Balfour & Combrink, 2011; Hlalele, 2012; Myende & Chikoko, 2014). Other researchers believe that the elusiveness of the definition emanates from the ambiguity of the term and arbitrary nature of the distinctions with urban which often overlook the contextual differences because school curricula and practices are similar (Abd-Kadir & Hardman, 2007; Anaxagorou, 2007; Kline, White & Lock, 2013).

In Zimbabwe, the legacy of the colonial rule delineated land into three classifications: First, the former sparsely populated white farming areas, with distinctive developed infrastructure, close to towns and cities, across watershed with rich agricultural farmlands (Mlahleki, 1995). Second, sparsely populated, black owned small-scale market gardening farming areas located on infertile soils and with limited infrastructure, further away from towns. Third, the traditional village- rural, remote, communal lands called *tribal trust lands* or *reserve*' (both descriptors signify derelict land assigned by the colonial government but not owned by the black population) (Chikoko, 2006). Remote denotes physical road distance to the closest urban area where the geographical distance imposes the highest restrictions (Kline et al., 2013). Remote is understood from this perspective in Zimbabwe and in this study. These remote areas extend for hundreds of kilometres away from towns and former white farms, and are characterized by large tracts of infertile land for peasant farming and animal grazing land portions, further away from the homesteads (Peresu, Ndundu, & Makoni, 1999).

Rural schools in Zimbabwe are positioned in remote villages as described above. Generally, class enrolments are small, but schools are severely under-resourced and teachers often have to *make-do* in order to teach (Mlahleki,

1995). However, a positive theoretical potential within the *make-do* disposition is that this stimulates creative thinking to deal with these resource constraints, consequently creating possibilities for professional learning. An awareness of shortcomings often leads to developing effective mediational interventions which give rise to professional development. The rural communities around the schools are generally poor, which tends to undercut any possibility of schools pooling resources. Nevertheless, however, under-resourcing, inclusive of the entire rural atmosphere apparently strengthened the spirit of teacher agency and relational dimensions. Again, most of these schools are neither electrified nor do they have piped water. They are far apart and communication facilities like telephone, cellphone or broadband internet are rarely available. This is compounded by limited and undependable transportation; and when transport is available, many parents cannot afford it due to the high charges (Mukeredzi, 2009). This forces many school children to walk long distances to the nearest secondary school.

Working in rural settings has its own peculiar and idiosyncratic challenges. Attracting and recruiting qualified teachers to these school settings is difficult. Qualified, proficient and experienced teachers often reject rural school teaching posts due to issues of geography, socio-economic circumstances, ethnic differences and the prevailing views of disadvantage, deficiency and marginalization that conceptualize living and working in schools in rural settings as low grade and detrimental (Arnold, Newman & Gaddy, 2005; Pennefather, 2011; Miller, 2012). While, problems of *hard to staff*, *harder to stay* schools are prevalent the world over (Hlalele, 2012; Kline, et al., 2013; Miller, 2012), the problem is more pronounced in developing countries. McEwan (1999) reported various incentives for rural teacher recruitment in many

developing-countries. Governments in Argentina, Bangladesh, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Egypt, Guyana, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Philippines, Venezuela, Zimbabwe and others, adopt diverse recruitment strategies, including wage premiums, subsidized rural housing, special in-service training, and compulsory teacher redeployment to rural schools (McEwan, 1999). Thus, the majority of teachers in these rural schools are either unqualified or under-qualified.

In 1999, 4,035 of the 8,386 university graduates in the Zimbabwean secondary school sector, did not have a professional teaching qualification (Nziramasanga, 1999). More recently, Majongwe (2013) revealed that the government recruited over 15,000, unqualified teachers to fill teacher gaps following two decades of skills flight in the education sector. Consequently, rural schools, mainly staffed with unqualified teachers, performed badly in the 2011 and 2012 Ordinary and Advanced level examinations (Majongwe, 2013). Further, Chiwanga (2014) reported that of the 98,446 teachers in Zimbabwe, 12,713 were professionally unqualified. It was not possible to establish the number of PUPs in rural secondary schools, but given the *hard to staff*, *harder to stay* issues, and with most of the population located in rural settings, it is unsurprising that most of these unqualified teachers are in rural schools. This suggests that education research to develop strategies in rural contexts may be critical for fostering teacher professional development.

Rural areas in many countries suffer more than other contexts due to limited research and ill-advised efforts to develop relevant and reliable approaches for improvement of the quality of education (Miller, 2012). Seemingly, not many devote time to rural issues, nor effectively support the efforts of those who attempt to improve education in rural schools

and communities. Zimbabwe is not an exception, education in rural areas lags behind educational development in other parts of the country. Thus, providing accessible, quality education to these settings is crucial. This study investigated how PUPTs professionally develop in rural school contexts.

