EXPLORING COLLABORATIVE LEARNING OF FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING BUSINESS STUDIES TEACHERS IN ONE CLUSTER IN THE PHOLELA CIRCUIT

BY

SIYABONGA ANDRIAS MAGOSO

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters in Education in Teacher Development Studies

School of Education, College of Humanities University of Kwa Zulu-Natal Pietermaritzburg

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Supervisor: Dr Jacqueline Naidoo

DECLARATION

This thesis has been submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters in Education in the Graduate Programme in the College of Humanities, University of KwaZulu-Natal, and Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

I, Siyabonga Andrias Magoso, declare that:

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Student Signature Date

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Supervisor's Signature Date

Dr Jacqueline Naidoo

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my father Zwelakhe "Mali ezalayo" Magoso a farm worker and my mother Yekeleni Magoso who supported me in my childhood and instilled in me the passion for education.

To my two sons Thandolwenkonsi and Indiphile, and my one and only daughter Hlelo for understanding my departure for the past two years.

A special dedication goes to my fiancé, Gciniswa Mkhize for the loving care you provided to our kids while I was busy with this journey.

To my family, friends and colleagues thank you for the support and encouragement. Without your presence I would never have succeeded.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACE	Advanced Certificate in Education
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
BCOM	Bachelor of Commerce
CAPS	Curriculum Assessment and Policy Statement
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DIPIP	Data Informed Practice Improvement Project
DoE	Department of Education
DUT	Durban University of Technology
EMS	Economics and Management Sciences
FET	Further Education and Training
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HOD	Head of Department
ISPFTED	Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
NPDE	National Professional Diploma in Education
PGCE	Post Graduate Certificate in Education
PLC	Professional Learning Communities
SACE	South African Council for Educators
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal
UNISA	University of South Africa

ABSTRACT

There have been various reforms to the South African education system since 1994. These reforms have included continuous professional development initiatives for teachers, policy and curriculum changes. Teacher development initiatives demand teachers collaborate together in order to produce excellent quality results. Moreover, significant changes had been implemented to ensure that the quality of teaching and learning improves in South African schools. The objective of this study is to explore the collaborative activities that grade 10 business studies teachers engage in during cluster meetings and to examine how these activities contribute to collaborative learning of grade 10 business studies teachers.

The study adopted a qualitative case study approach located within the interpretive paradigm. This study used Brodie's (2013) framework of the power of professional learning communities to identify the type of collaborative activities that took place in the cluster meetings and Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, and Thomas (2006) framework of professional learning communities: a review of the literature to examine the extent to which cluster a serves as an effective PLC for Further Education and Training business studies teachers. Purposive sampling was used to select five business studies teachers in the Pholela circuit of Harry Gwala district. Convenience sampling was used to select the most accessible schools and participants for this study. Semi-structured interviews and observations were used to generate data from participants.

The findings of this study highlighted that there are two major activities which took place in the business studies cluster meetings namely, moderation and setting of assessment tasks. Teachers meet quarterly to moderate formal assessments tasks that were written in the previous term. The findings further indicated that teachers collaborate in a cluster for setting of assessment tasks for various grades. These include common tests, assignments, oral presentations and research projects. However, the findings highlighted that the discussion of subject content was not sufficient to promote teacher learning and development. Additionally, the findings indicated the business studies cluster was regarded as an effective PLC since it reflected majority of the characteristics of functional learning communities. The findings of this research could assist the Department of Education in identifying ways to improve clusters as a vehicle for professional development.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore collaborative learning of FET business studies teachers in one cluster in the Pholela Circuit. This chapter begins by describing the purpose of the study and outlines the background, rationale and objectives of the study. The chapter also discusses key research questions, a summary of related literature and the methodological approach adopted in this study. The chapter concludes with a brief overview of each chapter in the dissertation.

1.2 Purpose of the study

In the past decade, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) has used teacher clusters as a vehicle for professional development of teachers in South Africa (Brodie & Borko, 2016). Therefore, teacher clusters serve as the space where teachers collaborate in groups to improve their knowledge and their professional practices in order to change their classroom practice (Jita & Ndlalane, 2009). The purpose of this study is to explore collaborative learning of FET business studies teachers in one cluster in the Pholela Circuit. Moreover, it explores the types of activities that teachers engage in during cluster meetings. In addition, it examines if and how the cluster serves as an effective professional learning community for FET business studies teachers. The study focuses on FET business studies teachers who learn together at the cluster meetings. According to Jita and Ndlalane (2009), a teacher cluster refers to a group of teachers who form a professional learning community that assists them in improving their teaching practices. The purpose of this study was to explore the collaborative activities that FET business studies teachers engage in during cluster meetings. This study also aimed to examine whether the cluster served as an effective PLC for FET business studies teachers.

1.3 Background of study

There have been many changes to the South African education system since the introduction of democracy in 1994; amongst them is curriculum reform which aims to accommodate all population

groups and to transform education (Brodie & Borko 2016). Jita and Mokhele (2014) contend that curriculum reform demands professional development initiatives and collective relationships between teachers to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Similarly, Grounder (2014) asserts that the new curriculum requires teachers to be life-long learners by participating in different professional development programs that are initiated by the DBE and other stakeholders such as the South African Council for Educators (SACE).

Furthermore, the Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa 2011-2025 (ISPFTED) recommends the establishment of teacher development initiatives to improve classroom practice and learner achievement (Brodie & Borko, 2016). Moreover, it suggests that the South African education system should consist of school-based and cluster-based professional learning communities (PLCs) where teachers will collaborate in groups to discuss problems, plan assessment tasks and lesson activities collectively, to improve the quality of teaching and learning at their schools. Jita and Mokhele (2014) describe PLCs as a group of teachers who come together voluntarily to share resources and understanding about their subjects.

This study focuses on cluster-based PLCs where FET business studies teachers learn collectively in a broader community. Cereseto (2015) contends that PLCs improve teachers' professional development and their classroom practices. Similarly, Brodie (2013) maintains that the Data-Informed Practice Improvement Project revealed that PLCs could be a solution to improve teacher learning. She argues that teacher's conceptual knowledge improved when teachers worked together in teams. Brodie and Borko (2016) further assert that PLCs improve teacher relationships by increasing their knowledge, skills and competencies as they learn in broader communities. According to Jita and Mokhele (2012), teachers who engage in cluster activities improve the quality of teaching and learning in their classrooms. PLCs have been practiced in different countries such as South Korea and United States of America as a method of improving teacher professional development (Hord, 1997; DuFour, 2004). This study was conducted in one cluster in the Pholela circuit of the Harry Gwala District, in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. This study was conducted in five under-resourced high schools which are categorized as no-fee paying schools. These high schools are located in deep rural areas and are classified as quintile one and

two schools according to the DBE rankings. The cluster serves a community which is affected by a poor socio-economic status with poverty, unemployment and crime.

1.4 Rationale of the study

This study is motivated by my interest in examining how business studies teachers learn in a cluster. Based on my five years' experience as a business studies teacher, I have noticed poor academic performance of FET learners in our cluster and district which raises concerns about teacher knowledge and teaching business studies. However, the majority of teachers in our district work in isolation and only attend cluster meetings when they are requested to do so by district subject advisors. Therefore, this study was conducted to investigate how a cluster supports teacher learning. Myende (2016) recommended that more research is needed in the field of teacher learning communities in clusters. He also suggests that PLCs in different subjects be explored because his study was based only on geography PLCs. Thus, this study explores teacher learning of FET business studies teachers in a cluster. The results of this study may assist school principals, teachers, and subject advisors the importance of teacher clusters in supporting teacher learning. Furthermore, the results of this study may also assist the DBE to identify ways to improve teacher clusters in South Africa. In addition, the results of this study will add to the existing literature for other researchers who wish to conduct further research on teacher learning in clusters.

1.5 Research questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What collaborative activities do FET business studies teachers engage in during cluster meetings?
2. To what extent does the cluster serve as an effective PLC for FET business studies teachers?

1.6 Key concepts and conceptual framework

The following section briefly describes the key concepts relevant to this study such as teacher learning and professional learning communities.

1.6.1 Teacher learning

Kelly (2006) defines teacher learning as a process in which novice teachers improve their practices and endeavour to be experts. Similarly, Desimone (2009) maintains that teacher learning is about collaboration of teachers from same school and grade with the aim of developing their professional practice.

1.6.2 Professional learning communities

Stoll, Bolan, Wallace and Thomas (2011, p. 22) refer to a PLC as "a group of people sharing and critically interrogating their practice in an ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-oriented, growth-promoting way and operating as a collective enterprise". This suggests that teachers learn together when they collaborate in PLCs. Similarly, DuFour (2004) describes a PLC as a team of professionals working together to achieve similar objectives.

1.6.3 Conceptual framework

This study is underpinned by Brodie's (2013) notion of PLCs and Stoll et al. (2006) characteristics of effective PLCs as the conceptual framework. Brodie (2013) contends that successful PLCs depend on strong collaboration between teachers. She further emphasises that teachers come together in PLCs to do activities such as analysing and designing assessments, lesson planning and discussing matters related to classroom practice. Stoll et al. (2006) outlined eight characteristics of effective PLCs. These characteristics are collaboration, collective responsibility, promotion of group as well as individual learning, shared values and vision, reflective professional enquiry, mutual trust, respect and support among staff members and inclusive membership (Stoll et al., 2006, p. 27-30). These key concepts and conceptual framework are explained in detail in Chapter Two.

1.7 Research design and methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach. Creswell (2012) views qualitative research as educational research that aims to understand the worldviews through the interpretation of a

participant's experience. A qualitative approach seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of a situation that is being investigated (Creswell, 2012; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). In this study, using a qualitative approach offers me the opportunity to interpret the experiences and feelings of FET business studies teachers about cluster meetings. Cohen *et al.* (2011) contends that qualitative researchers explore small groups of the population to understand the situation that is being investigated.

According to Cohen *et al.,* (2011) the interpretive paradigm attempts to understand human behaviour through interaction between the researcher and participants. Similarly, Maree (2012) claims that the interpretive paradigm enables researchers to draw on participant's views to understand the context that is being explored. As a result, this study is located within the interpretive paradigm and relied on the opinions and experience of FET business studies teachers to understand the types of collaborative learning activities that take place in cluster meetings.

Interpretivists assume that reality is socially constructed (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). As the researcher, I constructed multiple realities from participant's viewpoints by allowing them to share their experiences about cluster meetings. Maree (2012, p. 75) describes the case study "as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident and in which multiple sources of evidence are used." Cohen *et al.* (2011) assert that case studies are commonly used by researchers who adopt the interpretive paradigm. Therefore, I adopted a case study design which included FET business studies teachers learning in a PLC.

The study collected data from FET business studies teachers through semi-structured interviews and observation of cluster meetings. Maree (2012, p. 87) describes an interview as a "two-way conversation in which the interviewer asks the participants questions to collect data and to learn about the ideas, beliefs, views, opinions and behaviour of participants". I opted to use semi-structured interviews in order to ask open ended questions and to probe for clarification of questions when required. Bertram and Christiansen (2014) describe observation as the process in which the researcher visits the place where the study is conducted and observes the participants in their natural setting. Observation is appropriate for this study as it allowed me to observe cluster meetings.