### **Teacher Qualifications and Recruitment in Zimbabwe**

Teacher Education in Zimbabwe resides in teachers' colleges and universities, and knowledge levels vary among practicing teachers (Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) Action Plan, 2010). The required minimum qualification for primary and lower secondary school teachers (Form 1- 4) is an 'Ordinary' level academic certificate plus a teachers' diploma/certificate obtained after three or four years of teacher education in a teachers' college. Teachers for senior secondary (Form 5 & 6) require an 'Advanced' Level certificate plus a teachers' diploma/certificate obtained after two or three years of teacher education in college or, 'Advanced' level certificate, plus a three-year university degree, and a teachers' diploma/certificate.

Teacher recruitment and deployment is provincially centralized (MoHE, 2010), but a secondary teacher's contract may require deployment to anywhere in the province. The PUPTs explored in this study were employed before enrolling for ITE, and registration in the PGDE programme required them to have at least two years teaching experience.

### **The Zou PGDE Curriculum**

Three major components comprise the PGDE curriculum in the ZOU: teaching specialization; education and professional foundations; and teaching practice. The educational foundations modules provide the PUPTs knowledge and skills on theories of learning, curriculum,

education management, philosophy of education, school experiences, communication media in the classroom, and research methods with action research project (ZOU, 2001). The subject specialization modules cover the subjects which they taught or their under-graduate degree subject specialization majors. These modules also include lesson preparation, general pedagogy, and pedagogic content knowledge. The teaching practice module extends over two semesters, and the PUPTs did their teaching practice at the schools where they were teaching.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Teacher professional development has been understood in relation to qualified teachers however, in this study it is used with reference to PUPTs. This study draws on concepts of teacher professional development (Villegas-Remers, 2003). Villegas-Remers suggested that professional development is underpinned by a number of characteristics:

Firstly, professional development is based on constructivism. Consequently, teachers are viewed as active learners, who engage in concrete tasks of teaching, assessment, observation and reflection (Villegas-Remers, 2003). Professional development is a social process in which teachers learn from and with others in specific ways. The process is long-term, which acknowledges teachers as life-long learners who learn more effectively from their experiences (learning-in-practice) than from one-off presentations. The central position assumed by the learner (the PUPT) in their learning, and the on-going nature of professional development, suggests a strong connection between teachers as learners, teachers in classroom practice, and in the learning of their pupils. In short, being a teacher implies professional development.

Secondly, professional development is understood as a collaborative process. While

teachers may professionally develop through individual experiences and reflection, their most effective professional learning is understood as occurring in interaction, negotiation and discussion with other teachers as well as with other interested parties, such as parents, administrators and even pupils (Villegas-Remers, 2003). Socio-constructivism alludes to individual knowledge construction occurring in social contexts, as learning activities are socially and contextually bound (Du Plessis, Marais, Van Schalkwyk & Weeks, 2010). In this regard the school community, inclusive of cultural and contextual practices, provides the context in which the PUPTs learn to teach through engagement in socially and contextually determined teacher roles and activities. Learning is an active meaning-making process of transforming understandings in interaction; hence, the PUPTs assume a pivotal role in their learning (Villegas-Remers, 2003). As emphasis is on making-meaning in interaction with colleagues and the context, learning is not located at a psychological level (in a person's head) nor does it involve development of passive behaviours, rather it is influenced by external forces and occurs in collaborative engagement. Interaction with knowledgeable others, including mentors, colleagues, parents, learners, etc., who support the PUPT in knowledge construction, to acquire social meanings of important systems and learn how to utilize them is critical. Hence, relational dimensions, interdependence and interaction are vital for productive and successful learning with and from each other.

Thirdly, professional development takes place within a particular context and is related to the daily activities of teaching/learning

(Villegas-Remers, 2003). Thus, the context becomes central to the learning itself and should be designed to support and challenge the PUPT's thinking, assisting them to professionally develop into effective professionals capable of handling real world complexities (Du Plessis et al., 2010). Learning by doing is emphasized for the PUPTs to experience relevant activities hence, performing core-teacher roles enables such experiences.

Fourthly, a teacher is conceived as a reflective practitioner who enters the profession with some knowledge (Villegas-Remers, 2003). These PUPTs have an undergraduate degree. Thus they will acquire new knowledge and experiences based on prior knowledge. Thus, professional development will help the PUPTs to develop expertise, acquire/improve their theoretical and teaching practices, with trial and critical reflection, and with support and feedback from knowledgeable others (Guskey, 2002).

## **Methodology**

### **Participants**

A qualitative methodology was adopted to investigate how PUPTs professionally develop outside TEIs in rural secondary schools. Six participants who were in the final year of the PGDE programme were purposefully selected. These participants were identified from university biographical data sheets that included geographical location of their schools and schools' distance from town. PUPTs were diverse in teaching experience, teaching specialization, age and gender. The mean age was 36 years, and ages ranged from 30 to 43 years (see Table 1).

Table 1  
*Biographical Details of Participants*

Teacher	Age in years	Gender	Subjects taught	Experience in years before ITE	Class size taught
1	35	Male	History, Geography	9	40-45
2	43	Female	English, Religious studies	7	38-40
3	37	Female	Accounting	9	40-52
4	38	Male	English, Shona (Local Language)	7	40-45
5	30	Female	Business studies	17	35-40
6	34	Male	Geography	6	40-45

### Data Collection

Data was collected through individual face-to-face interviews supplemented by photo elicitation. Informed by Seidman (1998) that interview data should involve more than one interview, three series in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant. Participants answered the same questions in a similar sequence.

Interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes, and were audio-recorded. Facilitative communication techniques - probing, paraphrasing, minimal verbal response, and summarizing were employed to promote continuous talking. Participants responded in English with ease, choosing and using appropriate words effortlessly.

The researcher expanded the field notes immediately after each interview and transcribed tape-recorded interviews verbatim to accurately reflect participants' views. Data was cross-verified from different interviews and across different participants and further verified by checking field notes

and requesting participants to do "member checking" (Cresswell, 2008).

The first, interview began with an explanation of the study purpose, a promise of confidentiality, assurance that they could withdraw at any time, and reassurance that all answers were correct. This interview focused on participants' education and teaching activities, to provide context to their teaching, and to link with activities which demonstrated how they professionally developed in rural schools. The second interview utilized photographs that participants had taken to illustrate their professional development activities. Photo elicitation involved using photographs (or other visual representation) in an interview and requesting participants to comment on the images (Warren, 2005). This stimulated direct participant involvement and promoted data collection. Participants took photographs of their professional development activities illustrating: mentoring and supervision; whole school staff and specialization meetings; subject cluster and

association meetings; lesson preparation, delivery and assessment. These photographs prompted examination and discussion of their professional development practices. The third interview, reflection on meaning, stimulated reflection on their professional development experiences in rural schools.

### **Data Analysis**

Content analysis was utilized to analyze data. Plunkett and Dyson (2011) view this process as involving “a careful, detailed, systematic examination and interpretation of a particular body of material to identify patterns, themes, biases, and meanings” (p.37). Transcripts were read and audio tapes were listened to several times to identify themes relevant to the key question. Independent judges were involved to validate themes of relevant meaning as recommended by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2006). Consequently, the author’s promoter acted as the independent judge who read through the interpretations and offered an outsider’s perspective on the findings, identifying errors and/or omissions and gave the researcher feedback (Mukeredzi 2013). This also enhanced credibility and trustworthiness. Subsequently, the researcher counted participants who made reference to particular themes (domains), sites and spaces. This is shown in Table 2. Bullock (2012) emphasized data representation and analysis that inform findings and interpretations making it transparent to others. In this paper, the author attempted to make data visible by using quotations representative of each theme from audio recorded discussions, and ensured representation across gender and subject

specialization. Singleton and Straits (1999) called this, “... capturing in their language and letting them speak for themselves” (p. 349).

### **Findings**

The study investigated how PUPTs professionally develop outside Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) in rural secondary schools. Data suggested that, these PUPTs engaged in professional development practices in interaction through domains of formality (non-formal, informal) and experience (experiential) in four main situations (school structures, wider professional sites, planned and unplanned meetings and the classroom). Firstly, school structures offered professional development spaces through mentoring and supervision, whole school staff and subject specialization meetings. Secondly, subject cluster and association meetings, and ministry of education (MoE) workshops provided spaces for professional development in wider professional sites. Thirdly, informal professional development occurred in interaction through both planned and unplanned meetings; and fourthly, classroom practice provided space for experiential professional development. Table 2 provides a summary of responses. PUPTs are identified by codes (e.g. Teacher 1).

### **Domains of Professional Development**

In the context of this study, professional development at rural school level is understood as usually occurring through four domains (Figure 1).





**Figure 1** Domain-based typology of professional development (Mukeredzi, 2009).

Mukeredzi (2009) defined these four domains as follows: 1) Formal domain, offered by a TEI, constituting creditable, portable and bankable learning and contributing towards attaining a formal qualification (e.g., PGDE). 2) Non-formal domain, which may be characteristically planned, pre-arranged, organized and structured either internally or externally to the school but, without direct contribution to a qualification. Non-formal learning may be formal in so far as it may be intentional, planned and structured, but non-

credit bearing, nor formally portable or bankable, hence not directly contributing to a formal qualification (Mukeredzi, 2009). 3) Informal domain which is incidental professional development oftentimes picked up from, for example, collegial interactions. 4) Experiential domain which involves learning by doing through classroom practice. This study set out to understand how the PUPTs professionally develop outside the TEI from three domains: non-formal, informal and experiential.



## **Professional Development Through the Non-Formal Domain**

### ***School Structures: Mentoring and Supervision***

All six participants reported mentoring as a major process through which they experienced professional development within school structures. Mentoring was viewed as a process involving coaching/teaching, counselling, guiding, developing and nurturing the professional growth of a novice by a person of greater rank/expertise in an organization (Kerry & Mayes, 1996). Collaboration in preparing, planning, teaching and assessment were key among the professional development supports the PUPTs received through mentoring. Participants took photographs of mentoring meetings; others took photographs of or with their mentor. Looking at a photograph of her mentor Teacher 3 commented:

... my mentor is helpful, very supportive, we collaborate. She is my teacher ... conducts demonstration lessons, I learn a lot, how to introduce lessons, manage learning, and handle students. ... in observing my lessons, we discuss before and after observation, I learn from constructive criticisms, advice and feedback ... it makes me re-play my lesson and learn.