The sample of this study consists of five FET business studies teachers from different schools in the Pholela circuit. The study used convenience sampling to select five schools based on convenience in terms of transport cost and availability. The study also used purposive sampling to select the five FET business studies teachers.

1.8 Structure of the dissertation

1.8.1 Chapter One

In this chapter, I present the introduction and the purpose of study. The chapter outlines the background and rationale for the study. The key research questions, key concepts and the conceptual framework used in the study were described. The methodological approach and research design were also discussed. I conclude this chapter with an overview of the structure of the chapters in this dissertation.

1.8.2 Chapter Two

This chapter focuses on the literature review and conceptual framework that was used to guide the study. To begin, I discuss international and national literature on the professional learning communities including the characteristics of effective professional learning communities. Next, I discuss the concept of teacher learning, outlining the notion of collaborative, formal and informal learning. To conclude, I describe theories of teacher learning as well the conceptual framework that is used to analyse data in chapter 4.

1.8.3 Chapter Three

This chapter presents the qualitative methodological approach and case study research design adopted in this study. In this chapter, I describe the interpretive paradigm, sampling procedures and semi-structured interviews and observation as data collection methods. This chapter further outlines the ethical considerations of the study, trustworthiness, and analysis of data for the study.

1.8.4 Chapter Four

In this chapter, I present the data collected through semi-structured interviews and observation of cluster meetings. I further discuss the analysis of data and interpretation of the findings drawing on the relevant literature and conceptual frameworks

1.8.5 Chapter Five

This chapter concludes the study by summarizing the main findings and provides recommendations for future research.

1.9 Conclusion

This chapter described the purpose of the study and presented the background, rationale and key research questions. Moreover, it provided an overview of key concepts and the conceptual framework that was used to analyse the data. In addition, this chapter explained the methodological approach and research design adopted in the study. Finally, the structure and the content of the chapters in this dissertation were outlined. The next chapter presents the literature review and conceptual framework that guide the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This study sought to explore collaborative learning of FET business studies teachers in one cluster in the Pholela Circuit. The previous chapter presented the introduction and background of the study. This chapter commences by defining the concept of teacher learning. Next, the notion of collaborative learning and formal and informal learning is outlined. Thereafter, the chapter outlines theories of teacher learning. This is followed by a discussion on professional learning communities (PLCs), including PLC learning activities and the benefits and characteristics of effective PLCs. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the conceptual framework that was used to analyse the data. This chapter draws on relevant national and international literature and aims to address the two research questions that framed the study namely:

1. What collaborative activities do FET business studies teachers engage in during cluster meetings?
2. To what extent does the cluster serve as an effective PLC for FET business studies teachers?

2.2 Defining teacher learning

There is no single definition of teacher learning since various authors define the concept in different ways. Buyse, Sparkman and Wesley (2003, p. 267) contend that learning is "grounded in daily activities and cannot be separated from the complex environments in which knowledge must be applied". This suggests that learning originates from the experience we obtain in the workplace after participating in various activities. Buyse *et al. (*2003) further claim that learning occurs through social relationships with other members of the community who share similar goals. Stoll and Louis (2007) maintain that learning involves sharing of knowledge with the purpose of improving practice.

According to, Borko (2004, p. 4), "Situative theorists conceptualize learning as changes in participation in socially organised activities, and individuals' use of knowledge as an aspect of

their participation in social practices". Learning in professional learning communities is a social process because it involves developing expertise through participation in social activities.

Lave and Wenger (1991) view learning as a social practice that brings many people together to learn. These authors contend that learning includes a community of practice whereby a group of people meet together with the purpose of sharing resources and information. Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that learning is a social practice because it involves practicing in a community. In the context of this study, FET business studies teachers learn together in cluster meetings.

Moreover, Fraser, Kennedy, Reid and McKinney (2007) describe teacher learning as the continuous process of developing group or individual teachers, resulting in a change in the professional knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs and the teaching strategies of teachers. They further contend that teacher learning takes place in four ways: formal, informal, incidental and planned. Sfard (1998) outlines two metaphors which describe teacher learning; the acquisition metaphor and the participation metaphor. Essentially, the acquisition metaphor corresponds with the cognitive approach. The acquisition metaphor mean that teacher learning resides with an individual's mind who learns by grasping knowledge, concepts, content, and meanings with the help of a facilitator. On the other hand, the participation metaphor mean teacher learn effectively by participating in various social activities from the community rather than accumulation of knowledge for benefit of individual (Sfard, 1998). Furthermore, the primary objective of the participation metaphor is to "know" after participating in certain activities unlike the acquisition metaphor which only values the knowledge that is accumulated. Sfard (1998) argues that both metaphors are useful for teacher learning. The following section outlines types of teacher learning.

2.3 Types of teacher learning

2.3.1 Collaborative learning

Collaborative learning is a situation where people are learning something together (Dillenbourg, 1999). Jita and Mokhele (2014) argue that teacher collaboration is an essential characteristic of functioning clusters. Brodie and Borko (2016) describe teacher collaboration as conditions in which a group of people work together voluntarily with the purpose of sharing skills, resources

and experience to achieve a common goal which is about their professional development. In the same way, Duncombe and Armour (2004) posit that collaborative learning occurs when a group of teacher's exchange ideas with one another with the purpose of learning, improving skills, knowledge and understanding about pedagogical issues. This study aimed to explore collaborative learning of FET business studies teachers in a cluster.

Correspondingly, Stoll *et al.*, (2006, p. 226) outline the following characteristics as crucial for successful professional learning communities (PLCs): "Share values and vision, collective responsibility, reflective professional enquiry, collaboration, group and individual learning is promoted". This means that collaborative learning involves a group of teachers sharing the same vision to improve professional practice. Teachers who engage themselves in collaborative learning approaches like clusters become experts in their practice which enables them to transfer knowledge to students, and to improve learner achievement. Therefore, the notion of collaborative learning values team teaching as a type of learning initiated to improve teaching practice through team work.

Likewise, Ndovela (2014) concurs with other authors that collaborative learning involves sharing of ideas by teachers who are teaching similar subjects, grades or phases with the purpose of improving their practice. In addition, Laal and Laal (2012, p. 491) define collaborative learning as an "educational approach to teaching and learning that involves groups of learners working together to solve a problem, complete a task, or create a product." These authors maintain that collaborative learning allows groups of teachers to work together who are searching for understanding and solutions together to address their educational challenges.

Collaborative learning assists teachers with applying various teaching strategies. Research on teacher learning suggests that collaborative learning improves teaching practice (Vescio et al., 2008; Jita & Mokhele, 2014; Brodie & Borko, 2016). Servage (2008) contends that collaborative teacher learning builds a sense of community between teachers who belong to one PLC and it positively influences student learning. Similarly, Jita and Mokhele (2014) opine that through collaborative learning, teachers improve their subject content and subject matter knowledge in order to reshape classroom practice.

Barkley, Cross and Major (2005) assert that collaborative learning involves learning in groups rather than learning as individuals. They further list three essential features of collaborative learning: designed to serve particular objectives; group members must work together to achieve common a goal and it must contribute to the meaningful learning of group members. Barkley *et al.* (2005) maintain that the epistemological assumption of collaborative learning is social constructivism. This highlights that people construct knowledge and meaning when practicing together. Day (1999) argues that sometimes teachers may collaborate together to create friendships instead of improving professional practice. In this study, I view collaborative learning as a strategy to support professional development of teachers. In addition, Laal and Ghodsi (2012) outline four benefits of collaboration learning: it builds cooperation and social support between members, improves teaching practice and learner's results, increases self-esteem of members and encourages teachers to use different forms of assessments.

2.3.2 Formal learning

Marsick and Watkins (2012) define formal learning as the kind of learning that is structured to achieve a certain educational purpose. They further emphasise that formal learning leads to accreditation. Formal learning includes attending professional development workshops or trainings that are sponsored by education departments designed to achieve particular objectives.

2.3.3 Informal learning

Informal learning is the type of learning that is "predominately unstructured, experiential, and non-institutional" (Marsick & Volpe, 1999, p.4). Informal learning take place without being organized professionally and it is usually unplanned and does not lead to any accreditation (Berg & Chyung, 2008). Hodkinson, Colley, and Malcolm (2003, cited in Berg and Chyung, 2008) maintain that informal learning can be associated with daily activity since it can happen incidentally while performing daily tasks. Berg and Chyung (2008) suggest that informal learning improves productivity of teachers because teachers gain different skills and knowledge from informal learning activities more frequently than they do from formal training. According to Eraut (2004, cited in Berg & Chyung, 2008, p. 2):

> Informal learning also takes place through daily social interactions such as participation in group activities, working alongside others, tackling challenging tasks,

and working with clients; the success of these forms of informal learning is highly dependent upon the quality of human relationships in the workplace.

2.4 Theories of teacher learning

The literature theorises teacher learning in many ways. Kelly (2006) mentions two theories of teacher learning, namely, the cognitive approach and the socio-cultural approach. According to Kelly (2006), in the cognitive approach, learning resides in an individual's mind and it is characterised by acquired skills, knowledge and understanding in one place. The cognitive learning approach includes regular attendance of professional development workshops that are designed to achieve particular objectives. Teachers are then expected to apply what they have learnt from workshops practically to improve teaching and learning in their classrooms. Kelly (2006) further contends that the cognitive learning approach does not value a teacher's identity because learning can take place in various ways.

Lave and Wenger (1991) describe the socio-cultural approach which views teacher learning as a social practice that involves collective participation in a community of practice. They assume that teacher learning develops through participation in community activities rather than learning in isolation. This therefore suggests that teachers learn by engaging with learners in classrooms, networking with colleagues or by collaborating with other members of society. The socio-cultural approach is related to my study because teachers are learning through attending cluster meetings. Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998) assert that teaching practice changes when teachers participate in more than one learning community. In the same vein, Kelly (2006) maintains that teacher learning does not reside within an individual, but it is understood as a collaborative effort whereby teachers learn by collaborating in a social situation. Rust and Smith (2006) affirm that learning is a social process because teachers learn more when they exchange opinions with one another. In addition, Opfer and Pedder (2011) believe that teacher learning is based on a range and repertoire of professional development activities, the outcome of teacher's learning can be predicted and demonstrated by a change in teaching practice, skills, knowledge and improvement of learners' performance. This study explores how teachers learn by collaborating in cluster meetings.