Modelling the lesson enabled learning through mentor-practice, and being observed facilitated learning in three clinical phases: pre-lesson observation conference, observation, and post-lesson observation conference, as suggested above. In the pre-lesson observation conference, the mentor and mentee address the 'what' 'when' 'why' and 'how' of the lesson. The cycle enabled the mentor/supervisor to assist the PUPT to learn from his/her own practice and from

reflection, which promoted professional development. A teacher is a reflective practitioner (Villegas-Remers, 2003); and the mentor is someone to emulate, who stimulates his/her growth and development and who provides some sense of what he/she is attempting to become (Kerry & Mayes, 1996). Emphasising collaboration, Teacher 4 commented:

We collaborate on everything, scheming, planning, teaching, and assessment. He wants me to do a critical self-assessment after each lesson, mine or his before giving his own assessment. ... gives both oral and written evaluations. This makes me learn.

Teacher 2 expressed a similar sentiment:

Whenever I have a challenge, he helps me. He has mentored me throughout PGDE overseeing my development. Seeing how he handles students has helped me to grow.

Collaborative lesson planning enabled the PUPT to discover what was taken into account, and in assessment collaboration, promoted joint critical reflection and professional development. Further, self-assessment provided evidence of professional learning through constructive self-criticism, a vital component for professional development. In lesson delivery, mentor or mentee or both, taught different components, which promoted the trainees' professional development through the joint practice. Collaborative teaching fulfilled another mentoring function, where mentor and mentee engaged in specific tasks to foster and enable knowledge and skill acquisition "as equals". The mentor (nurturer) witnessed ability

development and maturity in the nurtured (PUPT) through tasks performed and dispositions displayed. One dimension of overseeing, protecting and nurturing was to ensure a safe, challenge-free environment and caring for both professional and other forms of development. Being a mentor also implied being a close friend who provided a shoulder to lean on.

In addition to mentoring, four participants highlighted in-school supervision by Head/Deputy Head or Head of Department (HOD) which enhanced their professional development. To illustrate Teacher 6 explained:

See these lines and ticks, and this comment, the deputy made them assessing my documents. Teaching documents are also supervised by the HoD fortnightly. ... they write comments like here (showing) I learn from these comments, it helps me professionally, I reflect more ...

The four PUPTs also alluded to benefiting from lesson supervision by school management. For example, Teacher 5 commented:

Every term I have two lesson observations by HoD and Deputy/Head apart from my mentor. We sit and discuss, I learn from feedback and advice.

Two PUPTs indicated an absence of any form of supervision apart from mentor supervision. Teacher 2 complained:

No, somewhere somehow something is wrong here. ... We don't have such things. We are supposed to be supervised by HoD, D/Head or senior teacher, but management doesn't care, they believe we scheme and teach

because they gave us scheme books ... The mentor tries but she needs back-up by management (laughs).

An absence of in-school supervision implied deprivation of the many dimensions of professional development, and a whole repertoire of in-school guidance and support beyond the mentor. Again, without in-school supervisory support from management, the quality of mentoring often suffered as management supervision may reinforce and enhance teaching practices.

### **Whole School Staff Meetings**

Four PUPTs reported professional development through in-school meetings: whole school staff meetings and subject specialization meetings. These pre-arranged and planned learning opportunities often promoted collaborative learning where the instructional leader acted as the facilitator. To illustrate some participants said:

I learn from colleagues' ideas, they impart different ideas, they trained at different colleges, so we have a cross-pollination of ideas around teaching in staff meetings. I benefit, we discuss issues that affect departments and individuals. I learn through that, you ask any questions, they explain. (Teacher 3)

We gather for staff meetings. Yes, I benefit, from sharing, this gives opportunities for sharing views and learning from others. Interaction is collegial, which is useful for sharing new insights and ideas. (Teacher 4)

The teachers, with diverse biographies, backgrounds, experiences, disciplines, knowledges and understandings, created a rich

environment for cross-fertilization of ideas and sharing of knowledge at meetings. Collaboration received emphasis as essential for personal learning since personal mastery and collaborative mastery feed on each other. The aspect of asking and receiving answers also points to personal strength in inquiry, which goes hand-in-hand with effective collaborative learning (Villegas-Remers, 2003). All this therefore underscores the centrality of teachers learning individually and collaboratively, which Graven (2004) defined as double-loop learning. However, Teacher 1 highlighted unproductive meetings. He explained:

Yes, we have meetings every Monday at break ... He wants meetings, but they are just for announcements and not quite beneficial because he gives the announcements, we do not discuss.

Teacher 2 also said:

No, we have never had any... We are left on our own... Something is wrong here ...

Knowledge acquisition was through prescriptions, instructions and announcements for Teacher 1. Such autocratic tendencies negated cultures of collaborative – interactive professional learning, instead cultivating collective compliance (Day, 1995, Villegas-Remers, 2003). The ‘one jacket fits all’ prescriptions and instructions often bind teachers to practices which are unlikely to match their diverse needs and those of their learners. Thus, rather than developing conducive environments through structured meetings, for teacher learning and peer support, to broaden their knowledge of classroom practices and of their learners, opportunities were invariably denied.

### **Subject Specialization Meetings**

Five PUPs highlighted subject specialization meetings as spaces for professional development which promoted discipline specific professional learning.

... at the beginning and end of the term we meet for term planning, then reflection on problems and successes. At half-term it's sharing and learning from each other, one teacher presents something. We acquire new subject information, it's developmental. (Teacher 5)

McLaughlin (2008) asserted that subject specialisations around classroom practice resemble ‘knowledge collectives’ with collaborative responsibility for students’ learning and colleagues’ professional development. Dialogues promote acquisition of new knowledge and skills of an active nature as teachers reflect on what they hear, see and practice (Villegas-Remers, 2003). Such collegial sharing implies elements critical for teacher learning where they are not being dictated to, but enabled to engage in interaction, with ample occasions for discussion, critiquing, evaluating, agreeing and disagreeing and, being treated and treating each other like professionals (Mukeredzi, 2013). Cultures of this nature usually view teacher learning as life-long, which teachers themselves direct, and on which an ongoing part of their professionalism is built.

### **Wider Professional Sites**

#### ***Subject Cluster and Association Meetings***

Wider professional sites in this study refer to subject specialisation cluster and association meetings, and MoE meetings/workshops through which PUPs experienced professional development. All PUPs concurred that they professionally benefitted from specialisation

cluster meetings through collaboration, sharing, learning from and supporting each other in planning, teaching and assessment. Teacher 6 explained:

We exchange information and do seminars. All schools set questions and exchange for students to research and make presentations. You learn from specialization colleagues and students.

As language teachers we help each other with difficult topics, set common papers for mid-year and end of year local examinations. When you need material, you ask, they give you. ... I benefit, especially me, other teachers tell me how to handle discipline and manage students. (Teacher 2)

Comments such as those above support Chikoko (2006) who noted that clusters, as groups of schools within close geographical proximity of each other, share ideas, resources, pedagogies and challenges all intended to improve education quality and relevance in their respective institutions. All these activities led to professional development. School-to-school interdependence enables teachers to transcend their own school and classroom contexts, to meet other possibilities and colleagues confronted with, and solving similar challenges (McLaughlin, 2008). Thus, clusters promoted inter-school interdependence and sharing of both material and psychological mediational tools. Through this joint work, as reflective practitioners (Villegas-Remers, 2003) teachers reflected on their own practice and consequently learnt from both own reflection and colleagues' practices and experiences.

Four PUPTs also reported professional gains from subject association meetings. Teacher 5 commented:

In the geography association we discuss critical teaching and assessment issues. We learn and our students benefit. We get reports on candidates' performance in previous external examinations which makes us revisit our strategies to prepare students for subsequent exams.

Workshop content described as 'critical' promoted reflection and re-examination of teaching strategies. Teachers apparently adopted a test-focussed approach to teaching content and any workshops that dealt with examinations were likely to be regarded highly if they prepared students for external examinations. Through this whole process, the PUPTs developed professionally. Two of the six participants were not aware of any subject specialisation associations in their disciplines. For instance, Teacher 4 made this comment: "I have never heard anybody talking about this, just the clusters" ... (Teacher 4). McLaughlin (2008) indicated that effective teacher professional development also emerged from membership in professional associations and communities that transcend institutional and geographical boundaries. Such communities converge teachers from diverse backgrounds, experiences and knowledges who have something in common; their subject specialization.

### **MoE Workshops**

Three participants concurred that ministry workshops were beneficial but they had become sporadic and cascaded. The following extracts exemplify their comments:

Yes, we learnt a lot ... discuss teaching, examinations, syllabus updates, tackle difficult topics. But this time just the head goes and then trains teachers. He can only

discuss general policy stuff, content he can't ... (Teacher 1)

They do not help us anymore; the head cannot tackle subject-specific information. (Teacher 3)

It appears as if professional development through MoE workshops previously, was valuable, but participants criticised the cascaded approach to training which had then been adopted. Cascading approaches to teacher professional development adopted by the government have been criticised for distortion of information (see for example Ono & Ferreira, 2010; Harley & Wedekind, 2004).

### **Professional Development Through the Informal Domain**

#### ***Informal Interactions***

Participants highlighted informal interactions as a source of professional learning. Emphasising professional development through this domain. Day (1995) pointed out that informal interactions facilitate checking against bias in self-reporting and self-evaluation and enable school-to-school classroom practice comparisons. School structures and the wider professional sites enabled informal interactions and enhanced informal/incidental professional development within the planned/intended activities and meetings, as this kind of learning sits at the verge of any gathering (Mukeredzi, 2009). One PUPT commented that: "... just talking to colleagues, you learn something about your job. Jaah! ... we share teaching experiences and challenges, and discuss solutions (Teacher 2). Interactions touched their personal and professional lives including school contextual issues, thus learning from experiences and practices of colleagues as the way in which challenges were addressed provided learning for similar contexts in one school.