2.5 Professional learning communities (PLCs)

National and international literature highlights that teacher learning groups have been given different names by various researchers. These include professional learning communities, a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), collective learning (DuFour, 2006), clusters or teacher networks (Jita & Ndlalane, 2009), collective support for learning (Brodie, 2013) and collaborative learning (Stoll, 2011). According to Wenger, (1998, cited in Jita & Mokhele, 2014, p. 3) the term PLC originated from the concept of a community of practice, which can be described as a "group of teachers who meet voluntary to engage with matters of practice". In the same way, Mintzes, Marcu, Messerchmidt-Yates and Marlk (2013, cited in Colak, 2017) define PLCs as a team of teachers gathering together to increase learner's performance. PLCs should be established to support teachers and to promote collaborative learning which leads to teacher learning. Hipp and Huffman (2010) argue that PLCs involve professional teachers working collectively towards improving student's achievements. In the same vein, DuFour (2005) describes PLCs as the organised process whereby a group of people collaborate together to improve teaching and learning. A PLC aims to build teamwork that supports ongoing learning which leads to teacher development and student learning in a particular context. Moreover, international literature on PLCs suggests that teachers need to work and learn together to promote collaborative learning (Vescio, Ross & Adam, 2008; Stoll *et al.*, 2011; Hord, 1997; DuFour, 2004).

Furthermore, according to the Integrated Strategic Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa, 2011 – 2025 (ISFTED), PLCs refer to communities of practice that provide assistance to teachers, school principals and education specialists so they can participate collectively and develop their professional knowledge. Hargreaves (2008) points out that PLCs include a group of people engaged in learning for the benefit of their learners. In this study, clients refer to FET business studies teachers. Additionally, Brodie and Borko (2016, p. 6) support this opinion and contend that "teachers should have opportunities to talk more with one another and reflect more deliberately and systematically in their practice to enable their work to become more intellectually engaging and to facilitate a collective and sustainable shift in practice for the intellectual benefit of learners".

2.5.1 PLC learning activities

According to Stoll and Louis (2007 cited by Brodie & Borko, 2016, p.141), the "activities of a PLC include sharing and interrogating teacher's practices in an ongoing reflective, collaborative, learning–oriented and growth stimulating way". This means that there are various activities to be carried out by teachers who participate in PLCs. Vescio *et al.* (2008) assert that effective PLCs include collaborative activities whereby teachers work together to improve their teaching practice. The Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa 2011-2025 (ISPFTED) (Department of Basic Education and Department of Higher Education and Training, 2011) outlines various activities to be carried out by teachers who engage in PLCs. These activities include: learning from each other, analysing learners' assessments, lesson planning and learning about curriculum changes, and the implementation of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement. Smith (2015) explored the role of three relational principles: collaboration, trust and sense of community in building sustainable professional learning communities. Their findings showed that teacher collaboration is essential because it enables teachers to perform numerous activities together. The study also found that teachers shared collaborative activities such as opinions about the subject, resources, exchanging information with knowledgeable teachers, developing lesson plans and common assessments together.

Jita and Mokhele (2014) explored teachers' perceptions of successful clusters and the professional development received after being involved in cluster activities. The study found that teachers were able to share activities such as lesson planning, observing each other's lessons with the purpose of critique, supporting teaching strategies, helping each other on how to address challenging topics, and integration of subject matter.

Additionally, Chauraya (2013 cited in Brodie & Borko, 2016, p. 200) revealed that during phase 3 of Data Informed Practice Improvement Project (DIPIP) (2011-2014), mathematics teachers learnt from one another and they performed various activities together such as analysing learners' errors and designing lessons together. Cluster activities should be determined by the teachers and learners needs. This means that cluster activities should be initiated to achieve particular goals. Therefore, teachers should use clusters as a platform to debate about their daily teaching.

2.5.2 Benefits of professional learning communities for teachers

Participating in PLCs has many benefits for teachers. According to Vescio *et al.* (2008), PLC's improve teacher's performance, pedagogical and content knowledge. They further emphasise that effective PLCs should have a positive impact on teaching practices and student achievements. In addition, PLCs lead to professional development of teachers which improves student performance. Vescio *et al.* (2008, p. 88) claim that effective PLCs should develop teachers' 'knowledge of practice' and student learning. Furthermore, PLCs should generate a knowledge of practice as teachers collaborate together to exchange ideas, which enhances teaching and learning (Vescio *et al.*, 2008). Similarly, Brodie and Borko (2016) concur that PLCs benefit teachers in many ways. These authors argue that PLCs offer the opportunity for teachers to learn from one another in order to solve educational problems. They further outline the following benefits of PLCs to teachers: Firstly, building mutual relationships and networks between teachers. Secondly, providing teachers with the opportunity to learn from each other and lastly, encouraging sharing of resources, knowledge and understanding by colleagues. For example, Grade 12 business studies teachers could create a WhatsApp group whereby they will deliberate about issues related to the subject in order to improve their practice which could result in an improvement in their teaching practice. Similarly, Stoll *et al.* (2006) contend that PLCs provide ongoing learning and development for teachers leading them to improve their professional knowledge and student achievement. Jewett and MacPhee, (2012) affirm that PLCs enable teachers to share their strengths and weaknesses openly with the hope of receiving positive feedback from other colleagues. The DBE and DHET (2011, p. 14) suggest that PLCs "will assist teachers to integrate their own knowledge with the latest research-based knowledge about content and practice". It further emphasised that "individual teachers will be able to highlight areas of weaknesses, and use expertise within the PLC to help address their difficulties" (DBE & DHET, p. 14).

Similarly, Andrew and Lewis (2007) found that learning in PLCs constructs teacher knowledge which results in a change in teaching practice. Chauraya (2013) conducted a study in a mathematics PLC (Data Informed Practice Improvement Project) in the Gauteng Province. The purpose of study was to explore what and how teachers learn from a PLC and to understand the impact of participation from PLCs on teaching practices and teacher's identities. The results showed that teachers identities changed by participating in PLC activities. The findings also indicated that

teachers were happy about their participation in the DIPIP project because it enabled them to learn from one another. Therefore, PLCs promote team teaching. This suggests that PLCs have the potential to assist teachers to become updated about the curriculum. Burke, Marx and Berry (2011) contend that PLCs help teachers to improve their classroom practices through collective learning with the goal of achieving the best results. Jita and Mokhele (2014) indicated that participation in school clusters benefit teachers by building content and pedagogical knowledge, promoting collaborative learning skills and building of leadership skills. In this study, I viewed teacher clusters as a platform for collaborative learning. Marchant (2015) claims that professional learning communities provide space for development of teacher knowledge and they assist in solving learners and teachers' problems, which could lead to positive changes in teaching practices. Hord (1997) asserts that PLCs improve school performance because classroom practices and learners' performance improves when teachers learn within a broader community. This indicates that PLCs allow teachers to generate more ideas about the subjects they teach. De Clercq (2014) argues that when teachers share ideas about how they actually teach in their classrooms, they become empowered with new teaching methods that are easy to transfer to their own classrooms.

Brodie (2014, p. 222) maintains that "successful professional learning communities create a space for teachers to explore their strengths and weaknesses with colleagues; develop collaborative solutions to problems of practice; and implement new ideas collectively for the benefit of learners. This suggests that functioning PLCs have the potential to resolve obstacles facing teachers at their respective schools. In addition, Stoll (2004) mentions the following benefits for participating in a PLC: It allows teachers to be involved in different formal and informal learning experiences; it promotes collaboration between teachers, builds mutual trust and relationships between members, offers learning opportunities and lastly, ensures that there is sustainable professional development for teachers.

2.5.3 Characteristics of effective professional learning communities

Hord (1997) contends that schools should be converted into PLCs where teachers work together with their school principal to promote collegiality within the organisation. The second characteristic is a shared vision, mission and objective. Hord (1997) asserts that the school's vision should promote collaborative learning. For instance, the school's vision should drive teachers to work towards a common goal. Furthermore, Hord (1997) posits that PLCs should promote

collective learning where staff engage in reflective dialogue to discuss ways to improve teacher knowledge and student performance. PLCs should enable teachers to share personal practices.

Hord (1997) asserts that colleagues should meet regularly and observe each other and then devise strategies to improve their professional practices and student learning. Furthermore, successful PLCs have the "capacity to promote and sustain the learning of all professionals in the school community with the collective purpose of enhancing pupil learning" (Stoll *et al.*, 2006. p. 229). Borko (2004) identifies key features for the establishment of PLCs. She states that PLCs should develop a group identity, norms for interaction, a sense of collective responsibility for the regulation of norms and behaviour, and take responsibility for the benefit of the community and their personal growth and development. She further posits that effective professional development should build community trust and communication between teachers since collaborative interaction occurs when a group of teachers work towards the same vision and mission. Chauraya (2013) argues that PLCs need to promote collective relationships between teachers through the establishment of collaborative learning. Stoll (2004, p. 34) lists five features of successful PLCs which are discussed below:

1. Shared values and vision that focus on improving learning and teaching: The term vision refers to a dream that someone hopes to achieve, either in a long-term or short-term period. This suggests that PLC members must know exactly what they want to achieve such as focusing on student learning. PLC members should support each other and be committed to the goal of PLCs and teachers should be part of the decision making process in PLCs.
2. Collective responsibility for the learning of all pupils: This suggests a willingness to share knowledge, skills and expertise by members of PLCs.
3. Reflective professional enquiry to deepen practice: This includes sharing of ideas by members of PLCs. This suggest that teachers should have conversations about educational issues to improve teaching and learning.
4. Collaboration and teamwork: Collaboration means working together: Teacher collaboration is essential for effective PLCs. Teachers should work with integrity by striving to assist one another.
5. Group and collective learning, as well as individual learning: PLCs should promote collective learning through engagement in dialogues about education matters.

Brodie and Borko (2016, p. 123) assert that "promoting a culture of collaboration eliminates the practice of teachers working in isolation behind closed doors, which may have a negative impact on school effectiveness". They further argue that PLCs should provide ongoing learning and teacher development. They list key principles and features of PLCs such as teachers should work in teams and share information and understanding; teachers should be actively involved in their professional development; teacher learning should take place in community of practice; PLCs should encourage a culture of collaboration between its members; and lastly, teachers should meet on a regular basis. PLCs encourage cooperation between teachers. According to Newman (1996, cited in Vescio *et al.,* 2008) effective PLCs consist of the following characteristics: Firstly, shared values and norms amongst the group members. Secondly, to have a clear mission and vision statement which focuses on student learning. Thirdly, student development, instruction should be part of reflective dialogue where teachers engage about the curriculum. Lastly, teaching must take place in community and finally, PLCs should focus on collaboration.

Table 1 compares characteristics of effective professional learning communities (PLCs) as presented by different authors.

Authors	**Hord (1997)**	**Borko (2004)**	**Vescio *et al*. (2008)**	**Stoll 2004**
Characteristics of effective PLCs	Shared values and vision	Develop group identity and norms for interaction	Shared values and norms amongst the group members	Shared values and vision that focus on improving learning and teaching
	Supportive and shared leadership	Sense of collective responsibility	Clear mission and vision statement which focuses on student learning	Collective responsibility for the learning of all pupils
	Supportive conditions		Reflective dialogue	Reflective professional enquiry to deepen practice
	Shared personal practice		Focuses on collaboration	Collaboration and teamwork

	Collective creativity		Teaching must take place in community	Group and collective learning, as well as individual learning

2.6 Conceptual framework

This study employs two conceptual frameworks namely; Brodie's (2013) power of professional learning communities framework and Stoll *et al's*. (2006) characteristics of effective PLCs. These conceptual frameworks will assist to answer research questions 1 and 2.