Four PUPTs highlighted teacher-parent interactions as a source of professional development. Sentiments by Teacher 5 below illustrate:

At parents-teacher meetings they examine children's books, I tell them weaknesses and strengths, they also indicate weaknesses and strengths ... I get to understand parents' attitudes towards educating their children which helps on how to deal with some pupils.

Contrary to comments by Teacher 5 above, Teacher 2 indicated school-community boundaries: "we never have such meetings with parents, they don't come when invited." However, good teacher-parent relations are effective in fostering teacher professional development, classroom practice and learner discipline (Anaxagorou, 2007). Such liaison and networking acknowledges parents as complementary educators and knowledgeable 'others' which enhances teacher personal and professional learning and heightens school image and standing within the community (Bhengu, 2007; Villegas-Remers, 2003).

### **Professional Interaction Through the Experiential Domain**

PUPTs experienced professional development through the experiential hands-on process in classroom practice, in performing the essential teacher roles. Participants talked about lesson planning and delivery, particularly teaching strategies, classroom management, assessment, and reflection and evaluation as some of the practices through which they professionally developed. For example, preparation and planning - the immediate translation of the scheme of work into action, showing a summarized version of how the lesson would proceed. The quotation below is typical of

teacher sentiments:

I read and summarize concepts from various books, I also ask colleagues, re-visit my scheme, learner activities and teaching strategies, making sure I know what I will do with pupils. This is learning ... (Teacher 4)

Comments such as above suggest some professional development through planning processes as the process involves reading, choosing materials, learner activities and methods/strategies for use in lesson delivery. The comments also suggest interdependence where colleagues are the knowledgeable 'other' (Villegas-Remers, 2003).

Participants further highlighted professional development from lesson delivery:

My work is central to my professional development ... in teaching you learn, you reflect and evaluate your performance, analyze, see your mistakes, what worked or didn't and why? then take corrective action ... learn from mistakes. When marking, I reflect, questioning myself ... Without self-questioning, I don't learn, don't develop. (Teacher 5)

The comments depict the cyclical nature of experiential learning, portraying two dialectically related modes of grasping experience: Concrete Experience and Abstract Conceptualization, and two dialectically related modes of transforming experience: Reflective Observation and Active Experimentation (Sternberg & Zhang, 2000). From the four-stage learning cycle, concrete/immediate experiences are the basis for observations and reflections. These reflections are assimilated and distilled into

abstract concepts from which new implications for action can be drawn which are tested to guide creation of new experiences (Sternberg & Zhang, 2000). Questioning oneself usually creates avenues for viewing thoughts and experiences from new perspectives, and acceptance of theory which emerges out of convincing experiential evidence grounded in practice. PUPTs may thus, be empowered to think through classroom complexities and practices and, experience positive results as well as personal and professional growth.

## Discussion

The study explored how PUPTs professionally develop in rural Zimbabwe secondary schools outside TEIs. From the data, PUPTs experienced professional development in domains of formality and experience. Within the non-formal domain, professional development occurred in school structures and in wider professional sites. In the informal domain, PUPTs developed professionally in interaction within the context of planned and unplanned meetings, while professional development in the experiential domain was through hands-on experience in classroom practice.

School structures, provided four spaces for professional development: mentoring, supervision, whole school staff and subject specialization meetings. All participants highlighted professional development through mentoring where they benefitted from collaborative planning and teaching, lesson modelling and lesson observations and feedback. Mentoring has been publicized as a means of effective school-based professional development and practice where mentees benefit from supervisory guidance, critique, and feedback, and from their own reflection as was the case in this study. Villegas-Remers (2003) emphasized interaction with knowledgeable



'others' (mentors, parents, colleagues, etc.) who facilitate and support the PUPT's knowledge construction. In-fact Du Plessis et al. (2010) argued that "if practice teaching is the most single intervention in teacher professional development, then mentoring is the single most powerful process of that intervention" (p. 328). The PUPTs seemingly worked with effective mentors who articulated expectations and provided advice, observed them teach, provided oral and written feedback, and further feedback on their self-evaluation of their teaching.

Mentoring and supervision enabled professional development experiences through three clinical phases: pre-lesson observation conference, observation, and post-lesson observation conference. These phases promoted teacher professional learning from their own practice, from self-assessment, self-criticism and reflection. Professional development is rooted in self-enquiry, self-criticism, self-evaluation, and reflection (Mukeredzi, 2009); these processes generally involve playing back and thinking about direct encounters with the phenomenon under scrutiny (teaching), rather than merely thinking about the encounter or only considering the possibility of doing something about it. School-based teacher educators in this study helped the PUPTs to acquire teaching knowledge as a product of their own reflection and self-critique "exploring and critiquing their emerging teaching philosophies and practices as teachers" (Olsher & Kantor 2012, p.36). These are vital components for professional development given that it is when one admits to own shortfalls, that one opens up to new learning (McLaughlin, 2008). The one PUPT who did not have in-school supervision missed out on a whole range of in-school guidance and professional development.