2.6.1 Brodie's framework on the power of PLCs

The study used Brodie's (2013) framework to answer research question one: What collaborative activities do FET business studies teachers engage in during their cluster meetings? Brodie (2013) asserts that:

> The term professional learning community suggests that the focus is not only on individual teacher's learning but on collective professional learning within the context of a cohesive group that works with an ethic of interpersonal care, which permeates the life of teachers, students and school leaders (p. 6).

This suggests that successful PLCs depend on strong collaboration between teachers. Brodie (2013, p. 5) identifies six characteristics for effective professional development programs. These characteristics are: "focus on artefacts of practice such as student thinking tasks and instructional practices; they use actual classroom data; they encourage design and reflection on the part of teachers; they are job-embedded (school-based) and therefore blur the boundaries between teaching and learning about teaching; and they promote the development of professional learning communities'. The above characteristics assisted to understand various activities which took place during cluster meetings.

Brodie (2013) found that the Data Informed Practice Improvement Project (DIPIP) which is a teacher development project that works with mathematics teachers considered all the

characteristics of effective professional development. Therefore, Brodie (2013) argues that PLCs should focus on learners needs in order to improve teachers understanding. She further mentions different data sources that could assist teachers in determining learners' needs. These include national or international examination results or class tests, conducting interviews with learners, and learners' work and classroom observations that should assist teachers in determining learner and teacher needs. According to Brodie (2013), teaching practice also improves when teachers collaborate in PLCs. Brodie (2013) contends that teachers should perform various activities when they engage in a PLC. For example, during phase 3 of the DIPIP project (2011-2013) teachers worked in teams to perform activities such as, analysing and designing assessments, lesson planning and discussing matters related to classroom practices. According to Brodie (2013), facilitators play a vital role in building and sustaining professional learning communities.

Brodie (2013) outlines three elements that keep PLCs sustainable. Firstly, learning should be professional. This means that PLC activities should aim to improve student learning. Secondly, facilitators should build trust and respect between members of a PLC. This suggests that facilitators should plan and organise appropriate activities for teachers. Thirdly, learning should be collaborative and must be supported by relevant stakeholders such as the department of education, school principals and teachers at ground level. This conceptual framework is suitable for this study because it will enable me to identify activities that are performed by FET business studies teachers when they engage in PLCs in cluster meetings.

2.6.2 Stoll's framework of effective PLCs

The study also drew from Stoll *et al's.* (2006) framework to answer research question two: To what extent does the cluster serve as an effective PLC for FET business studies teachers? Stoll *et al.* (2006) highlight the following eight characteristics of effective PLCs: collaboration, collective responsibility, promotion of group as well as individual learning, shared values and vision, reflective professional enquiry, mutual trust, respect and support among staff members, and inclusive membership. The list characteristics is a conceptual framework because it assisted me to analyse and interpret data and to get an in-depth understanding about the cluster.

According to Stoll *et al.* (2006) functioning PLCs should encourage collaboration between teachers. Importantly, teachers should work together to achieve the vision and the objectives of the

PLCs. Stoll *et al.* (2006) further indicates that arguments and disagreements could arise when people from different cultures or backgrounds work together; however, this must result in better decision making. When teachers learn as a team they generate many ideas compared to when teachers learn as individuals.

Stoll *et al.* (2006) maintains that teachers should take collective responsibility for their learning as well as their learners' learning. However, this should be motivated by a high degree of commitment from PLC members to achieve a collective goal. Furthermore, functioning PLCs should promote group as well as individual learning (Stoll *et al.* 2006). This suggests that PLCs should encourage teachers to learn from one another and this could be completed by applying different learning approaches such as dividing them into peers or groups. For example, in the cluster, an individual business studies teacher could learn how to apply different problem solving techniques to solve business problems and share their learning with other cluster members. Moreover, Stoll *et al.* (2006) contend that mutual trust in relationships is an essential feature of a functioning PLC. Therefore, PLCs members should respect the knowledge of other members and not criticize the contributions of their colleagues. Another important characteristic of successful PLCs is shared values and vision between members. This means that for teachers to learn collaboratively in a broader community they need a shared common purpose. Mutual learning requires community members to accept each other in order to achieve the same goal (Stoll *et al.,* 2006). The next characteristic of effective PLCs is inclusive membership. The concept inclusive means that no one should be discriminated against. The last characteristic for effective PLCs is engagement in reflective dialogues about teaching and learning (Stoll *et al.,* 2006). This requires teachers to have conversations about ways to improves student results. This framework is relevant to this study because it will help me understand whether a business studies cluster could be regarded as existing PLC for teacher development.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter described the concept of teacher learning, elaborating on collaborative learning, formal and informal learning. Furthermore, the chapter explained theories of teacher learning,

professional learning communities, PLC learning activities, and the benefits and the characteristics of effective professional learning communities were discussed. To conclude, this chapter presented the conceptual framework that was used to analyse the data in this study, namely, Brodie's framework on the power of PLCs and Stoll's framework on characteristics of effective PLCs. The next chapter outlines the research design and methodology of this study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Chapter Two presented the literature review and conceptual framework for this study. This chapter presents the research design and methodology adopted in this study. The chapter begins with a discussion of the interpretive paradigm and the qualitative approach. This is followed by a description of case study research design, the research context and the purposive sampling procedure. Next, it outlines the methods and procedures for generating and analysing the data. Finally, trustworthiness and the ethical considerations and the limitations of the study are discussed. The research design and methodology is guided by two research questions:

3. What collaborative activities do FET business studies teachers engage in during cluster meetings?
4. To what extent does the cluster serve as an effective PLC for FET business studies teachers?

3.2 Research paradigm

McMillian and Schumacher (2014) describe a research design as the procedures followed by a researcher when conducting a research study. Cohen et al., (2011) describe a paradigm as the way in which people view the world or their set of beliefs about the world. Similarly, Guba (cited in Creswell, 2012, p.6) contends that the interpretive paradigm is "a basic set of beliefs that guide action." He asserts that interpretive researchers aim to understand the perceptions of participants about the phenomena. Correspondingly, Bertram and Christiansen (2014, p. 26) suggests that the interpretive paradigm aims to "develop a greater understanding of how people make sense of contexts in which they live and work." Furthermore, there are various theoretical paradigms that guide researchers such as the interpretive, positivist, post positivist, transformative, critical and pragmatic paradigms (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). For this study, I adopted the interpretive paradigm.

This paradigm was suitable for this study because it gave me the opportunity to understand the attitudes, behaviours and experiences of FET business studies teachers (Bertram & Christiansen,

2014). Maree (2012) argues that qualitative research is associated with the interpretive paradigm as it seeks to understand how human beings make meaning of the world. In supporting this view, Davies and Hughes (2014) contend that researchers adopt a qualitative approach to understand the complex lives of participants that are being examined.

Additionally, Tichapondwa (2013) asserts that an interpretive study uses words instead of numbers to collect and analyse data. This study generated data through observations and semi-structured interviews. Moreover, Tichapondwa (2013) suggests that an interpretive study attempts to understand the world through interactions between the researcher and participants. Maree (2012) contends that interpretive researchers depend on the opinions and experiences of participants to understand the context that is being evaluated. In this study, teachers were offered the opportunity to share their unique experiences with the researcher. Similarly, Cohen *et al.* (2011) contend that interpretive researchers work directly with participants to interpret the situation that is being examined. The ontological assumption of the interpretive paradigm is that there are multiple truths (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; Maree, 2012; Cohen *et al.*, 2011; Creswell, 2012). Whereas, Davies and Hughes (2014) maintain that reality is subjective. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to understand the unique experiences and perspectives of FET business studies teachers about the cluster. This means that the findings that emerged from the data were constructed through the interpretation of teachers' experiences. Correspondingly, Maree (2012) agrees that interpretive researchers believe that the reality of a study is socially constructed through the analysis and understanding of human experiences. The next section provides a description of the qualitative approach.

3.3 Qualitative research approach

This study employed a qualitative methodological approach to explore the collaborative learning of FET business studies teachers in one cluster. Bryman (2008) describes qualitative research as the strategy that uses words instead of numbers to generate and analyse data. The analysis of data is an ongoing process because the researcher interprets data before identifying catch phrases emerging from data. Similarly, Davies and Hughes (2014) describe this approach as a research methodology that uses interpretive materials to understand the world better and data is collected

verbally by interacting with participants. In this study, data was collected through semi-structured interviews and cluster observations. Moreover, this approach involves studying people in their settings with the purpose of interpreting their knowledge and experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Correspondingly, Maree (2012) describes it as a research approach that seeks to collect descriptive data in the context that is being investigated.

According to Bertram and Christiansen (2014), the qualitative approach enables researchers to understand human behaviour and experience in different situations. A qualitative approach was deemed suitable for this study because it enabled me to examine the experiences of FET business studies teachers and how they learn collaboratively at cluster meetings without generalising the findings. Secondly, a qualitative approach was relevant for this study because it uses open-ended questions and probing to provide participants with an opportunity to respond with their personal words, instead of forcing them to choose from given answers which a quantitative approach does (Mack, Woodsong, Macqueen, Guest & Namely, 2005). Nevertheless, Ignacio and Taylor (2013) contend that the qualitative approach has some weaknesses. The researcher may harm participants by asking sensitive questions which may challenge ethical issues during the course of data collection. To overcome this weakness, I made sure that participants were asked suitable questions that were relevant to the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014).

3.4 Case study research design

This study employed the case study research design to explore collaborative learning of FET business studies teachers in one cluster.

Yin (2003) defines case study as a process of investigating an event to obtain an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon. He further maintains that case study research aims to understand a single phenomenon by using numerous data sources. Five business studies teachers were observed during cluster meetings to obtain a deeper understanding of how they learn collaboratively. Similarly, to Yin (2003) Murray and Beglar (2009) describe a case study as the process of enquiry about a particular context. In the same vein, Maree (2012) defines a case study as:

> An empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident and in which multiple sources of evidence are used (p. 75).

Furthermore, Maree (2012) asserts that a case study enables researchers to collect both qualitative and quantitative data using multiple sources of data generation methods such as surveys, observation and document analysis. In this study, interviews and observations were used. The application of multiple data sources assisted me with ensuring triangulation (Davies & Hughes, 2014). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe triangulation as the process of using different data sources to construct knowledge in the research study. According Qi, (2009) case studies are bounded systems which are restricted to a particular place, people or community. This study was intended to investigate a group of FET business studies teachers learning in one cluster. Case study enabled me to study one case understand

According to Mlaba (2014), a case study allows researchers to obtain first hand data directly from participants. He posits that it also allows researchers to spend more time with participants which could be undertaken by employing multi data generation instruments. To achieve this, the researcher utilised different data collection methods. Bertram and Christiansen (2014) maintain that case studies describe what is happening in any situation. They further emphasise that case studies are usually employed by researchers who adopt the interpretive paradigm with the aim of viewing the world through the eyes of participants. This study's participants were given an opportunity to express their views about their collaborative learning in a cluster. Accordingly, a case study allowed me to obtain insights about the type of collaborative activities that FET business studies teachers engage in during cluster meetings and also assisted me with examining how the cluster serves as an effective PLC for FET business studies teachers.

3.4.1 Strengths and weaknesses of case studies

Cohen *et al.* (2011) outline the following strengths of case studies: they are concerned with realities because participants bring a personal perspective to the case. They are easily understood by many people because they are based on what is happening on a daily basis and can be undertaken by a single researcher without expecting external support from other researchers. Case studies build a

relationship between the researcher and the participant (Baxter & Jack, 2008). However, Cohen *et al.* (2011) critiques case studies for failing to address the issue of generalisation. To address this limitation, I employed two data collection methods. Furthermore, Tichapondwa (2013) asserts that case studies lack internal reliability since researchers might come out with different findings. As a result of this, I chose to employ two data collection instruments to improve the internal validity of the study.

3.5 Research setting

This study was conducted in a business studies cluster in the Pholela circuit in the Harry Gwala District (KwaZulu- Natal) involving teachers from five rural schools. Pholela circuit is divided into four wards namely; Bulwer, Hlanganani, Centocow and Underberg wards. All these schools are under-resourced and they are categorised as no-fee schools. These schools start from grade 8 and go to grade 12. They offer business studies from grades 10 to 12 in the commerce department. Learners travel between 2 to 4 kilometres before they get to school. All learners speak isiZulu as their first language. The community in which the study was conducted is affected by poor socio-economic conditions such as poverty, unemployment, crime and HIV/AIDS. The Department of Education subsidizes the schools with a feeding scheme to support learners from poor backgrounds. Additionally, teachers use the education center as a location for cluster meetings.

3.6 Sampling of participants

Bertram and Christiansen (2014) describe sampling as a process of making decisions about which participants, locations, events or behaviours to observe. Qualitative research sampling includes people either as individuals or as groups (Davies & Hughes, 2014). The present study employed convenience sampling to select the five schools from the cluster and purposive sampling was used to select the five FET business studies teachers as participants.

Merriam (2009) asserts that researchers should consider time, money, location and availability of participants before employing convenience sampling in the study. Convenience sampling was used to select five schools based on convenience in terms of cost, accessibility and availability.

Moreover, the selected schools were closer to each other and therefore, the teachers were more accessible from the selected schools. Maree (2012) asserts that purposive sampling involves selecting people who will participate in the study with a specific purpose in mind. Likewise, Polkinghorne (2005, p. 140) asserts that "purposive selection involves choosing people or documents from which the researcher can substantially learn about the experience". In the same vein, Davies and Hughes (2014) state that purposive sampling is applied when a researcher targets individual participants who seem to be knowledgeable in the population that is being studied. Moreover, Creswell (2012) contends that purposeful sampling is used when a researcher chooses participants that understand the phenomenon that is being explored. Purposive sampling was suitable for this study as it enabled me to access knowledgeable business studies teachers who have an in-depth understanding of cluster activities. Furthermore, I used purposive sampling to select five teachers from the five different schools.

The participants comprised of three male and two female teachers from the Pholela circuit. Teachers were selected from neighbouring schools who offer business studies. All participants taught business studies at a further education and training in their school (grade 10-12) Additionally, teachers were selected because of their expertise and experience in teaching FET business studies and because they could supply information relevant to my research study.

The five FET business studies teachers were able to provide information and data to respond to the two research questions this study aimed to address. All teachers were attending business studies cluster meetings. The age group of teachers ranged from 35 to 49 years old. The profile of the participants is summarized in table 3.1

Table 2: Profile of participants

Name of participants (Pseudonyms)	Gender	Race	Qualifications	Present position	Teaching experience
Ayanda	Male	African	Diploma & PGCE	Post level 1	9 years
Mandla	Male	African	Diploma & PGCE	HOD	17 years
Sipho	Male	African	BCOM & PGCE	HOD	09 years
Lizzy	Female	African	Diploma & PGCE	Post level 1	4 years
Zethu	Female	African	B.Ed. Hons.	Post level 1	12 years

3.7 Data generation methods

Data collection methods are "strongly influenced by the research question, the research design and the paradigm" (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014, p. 71). This study used face to face-semi-structured interviews and observations to generate data.

Table 3: Data generation plan

Research question	How data will be collected?	Whom data will be collected from?	Where data will be collected?	When data will be collected?
1. What collaborative activities do FET business studies teachers engage in during cluster meetings?	Semi-structured interviews and observations	Five FET business studies teachers	Observation at cluster meetings. Semi-structured interview at different schools.	Observations and semi-structured interviews were conducted between April to June 2018

2. To what extent does the cluster serve as an effective PLC for FET business studies teachers?	Semi-structured interviews and observations	Five FET business studies teachers	Observation at cluster meetings. Semi-structured interviewed at different schools.	Observations and semi-structured interviews were conducted between April to June 2018

3.7.2 Observations

Bertram and Christiansen (2014) assert that observation involves the researcher visiting the place in which the study will be conducted. McMillian and Schumacher (2014) maintain that observation is a method used by researchers to view and make field notes about what is happening in the research setting. Observation offers a researcher the opportunity to gain "live data from naturally occurring social situations" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 456). Similarly, Creswell (2012) agrees that observation enables researchers to capture information directly from participants without having a conversation with them. Observation allows the researcher to obtain primary data from the selected participants. Moreover, Maree, (2012) contends that observation is essential because it allows researcher to confirm what participants do in their setting rather than hearing from them. He further states that observation enables researchers to obtain a deeper understanding about the phenomenon that is being observed. Accordingly, the subject advisor and cluster coordinator were told about my visits and I also informed them about the purpose of the observation. Maree (2012) outlines the following types of observations namely, complete observer, observer as participant, and complete participant. In this study, I was a complete observer. Maree (2012) maintains that a complete observer occurs when the researcher does not participate in the phenomenon that is being studied.

During observation of cluster meetings, I remained passive since my intention was to confirm activities that were occurring at the meeting without sharing my experience, opinions and knowledge about the clusters. I attended two cluster meetings to observe the behaviour and activities that teachers were engaged in during cluster meetings and to examine to what extent the cluster served as an effective PLC for FET business studies teachers (Bertram & Christiansen,

2014). The cluster comprises of fifteen teachers from twelve schools and all teachers were present in both meetings. Teachers indicated that they normally hold about six cluster meetings in a year. However, the number of meetings sometimes exceed six depending on the instruction from the subject advisor. Cluster meetings were selected because there were differ from one another. The first meeting was based on moderation and the second was for setting of papers. Therefore, these meetings were selected because I was intended to get diversity data from participants. Maree (2012) argues that researchers should describe the purpose and focus of observation before the event is to be evaluated. Therefore, this was achieved by developing a detailed observation schedule and teachers were provided with the detailed observation schedule (Appendix 7) before observation commenced. Teachers were observed between April 2018 and June 2018. Davies and Hughes (2014, p. 205) argue that observation allows the researcher to "research what people do rather than what they say they do". Thaanyane (2010) asserts that observation benefits both the researcher and participants. Participants benefited by learning different skills such, as listening, presentation and communication skills. On the other hand, observation granted me, the researcher with the opportunity of learning how to observe and take field notes.

McMillian and Schumacher (2014) argue that observation helps researchers to have a better understanding of the setting that is being studied. However, observations have some disadvantages. Creswell (2012) points out that the researcher may lack observation skills. So, it is difficult to capture all the important information during observation, it is time consuming and expensive as researchers may have to travel a distance to reach participants at their sites, and participants may have a negative attitude towards the researcher. Similarly, Brynard *et al.* (2014, p. 49) affirm that the "target group may feel that an outsider is interrupting them in their work and they may become uncomfortable." Additionally, Mack *et al.* (2005) argue that the findings of observation cannot be generalised as sometimes participants may try to impress the researcher if they know that they are being observed. To overcome these disadvantages, I built a rapport with participants involved by explaining the importance of the study as well as the purpose of observation. I also made sure that I was not biased when taking field notes by capturing all activities that were taking place during the cluster meetings.

3.7.4 Interviews

Interviews are regarded as the most common instrument used by researchers to collect qualitative data (Davies & Hughes, 2014). An interview is described as a dialogue between the researcher and participants and it is different from our daily talking (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). This means that interviews take place by exchanging ideas between the interviewer and interviewee. Maree (2012, p. 87) describes an interview as a "two-way conversation in which the interviewer asks the participants questions to collect data and to learn about the ideas, beliefs, views, opinions and behaviour of participants". Polkinghorne (2005) concurs with Maree and defines interviews as a dialogue between two people initiated and directed by the interviewer to obtain the required information. Similarly, Kvale (2007, p. 7) describes interviews as a "construction site for knowledge". This suggests that that the interview site is where reality is socially constructed by engaging in discussions.

This study used semi-structured interviews as the second data generation method. Leedy and Ormrod (2010) asserts that semi-structured interviews include structured questions developed by the researcher. Semi-structured interviews enable participants to respond to interview questions in their own words in order to provide their subjective opinions about learning business studies in a cluster (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014; & Brynard *et al.*, 2014). Brynard *et al.* (2014) argue that semi-structured interviews assist researchers in clarifying questions to obtain an in-depth understanding of the interviewees' responses. McMillian and Schumacher (2014) assert that semi-structured interviews are characterized by open-ended questions. They further suggest that researchers must avoid asking questions that require "yes" or "no" answers because then interviews could become conversational.

Semi-structured interviews were suitable for this study since it offered me the opportunity to view the cluster through the eyes of participants since teachers shared their perspectives and personal experiences during semi-structured interviews.

Semi-structured interviews further offered me the opportunity to verify data by comparing information collected through observations with information given during face-to-face interviews. Additionally, semi-structured interviews helped me to approach different teachers using the same

semi-structured interview schedule questions (Maree, 2012). This assisted me to obtained required data.

A semi-structured interview schedule was developed (Refer to Appendix 6) and guided by the two research questions framing this study. Participants were provided with the interview questions before the interviews commenced. This was done to ensure that participants understand the questions that were going to be asked. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews were arranged at a venue that was convenient for the participants (Davies & Hughes, 2014). This was to ensure that participants were comfortable during the interview sessions.

Face-to face semi-structured interview were conducted with each participant at the central venue. Importantly, permission was obtained from the participants to be audio recorded before the interviews commenced. Davies and Hughes (2014) identify three ways to store interview records which include: taking field notes, audio-recording and video-recording. Semi-structured interviews were audio-recorded to ensure that the researcher did not miss valuable data and also because the researcher was not able to record on paper everything during the interviews. The interviews were transcribed for data interpretation purposes. Thereafter, follow-up interviews were arranged telephonically to request clarification on any responses that were vague during the interviews. Consequently, the interviews allowed me to ask open-ended questions and probe for clarification of responses where it was needed. Five FET business studies teachers were interviewed for the duration of approximately 60 minutes. Creswell (2012) argues that semi-structured interviews are used to obtain a large volume of data simultaneously. I used semi-structured interviews to collect verbal and non-verbal data directly from the participants.