From whole school staff meetings, four participants emphasized collaborative learning from the diverse biographies, backgrounds,

experiences, disciplines, knowledge and understandings that merged to build an enriched environment for professional interaction, sharing and learning. Villegas-Remers (2003) argued for effective professional development through interaction and debate. Inter-departmental meetings seemingly promoted development of collaborative capabilities where teachers were sitting beside, sharing and feeding off each other thus, learning with and from one another, promoting both individual and organizational professional learning (Guskey, 2002). Two of the six participants had no professional development experiences from joint meetings as their schools did not have such professional gatherings. Joint-staff meetings cut across disciplinary boundaries, fostering teacher discussion around pedagogy, often making the PUPTs think deeply about their practice, and inspiring them to examine their work from a global perspective. An absence of teacher professional gatherings contradicts the social aspect of professional development as the school community, with its structures and practices, is the context in which PUPTs (as learners) learn to teach through participation in socially and contextually determined activities (Villegas-Remers, 2003).

Five participants reported professional development experiences at subject specialisation meetings. Subject meetings differ from whole school staff meetings as they involve only teachers in the subject specialization and thus provided space for the PUPTs to engage in specialized professional development. Subject departments resemble 'talking departments' marked by an active interchange of professional ideas and information, bound by a clear and shared sense of vision (Darling-Hammond, 1996). In this study, as professional development experiences emanated from within the specialization, PUPTs seemingly took advantage of the planned and structured opportunities to

learn specific knowledge and skills from colleagues with particular subject expertise.

Within wider professional sites, subject cluster and association meetings provided spaces for PUPTs' professional development. Participants indicated that cluster meetings promoted learning in collaboration, where they shared, learning from and supported each other in planning, teaching and assessment. Professional learning was at a collegial stratum where teachers interacted and seemingly developed communities in which the PUPTs could openly and confidently, non-formally and informally discuss their practice and learn from qualified and experienced colleagues in a trusting and non-threatening atmosphere. Four participants also spoke in positive terms about professional development through subject associations which they portrayed as exerting dominant influence in setting national examinations and, subject syllabi. Little, (2000) found that subject associations, notwithstanding their nearly invisible position in mainstream professional development literature, are prominent in teachers' professional lives, shaping teacher attitudes, beliefs and values and exerting influence on teachers' dispositions to particular policies and reform. Professional development through specialization cluster and association meetings are all in tandem with Villegas-Remers (2003) who emphasized collaboration in effective professional development.

The PUPTs reported that ministry workshops had been beneficial, but had become ineffective due to sporadic and cascaded approaches adopted. Teachers reported that when cascaded approaches were used there seemed to be a lack of consideration of the diverse teacher needs, contexts, experiences and countless expectations for effective professional development which aspects promote professional learning and

shape teacher attitudes, beliefs and values (Ono & Ferreira, 2010).

Data suggested that within the informal domain, participants experienced professional development through informal interactions in school structures and wider professional. Day (1995) noted that informal professional development occurs naturally and individuals themselves may not be aware that they are contributing to their professional development. These PUPTs highlighted informal interaction with colleagues and parents as having effectively contributed to their professional development. However, two participants indicated boundaries between their schools and communities which contradicted findings by Kline, White and Lock (2013) that school-parents' partnerships provide a strong basis for community strengthening, teacher learning, and improved student learning outcomes.

In the experiential domain all participants indicated professional development in the hands-on processes of classroom practice. Experiential learning creates opportunities for engagement in professional development practices around practical knowledge on preparation, planning and organization of the teaching/learning process like: teaching strategies, pupil motivation, time management, classroom and group organization and monitoring (Caires & Almeida, 2005). Generally defined as learning by doing, experiential learning is a meaning-making process - a knowledge construction process of the individual's experience which occurs in the process of performing core-functions of being a teacher. It does not require a teacher, neither is it learning about being a teacher or listening to people talking about being a teacher, – rather it is practice in the diverse roles of being a teacher (Mukeredzi, 2009). Consequently, the teacher reflects on and questions his/her

performance, beliefs, and organizational modes of practice. Oftentimes, practical experiences with positive results promotes conceptual change and acceptance of theory. This effectively occurs through reflection on and about practical experiences. This supports Villegas-Remers' (2003) observation that professional development is context dependent and rooted in the daily activities of teaching/learning.

A key aspect of professional development which resulted from classroom practice was reflection. Participants emphasized critical self-evaluation of and self-reflection on their work and learning from that experience. Reflection for these PUPTs may, for example, result from pleasant/unpleasant experiences in teaching/learning. This is followed by critical reflection- trying to understand the incident better, explaining to oneself, going through the motions, comparing with previous instances, determining matches and mismatches, self-evaluating and evaluating against some norm, and then developing a way forward based on the experiences of others (e.g., the mentor) who may have had similar experiences. Discussion with the mentor, results in further self-evaluation and critical reflection. This leads to crafting new knowledge and beliefs about content, pedagogy and student learning and, consequently, application of this new learning in subsequent lessons (Mukeredzi, 2013).