3.7.5 Interview weaknesses

Nevertheless, interviews have some disadvantages. McMillian and Schumacher (2014) posit that interviews are expensive and time-consuming. However, three interviews were conducted on the same day since each session lasted for only one hour each while the other two interviews were also conducted on the same day but a different date. This helped me to save time and minimised my travelling costs. Cohen et al. (2011, p. 411) contend that a limitation of interviews is that they are construed as "prone to subjectivity and bias on the part of the interviewer". In addition, Tichapondwa (2013) outlines the following disadvantages of interviews: interviews are frequently

influenced by personal characteristics of participants, allows for "subjectivity and possible bias emanating from the eagerness to please the interviewer or the tendency by the interviewer to seek out answers that support his or her preconceived notion" (Tichapondwa, 2013, p. 128). To address this limitation firstly, I used an audio recorder to ensure that no data was omitted. Secondly, participants were requested to confirm the accuracy of the data after the interviews were transcribed by the researcher. Thirdly, I explained the purpose of interview to make sure that participants were comfortable during interview session.

3.7.6 Piloting of data collection instruments

De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport (2005) suggest that piloting research instruments has been practiced by a number of academics to improve the quality of the research instruments. They describe piloting as a short term process that aims to test the suitability of the research instruments. They further maintain that piloting should be conducted before the actual research project is undertaken. Cohen *et al.* (2011) assert that piloting research instruments assist researchers with increasing the validity and reliability of the study. Tichapondwa (2013, p. 132) articulates that piloting research instruments "test out the use of respondents who are part of the population but not part of the sample and whose attributes and characteristics are similar to these targeted population". I piloted my semi-structured interview schedule questions with senior colleagues from other clusters. I also considered my supervisor's comment's to ensure that my semi-structured interview questions were clear and unambiguous. Accordingly, this process assisted me with eliminating any ambiguous questions and enabled me to identify redundant questions which would have required clarification during interviews. On a broader scale, the piloting process assisted me with making adjustments about the interview questions before the final version was used with participants.

3.8 Thematic data analysis

Cohen et al. (2011, p. 537) assert that qualitative data analysis "involves making sense of data in terms of the participant's definitions of the situation, noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities". This study used thematic analysis to analyse the data. Bryman (2008, p.554) contends that "one general strategy for conducting a thematic analysis of qualitative data is provided by

framework". For the first research question, I used Brodie's framework of power of professional learning communities and also for the research question two. I used Stoll *et al's*. (2006) characteristics for effective PLCs. Rule and John (2011) contend that the process of interpretation and recording of data is time consuming. I began by transcribing all audio recordings into text form. After that, I read interview transcripts and observation field notes several times. This was followed by identifying similar concepts and differences that were emerging and then I colour-coded them in order to categorize them in relation to the two research questions. Thematic analysis helped me to identify patterns and data themes (Bertram & Christiansen 2014). Thematic analysis assisted me with understanding the phenomenon that was being investigated in this study.

3.9 Trustworthiness

McMillan and Schumacher (2006, p. 374), define trustworthiness as the "awareness of the researcher's assumptions, pre-dispositions, and influence on the social situation." Rule and John (2011, 107) contend that that trustworthiness promotes "scholarly rigour, transparency and professional ethics". Lincoln & Guba, (as cited in Maree, 2012) assert that trustworthiness of qualitative research is important to maintain authenticity of the study. There are four attributes to assist qualitative researchers to guarantee trustworthiness in the study, namely, transferability, dependability, confirmability and credibility (Maree, 2012). Similarly, Krefting (1991) concurs that these attributes are used by qualitative researchers to determine the trustworthiness of the study. Firstly, transferability refers to the way in which research findings could be applicable to other contexts (Wagner, Kawulich & Garner 2012). To address transferability in this study, I made sure that the research process was transparent and explained it in detail so that it was easy for other researchers to conduct a similar study in similar contexts in the future. Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle (2010) argue that researchers need to provide a detailed background and the study's setting to strengthen the transferability of a qualitative study. Electronic and hard copies of the thesis were made available at the university library so that other researchers could access it. The second attribute of trustworthiness is credibility. Bertram and Christiansen (2014) contend that the findings of the study should accurately reflect participant's responses. Similarly, Creswell et al. (2012) assert that credibility ensures that the findings of study show true data is gathered from the participants. Cohen et al. (2011) contend that researchers should use triangulation to achieve

credibility. To achieve triangulation, I used semi-structured interviews and observations to generate data from participants. To address credibility, I conducted member checking with participants (Maree, 2012). Participants were given a chance to verify interview transcripts and field notes to confirm the accuracy of the data.

The next attribute is confirmability. Rule and John (2011) contend that it is important for a researcher to disclose the research process, the ethics as well as their positionality in order to achieve dependability and confirmability of a qualitative case study. To achieve confirmability, I ensured that research process was transparent. Secondly, I did not use my position to influence the responses of participants. Thirdly, all participants were given the same interview questions to ensure that there was no biasness. The last feature of trustworthiness is dependability. Rule and John (2011) claim that dependability refers to the acceptance of the research findings by the community. To achieve this, I ensured that there was good relationship between the researcher, participants and gate keepers such as the school principal and the subject advisor.

3.10 Ethical considerations

Cohen et al. (2011, p. 8) describe ethics as "a matter of principled sensitivity to the rights of others, and that, while truth is good, respect for human dignity is better". This study considered all the principles of ethical research. Maree (2012) contends that researchers are not allowed to harm anyone during the research process. This study adopted the basic guidelines for ethical research such as ensuring the anonymity and confidentiality of participants, obtaining informed consent from the participants, doing no harm and obtaining ethical approval from the gate keepers (UKZN, 2014). According to UKZN research ethics policy (2014) it is compulsory for all students and staff members of UKZN to comply with the ethics policy when conducting research in or outside the university. Before the commencement of study, I applied for ethical clearance from UKZN Research Ethics Committee to conduct the research and received an ethical approval certificate (Refer to Appendix 1). I also requested permission from the KZN Department of Education to conduct research at Pholela circuit and received permission from the KZN DoE (Refer to Appendix 2). Next, I arranged meetings with the school principals of the five schools and the subject advisor to request teachers to participate in the research study (Refer to Appendix 3 & 4). I further visited

the teachers to explain the purpose of the study and requested their informed consent to participate in the study. An informed consent letter (Refer to Appendix 5) was issued to all participants that stated the purpose of study and outlined the data collection methods and timeframes (Cohen et. al., 2011) In terms of privacy, the participants' information was kept confidential by the researcher and supervisor in a safe at my supervisor's office at UKZN. The data will be destroyed after a period of 5 years. In addition, schools and participants were provided with pseudonyms to guarantee anonymity and to ensure that participants expressed themselves honestly. All participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study if they wished to do so at any time, with no consequences. Lastly, I ensured that no questions made my participants feel uncomfortable for the duration of study.

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter presented the research design and methodology of this study. The chapter began with a detailed description of the interpretive paradigm and the qualitative methodological approach and why these were suitable for this study. The case study research design was explained as well as the data collection methods of observation and the semi-structured interviews and their suitability for this study. The convenience sampling of the schools, the purposive sampling of the five FET business studies teachers as participants and the thematic data analysis process were also discussed. To conclude, the ethical considerations, issues related to trustworthiness and the limitations of this study were also outlined. The next chapter presents the data and findings of the study.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the research design and methodology employed for the study. This chapter presents and analyses the data generated from the semi-structured interviews and observations of cluster meetings. Five participants from five different schools were the sources of data and they were provided with pseudonyms for confidentiality and anonymity purposes. The findings presented in this chapter aim to address the following research questions:

1. What collaborative activities do FET business studies teachers engage in during cluster meetings?
2. To what extent does the cluster serve as an effective PLC for FET business studies teachers?

The process of data analysis started with reading interview transcripts and observation notes several times in order to understand the data better. This was followed by coding common phrases that emerged from each participant's responses. Thereafter, codes were grouped together in order to identify themes. Also, patterns of similarity and differences were noted. Next, the researcher made use of direct quotes from the semi-structured interviews to present the voice of participants. Identified themes are presented according to the research questions.

This chapter begins with a brief description of the profiles of participants. This includes their biographical details such as qualifications and teaching experience. Furthermore, the chapter presents the type of collaborative activities that teachers engaged in during cluster meetings. The chapter concludes by looking at the extent to which the cluster served as an effective PLC for FET business studies teachers. The data generated was analysed according to the conceptual framework and literature review that was outlined in Chapter Two. Participant's responses are represented in italics.

4.2 Profiles of the participants

This section provides a detailed outline of the profiles of the five participants of the study. The schools and participants were provided with pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. The study was conducted in five rural schools in the Pholela Circuit, Harry Gwala District, KwaZulu- Natal.

4.2.1 Zethu

Zethu is a 35-year old female teacher. She is a professionally qualified teacher registered with the South African Council for Educators (SACE). She has a National Diploma in Marketing obtained from the Mangosuthu Technikon and the National Professional Diploma in Education (NPDE) from the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Furthermore, she is the holder of an Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) and the Bachelor of Education Honours degree from the University of South Africa. Her major subjects are business studies, economic management sciences and life orientation. Zethu has been teaching in the same school for twelve years. During the study period, she was teaching grades 10 and 11 business studies. Zethu indicated that she enjoyed teaching business studies and before she was employed as a teacher, she served in the corporate industry. She further indicated that she has been attending business studies cluster meetings for past eight years. She confirmed this by saying the following:

> *I have been attending cluster meetings for period of eight years if I am not mistaken, this is because we are mandatory by our district officials to attend cluster meeting in order to improves our practice and our learner's achievements.*

4.2.2 Lizzy

Lizzy is a 28-year old female teacher. She is a professionally qualified teacher registered with the South African Council for Educators (SACE). She holds a National Diploma in Small Business Management from the Durban University of Technology and a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) from the University of South Africa. Her major subjects are Business Studies and Economics & Management Sciences. Lizzy has four years' teaching experience and she has been teaching business studies in grades 10, 11 and 12 for the past four years'. Furthermore, Lizzy stated that it was not her intention to become a business studies teacher but she enjoyed the subject because of the support she received from her colleagues and the subject advisor. She further

indicated that she has been attending business studies cluster meetings for the past four years. She responded by saying:

> *I started attending cluster meetings in 2014 and I never miss cluster meeting because I am still new on the field, I always go there with a purpose of learning something new in mind. To tell you the truth, I just go there to feed my brain with the knowledge from other teachers.*

4.2.3 Ayanda

Ayanda is a 30-year old male teacher who is a professionally registered with SACE. He matriculated in the year 2005. He holds a National Diploma in Office Management and Technology from Durban University of Technology, a Postgraduate Certificate in Education and a Bachelor of Education Honours degree from the University of South Africa. His major subjects are business studies and economic management sciences. Ayanda indicated that it was not his intention to be a business studies teacher. He stated:

> *It was not my choice to be a business studies teacher, but my major subjects from university force me to major with business studies in FET and EMS in the senior phase. Anyway, I enjoy business studies because I was doing commerce in high school and most of the grade 10 and 12 content is similar to business administration which was my major subject at DUT.*

4.2.4 Sipho

Sipho is a 35-year old male teacher. He is a professionally qualified teacher registered with the South African Council for Educators (SACE). He holds a Bachelor of Commerce degree and the Postgraduate Certificate in Education from the University KwaZulu-Natal. His major subjects are business studies and economics. Sipho has nine years of teaching experience and he has been teaching in the same school since he joined the Department of Education in 2010. During the study period, Sipho was teaching business studies to grade 11's and he was serving as the departmental head for commerce at Sinefedi Secondary School. Sipho indicated that he started attending cluster meetings in 2010 and he never missed meetings because the cluster coordinator ensures that all teachers attended cluster meetings by contacting school principals in advance.

4.2.5 Mandla

Mandla is a 45-year-old male teacher. He completed a National Diploma in Public Administration at Mangosuthu Technikon, a Postgraduate Certificate in Education and an Adult Basic Education and Training certificate from the University of South Africa. Mandla is the departmental head for commerce at Nkwezela Technical School supervising five post level one teachers. Mandla had been teaching in the same school for the past sixteen years. During the period year of this study, he was teaching business studies from grades 10-12. Mandla stated that his major subjects are economics and economic management sciences. Furthermore, he emphasized that he enjoys teaching business studies because it is similar to other commercial subjects. In terms of collaborating with teachers in the cluster, Mandla indicated that he has been collaborating with teachers from different schools since 2006. He supported his statement by saying:

> *I started to attend cluster meetings in 2006 because in 2004 and 2005 I was not familiar with the system and in that time, there was no one responsible for coordinating cluster activities in our circuit. For example, there was no subject advisor or cluster coordinator responsible for managing cluster activities in our circuit so that's why I said I start attending cluster meetings in the year 2006.*

4.3 The concept of 'cluster'

This study explores collaborative learning of FET business studies teachers in one cluster. I commence this section by describing participants' views of a 'cluster'. The data that emerged from semi-structured interviews indicated that participants understand the notion of 'cluster' in various ways. Two of the four participants seemed to have a common understanding about the concept as they viewed a cluster as a place for sharing information and knowledge about a subject. The following extracts highlight participants' responses during semi-structured interviews. Zethu described a cluster as:

> *A place where teachers meet together to share knowledge and problems about the subject they teach. Cluster meetings are usually attended by teachers who wish to assist one another by sharing everything.*

Likewise, Sipho acknowledged that the cluster benefited teachers in different ways. He stated, "A *cluster helped teachers to improve their class room practice as they learn from each other".*

Lizzy asserted that the cluster involved discussing curriculum issues to improve schools and learners achievements. She commented:

> *In my understanding, I believe cluster is group of professional teachers who volunteer to meet together regularly to discuss issues related to the subject they teach. Teachers meet together in cluster to identify alternative ways of approaching subject content.*

On the other hand, one participant pointed out that the cluster facilitated collaborative learning of teachers to improve teaching and learning. Mandla said, "*A cluster is about the working together of teachers to support one another by sharing information and resources to improve the way they teach"*. Vescio et al. (2008) assert that the primary purpose of PLCs is to improve teaching and learning through collective learning. They further contend that a cluster can be used as a vehicle for professional development for teachers. Brodie and Borko (2016) maintain that

> Teachers should have opportunities to talk more with one another and reflect more deliberately and systematically on their practice to enable their work to become more intellectual and to facilitate collective and sustainable shifts in practice for the intellectual benefit of learners (p. 6).

I also noted during cluster meetings that teachers worked collaboratively sharing resources and knowledge in order to improve their subject understanding. Ayanda asserted that cluster meetings enable teachers to make informed decisions that correspond with the current education system. He defined a cluster as:

> *A place where a team of teachers meets together to discuss matters about their subject. I think cluster play important role in promoting sustainable professional development to teachers. Cluster meetings also helps us to be updated about our education system.*

The data derived from participant's responses suggests that teachers had good understanding of the concept 'cluster'. All participants indicated that teachers learn from each other in cluster in order to improve their practice.

This corresponds with literature since various authors highlighted that cluster assist teachers to improve teaching practice. Lieberman and Miller (2008) describe a PLC as a clustering of teachers from neighbouring schools. They assert that teachers meet regularly with the purpose of improving their pedagogical content and content knowledge to enhance students learning. Similarly, Brodie (2013, p. 15) contends that professional learning communities can be "sites where deep and powerful learning among teachers takes place. She also argues that all stakeholders involved in professional learning communities should be committed towards the same goal. Stoll *et al.* (2006) assert that PLCs aim to provide ongoing learning to teachers in order to improve teaching practice as well as student achievements. Correspondingly, Jita and Mokhele (2014) found that clusters could be used as the spaces for sharing skills and practice.

4.4 What collaborative activities do FET business studies teachers engage in during cluster meetings?

This section responds to the first research question which addresses the types of collaborative activities that FET business studies teachers engage in during cluster meetings. In order to address this question, I attended two cluster meetings to observe learning activities that took place during cluster meetings. The first meeting focused on moderation of term one assessments and the second meeting was for setting of term three assessment tasks. This was followed by semi-structured interviews with participants to obtain in-depth information about collaborative activities that took place in cluster meetings. According to Brodie (2013) professional learning communities refer to a collective group of teachers from the same jurisdiction area with the purpose of achieving academic excellence. She argues that when teachers collaborate together they carry out various learning activities that enable them to learn from each other. Teachers participate in professional learning communities to interact with one another through formal or informal discussions (Brodie, 2013). Similarly, Vescio *et al.* (2008) assert that PLCs should include collaborative activities that will shift teaching practices. Teachers were engaged in various collaborative activities during cluster observations. These activities included moderation of assessment, setting assessment tasks, networking and sharing of experience and discussions of subject related matters.

5.4.1 Moderation of assessment

The purpose of moderation is to ensure that assessment tasks are fair and reliable (Department of Education, 2008). It is used to evaluate individual learner's performance on assessments that have been written. It also assists with intervention strategies to support learners in achieving higher marks. Moreover, according to the Department of Education (2008) moderation had to be conducted at four levels, namely; the school, cluster, provincial and national level.

The cluster moderation meeting that I observed was chaired by the subject advisor who arrived 30 minutes before the meeting started. The meeting was planned at district level. The procedure of the meeting was explained by the subject advisor and it was followed by remarks about the importance of moderation. In his remarks, he indicated that cluster moderation is done to ensure that a common standard is maintained by all schools in the district. This was in line with Brodie (2013) who suggested that PLC meetings should have a clear purpose in order to achieve the objective of the meeting. Brodie (2013) affirms that the facilitator plays an important role in creating sustainable professional learning communities. Similarly, the Department of Education guidelines (2015) indicate that subject advisors had to serve as gatekeepers during cluster meetings. During cluster observations, it was evident that the subject advisor took control of the structure of the meeting.

During the course of the cluster meeting, the subject advisor answered questions that were being asked by teachers. This was done to develop teachers in areas where they needed extra support. There was time planned for a discussion about learners' responses. This suggests that teachers improved their subject understanding by attending cluster meetings. For example, one teacher asked cluster members to explain to her how to award marks for layout, analysis, originality and synthesis when marking the essay in section C. However, I also noted that teachers spend less time on content discussions while attending cluster moderation.

The data from the semi-structured interviews indicated that teacher's moderate formal assessment tasks that were written in the previous term. These assessment tasks include common tests, assignments, oral presentations and research projects. Furthermore, participants concurred that

they meet quarterly for moderation and setting of papers. Ayanda explained, "*We normally meet twice a term for moderation of formal tasks for grade 10-12"*. Lizzy responded similarly by saying, *"We meet twice a term unless if there is special program to be facilitated by subject advisor like content workshop"*. On the other hand, Mandla's response showed that moderation meetings are organised by teachers and department officials at district level. He responded by saying:

> *Even though I won't be specific, but we supposed to meets four times a term. We normally meet three times in a term, firstly for setting of papers, secondly for moderation of assessment and in final moderation with advisor. Subject advisor only come to final moderation whereby he combined all business studies teachers under Pholela circuit in one venue*.

Overall, the responses of participants indicate that teachers first meet for cluster moderation without the presence of the subject advisor. Thereafter, they meet for the final moderation where the meeting is conducted by the subject advisor at the central venue. The data indicates that cluster moderation meetings are initiated by teachers and supported by the subject advisor on behalf of the department. All participants mentioned that teachers brought their portfolios and ten percent of their learner's work for moderation purposes. This was confirmed by Zethu who stated the following:

> *When we meet for moderation, we begin by ticking moderation tools to verifying available document on teacher's files because some of our colleagues brought unorganized files. After that, we swopped learner's files for remarking of script and also to see whether marking and moderation has been done correctly at school level by HODs*.

Similarly, Lizzy shared the same view as Zethu that teachers brought learner's files to cluster moderation meetings. She responded:

> *During moderation meeting, teachers brought ten percent of learners scripts marked and with school stamp proving that school based moderation has been conducted. So in cluster we just verify what has been done by HODs in schools.*

The data from the above two participants indicates that moderation begins at school where departmental heads moderate learner's scripts after marking. According to the Department of

Education, Moderate Assessment (2008) departmental heads had to moderate learners and teachers portfolios once per term. This is done to ensure that schools maintain quality assurance in different subjects.

The data generated also showed that moderation benefits teachers because they get the opportunity to trace learners' performance as they bring learners work with different marks to the meetings. Ayanda responded by saying:

> *When we are moderating it's different as when we setting papers, teachers work in small groups and are expected to brought ten percent of their learner's portfolio. A portfolio of learners with high marks, average marks and low marks. After that, we begin by checking teacher's files using moderation tools. We also analyse learners results in order to identify problematic areas in the subject, after analysis of papers we come up with different strategies of how to approach different topics this is done develop one another in the subject.*

According to Ayanda, teacher's use moderation tools during cluster moderation meetings to check the suitability of assessments and to check documents available in teachers' portfolios. Sipho concurred with other participants and explained: "*We complete moderation tools to confirm documents inside teacher's files"* (see appendix 9). In terms of teachers' portfolios, participants indicated that it should contain documents related to assessment such as an annual teaching plan, a program of assessment, lesson plans, the subject policy, CAPS documents, diagnostic analysis and mark sheets for each grade. Sipho further explained that teachers use all the above mentioned documents for various purposes. He stated:

> *We use Cass Grid to check whether learners' marks have been correctly recorded by educator. Cluster coordinator also put his signature as the evidence of cluster moderation. Moderation tool for checking documents on teachers file and to assess the suitability of assessment task. Question papers and memorandum for marking purpose. Diagnostic analysis for identifying problematic areas in the question paper.*

It was observed during the cluster moderation meeting that teachers re-marked learners' scripts using question papers and memorandums to verify learners' responses. During the course of the

meeting, the subject advisor asked teachers to mark learners' scripts using an orange pen provided that internal moderation had been done at school level, and a green pen was supposed to be used by departmental heads for internal moderation. It was noted that some of the learners portfolios were not moderated at school level because there were no green ticks on learners' scripts indicating that internal moderation had been completed, while other teachers came to the moderation meeting with no principal's signature on their Cass grids (see appendix 8). Two participants indicated that teachers are not allowed to change learners' marks on the Cass grid to avoid disadvantaging learners who were not being sampled for moderation. Zethu commented:

> *As cluster moderators we not allowed to change learner's marks. Instead we are expected to provide each other with a constructive feedback about findings of moderation. In my understanding feedback is provided to ensure that there is common understanding between marker and moderator.*

Similarly, Ayanda responded:

> *When we are moderating formal task like June common test, our cluster subject advisor discouraged us to adjust marks and to criticize learners' marks. To ensure that our marking is consistent, we used to attend memo discussion organised by subject advisor.*

Lastly, it was found that after the moderation session, cluster facilitators performed administrative duties as prescribed by the department. Mandla explained:

> *Cluster coordinators collect Cass Grid from teachers and signed them before marks are being validated by subject advisor. Subject advisor also put his signature on Cass Grid and moderation tools as evidence of moderation.*

4.4.2 Setting of assessments

According to the Department of Education (2011, p. 25) assessment is described as a "continuous planned process of identifying, gathering and interpreting information about the performance of learners, using various forms of assessments. The data that emerged from semi-structured interviews showed that teachers attended cluster meetings for setting assessment tasks for various grades. These assessments include common tests, projects and oral presentations. Ayanda explained:

Beside moderation of formal tasks, we meet in cluster for designing common assessment tasks for grade ten and eleven this is because department does not supply us with papers except for grade twelve.