### **Conclusions and Implications**

The study addressed the question: "how do PUPTs experience professional development in Zimbabwe in rural secondary schools outside TEIs." Findings suggest that they professionally develop in domains of formality and experience – non-formal, informal and experiential through four main sites: school structures, wider

professional sites, planned and unplanned gatherings, and the classroom. School structures provided spaces for professional development through mentoring and supervision, whole school and subject specialization meetings. In wider professional sites, professional development occurred within cluster and association meetings. These non-formal spaces also enabled informal professional development through informal interactions. Experiential professional development took place through hands-on experience in classroom practice. However, some PUPTs missed out on professional development through in-school management supervision, whole school staff and subject association meetings. No participants had effective professional development from MoE workshops.

These findings have a number of implications. First, they suggest that supervisory support cultures shape teacher professional development. School management can contribute to improved student learning by supervising and providing meaningful feedback and direction to teachers as this can have a profound effect on the learning that occurs in classrooms. As student learning is the primary function of schools, effective supervision of instruction is one of the most critical functions of school management if equal access to quality educational programs for all students is to be enhanced (Guskey, 2002). Where professional development practices lack school management support, even the most promising approaches may not succeed.

Second, findings suggest that to support teacher professional development experiences in rural schools, in-school support should be built into structures that constantly and tenaciously bring teachers together to promote professional learning and development (Villegas-Remers, 2003). Developing cultures, structures and opportunities for promoting in-school teacher

professional development is the responsibility of the school head (Graven, 2004). Failure to provide for such collaborations deprives teachers of a whole repertoire of professional development as holistic learner improvement is generally achieved from aggregating professional development of individual teachers (Guskey, 2002). Again, professional development is not an individual process purely located at a psychological level, but it is extremely mediated (Mukeredzi, 2013). Motivation to learn for the PUPT may be intrinsic, but much of his/her professional development is through, with, and from others. Hence, the most important aspect of professional development is interaction (Villegas-Remers, 2003). This implies that school heads need to pay attention to teacher learning individually and collectively. Individual teacher professional development is central to classroom practice, learner achievement, and organizational professional development (Guskey, 2002). Thus, providing occasions for interaction and collaborative learning through staff meetings and other school gatherings is critical. Schools with structures and cultures for effective inter-departmental meetings are viewed as institutions in double-loop learning which foster both teacher professional development and improved student learning through reduction of disciplinary margins (Graven, 2004). Such learning and sharing is often not marked by disciplinary boundaries but is within a 'feel equal factor'. In addition, school communities with collaborative learning practices reduce subject specialization boundaries, promote teacher professional development, and enhance student learning as they strengthen and promote—rather than weaken teacher professional learning (Day, 1995). By extension, when teachers are brought together to learn with and from one another, they take responsibility for students' learning as

debates are rooted in the shared subject: teaching/learning.

Third, subject specialization gatherings and associations promote professional development through engagement with colleagues, questioning and observing them, appraising one's own and others' practices overtly or covertly (McLaughlin, 2008). Interaction provides opportunity to discuss, criticize, evaluate, agree and disagree, without being dictated to but being treated and treating each other as professionals (Villegas-Remers, 2003). Hence, cluster and association networks, meetings and conferences that facilitate teacher collaborative work on their curriculum, listening and engaging in their work should be strongly constituted and supported as they are a vital way of upholding effective teacher professional development and engagement within subject specializations in wider contexts (Graven, 2004).

Fourth, while cascaded multiplier approaches are often adopted due to various constraints to reach many participants in a short space of time (Harley & Wedekind, 2005) they are based on the type of knowledge teachers must know worth teaching in schools, and characterized by transmission where teaching is "telling", and learning is "absorption" (Ono & Ferreira, 2010, p.2). Such 'one jacket fits all' sets of professional development are ineffective as they are fraught with distortion and often lead to no significant change in practice when teachers return to classrooms (Mukeredzi, 2013). Ono and Ferreira argue that professional development programmes should be participant/learner centered, knowledge centered, assessment centered and community centered to optimize teacher learning.

Fifth, findings indicate that strong teacher-parent relations are essential for PUPTs' professional development. An understanding of

mechanisms through which parent-teacher linkages promote student academic achievement would point to logical interventions. Rural communities where these PUPTs were practicing were generally poor. Poor communities are less likely to be involved in school life than are wealthier ones, and schools in poor communities are less likely to promote parental-school involvement (Mukeredzi, 2013). As a result, children who would benefit from parents-school relations are those who are least likely to receive it unless concerted attempts are made. Thus, policies designed to promote school-parental involvement in advantaged districts may be ineffective in promoting parental-school relations in disadvantaged communities. Understanding each community's contextual challenges is vital for building and upholding effective parents-school collaborations otherwise boundaries instead of bridges between schools and communities in rural settings will continue to be built.

### Notes

1. Zimbabwean secondary education is based on the Cambridge 3-tier model. Junior Level Certificate obtained after two years of secondary education (post Grade 7), Cambridge Ordinary Level Certificate obtained after four years of secondary education and Cambridge Advanced level certificate obtained after six years of secondary education.
2. It needs to be noted that experiential learning might be viewed as portable and bankable, through recognition of prior learning (RPL) where some formal qualifications recognize experience, however, this is outside the understanding in this study.

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