Similarly, Zethu emphasized, *"We used to do many things when we meet in cluster".* She further explained that *"we set common papers, assignments and projects for all grades".* She also indicated that common papers are supposed to be written on the same date and at the same time. She said, *"We also develop marking memorandums together because we have newly appointed teachers who depend on cluster papers and it is not easy to develop memorandum alone*".

Thabo asserted that*:*

Teachers meet quarterly for setting of papers for different grades…they discuss how to structure different questions and to check examination guideline to determine whether assessment correspond with CAPS documents or not.

Furthermore, Thabo reported that teachers collaborate in cluster for quality assurance of assessment. Lizzy explained that:

We check whether all cognitive levels have been used and the standard of the question paper. This is done because our subject advisor used to encourage us to set papers that can be written by all schools in our district.

She added that teachers spend more time on this activity, *"when we are setting papers, it's not about cut and paste. Instead we sat down and discuss questions as well the possible answers."*

Mandla concurred that*:*

Teachers discuss papers to be written by our learners. I think this is done to check the quality of papers because previously, we used to set papers that were below standard. Cluster coordinator and subject advisor play vital role to ensure that papers meet CAPS requirement standard.

The participant's responses indicate that teachers collaborate in cluster meetings to design assessment tasks for various grades. It also emerged that teachers meet quarterly because the

department does not supply schools with grade ten and eleven assessments, except the March, June and September common papers for grade 12. Furthermore, Lizzy indicated that subject advisors encourage them to set common papers to maintain the same standard in the district. She further emphasized that the subject advisor assists teachers to learn different teaching strategies. Lizzy confirmed this by stating, "*We love our subject advisor because he supports us with everything we need"*.

Therefore, it was very evident that the subject advisor served as a mentor during cluster meetings. During cluster observations, teachers used various resources to support them in developing quality assessments. These resources included previous question papers, textbooks, study guides and laptops. The data generated revealed that teachers spend more time on assessment because they used assessment findings to prepare learners for the final examination. Thabo responded:

> *We spend more time on setting papers because we are demanded by department to analyse assessment tasks quarterly, before we implement something new in the following quarter. This assist us as a cluster to determine challenging topics and to predict. Number two, it because all clusters are required to submit assessment tasks to subject advisor every term so that we could have common assessment in our district from grade ten to twelve*.

Correspondingly, Lizzy responded:

> *To be honest, we spend most of our time on setting common paper for grade 10 and 11. This is because every term we are expected to submit papers to subject advisor before we assess our kids. However, what I've noticed is that some clusters in our district does not comply with this initiative. I think it because department does not provide teachers with trainings about importance of cluster meetings*.

The responses of the two participants confirmed that teachers spend more time on assessment because there are curriculum changes in the subject that need to be implemented and because teachers assumed that they will improve learners' achievements by working together. Moreover, teachers assert that assessment meetings enabled them to comply with the business studies assessment policy. Lizzy responded by stating, *"Cluster meetings helped me to learn different*

teaching strategies from other colleagues since questions used to be adopted after strong debate".
Mandla concurred with Lizzy and said:

> *We discuss questions to make sure that question papers are balanced. I think our discussions help us learn from one another because previously we used to set papers with many problems.*

The participant's views correspond with Brodie's (2013) view that teachers collaborating in PLCs, result in collective learning between members. Msomi (2013, p. 31) contends that, "the process of designing assessment tasks in Business Studies includes pre-moderation of tasks and tools to ensure reliability and validity". This suggests that teachers moderate assessments tasks before they are being written by learners. Teachers also use marking tools such as memorandums and rubrics to validate learner's responses.

4.4.3 Networking and sharing of experience

The data generated from my observations of cluster meetings and semi-structured interviews indicates that teachers meet in clusters to network with colleagues from other schools. Participants mentioned that cluster meetings assisted them to address the challenges they are faced with in their classrooms. The following extracts were taken from participant's responses. Zethu responded:

> *In my first year of teaching, I was not good in teaching the insurance section, especially the calculation of simple and compound interest in the grade 12 syllabus. In such a way that I used to ignore some section in this chapter because my learners used to challenge me with many questions. To overcome this situation, I approached my colleagues in cluster meetings to help me on how to teach the topic. Surprisingly, my colleagues taught me different ways of teaching this section. For example, they told me that there are two methods that I can use to calculate the simple and compound interest.*

A similar view was also expressed by Ayanda who explained:

> *Attending cluster meetings has helped me in many ways because it's where I get opportunities to share information and problems with other teachers from different schools. It also assists me learn different teaching strategies from experienced*

teachers. As a young teacher, I always implement something new in my class after attending cluster meetings.

Likewise, Sipho commented, "*We get opportunity to socialize with teachers from other wards by sharing subject information like revision materials and study guides for grade* 12". However, Lizzy suggested that networking does not always happen in her cluster as indicated in her response that, "*Sometimes teachers talk about challenges they experience at their schools, but this is usually done by grade 12 teachers who usually discuss strategies to improve curriculum implementation".*

The responses of participants indicated that teachers collaborate in clusters to share experience and to discuss matters related to teaching and learning. To support the views of participants, Stoll et al. (2007) contend that networking assists teachers to:

> Share and tease out principles of good practice, engage in in-depth dialogue across schools, create knowledge to respond to particular challenges that any school might find hard to resolve, observe colleagues elsewhere, experience fresh perspectives, reduce isolation and see their own school through a different lens (p. 63).

These authors also affirm that networking promotes collaborative learning amongst teachers. Similarly, the study conducted by Stoll (2004) reported that networking with teachers from other schools allows teachers to acquire new knowledge from their colleagues. This suggests that teachers should work collaboratively with relevant stakeholders internally and externally from their schools to enhance their practice. Correspondingly, Wong (2010) argues that networking with colleagues from other schools is essentially to sustain a PLC. However, it emerged from participants that finding the time to network is the major challenge since cluster meetings are not conducted regularly.

These findings are similar to results obtained by Lapham and Lindemann-Komarova (2013) where their study revealed that there was a lack of formal networks in Russian schools.

4.4.4 Discussion of subject content

The findings from the data generated showed that teachers get the opportunity to discuss issues related to their classroom practice in the cluster meetings. This includes identifications of problematic areas in the subject and finding suitable intervention strategies that would assist in

improving learners' achievements. During cluster observations teachers worked together with the subject advisor. For example, I observed them sharing subject knowledge and experiences about marking essays. This emphasised that teachers are offered opportunities to learn from one another in meetings. Participants confirmed that in the cluster meetings they discussed subject content. Zethu highlighted that:

> *In the cluster, we check the diagnostic analysis for each school before we talk about problems that make our learners fail. Another thing we make sure that we discuss content because there are new teachers who are not familiar with the system.*

Lizzy's response was similar to Zethu by saying:

> *Our cluster meeting is conducted as orientation workshops for example we used to spend about 30-45 minutes every session discussing subject challenges. The problem with this session is that it is dominated by experienced teachers who enjoy sharing their past experience with new teachers.*

Mandla concurred with Zethu and Lizzy about content discussion by responding:

> *We also analysed learners results in order to identify problematic areas in the subject, after analysis of papers we come up with different strategies of how to approach different topics this is done develop one another in the subject.*

The data generated from participant's responses showed that teachers had time for subject content discussions during cluster meetings. In the moderation meeting the subject advisor took about forty-five minutes capacitating teachers about changes that needed to be implemented in the grade 10 syllabus. Teachers were provided with copies of the grade ten examination guideline, list of concepts that are normally used by examiners and the subject scope. As part of the subject content discussions, the subject advisor informed teachers that the new examination guidelines will help them to teach relevant topics that are in line with the annual teaching plan, and they were told how to split the grade ten topics into paper 1 and paper 2. Teachers who used to be markers for the grade twelve National Senior Certificate were requested by the subject advisor to share changes that were adopted at the marking centre in 2017. However, Sipho indicated that the time for content

discussions was not enough to improve teaching and learning because teachers spend more time on moderation. He said:

> *We don't spend much time on curriculum discussions in our cluster. I don't know maybe it because our focus is on moderation and setting of papers. If I can tell you the truth, we only learn assessment and moderation skills*.

In the same vein, Marchant (2015) found that teachers spend more time on pedagogical content conversations than content knowledge conservations in their professional learning communities. Correspondingly, Jita and Ndlalane (2009) reported that there is no evidence that cluster meetings provide teachers with the opportunities to discuss subject content. However, Brodie (2013) contends that professional learning communities should aim at improving teaching practices and student learning through collaborative learning. She argues that the content learned by teachers when they meet in PLCs is crucial. Participant's responses in this study, except Sipho, resonate with Brodie's (2013) view on the importance of discussing subject content knowledge during PLCs. The next section presents the results and discusses the themes related to research question two.

4.5 To what extent does the cluster serve as an effective PLC?

In this section, I respond to research question two. Semi-structured interviews and cluster observation notes were utilized to generate data. Further, I analysed data by comparing participants' responses with the characteristics of functioning PLCs described by Stoll *et al.* (2006) namely; collaboration, collective responsibility, promotion of group as well as individual learning, shared values and vision, and reflective professional enquiry (Stoll *et al.*, 2006, p. 27 -30).

4.5.1 Collaboration

Katz and Earl (2010, p. 30) define collaboration as "intensive interaction that engages educators in opening up their beliefs and practices to investigation and debate". Similarly, the Department of Education (2015) views collaboration as the working together of teachers to improve teaching and learning. In our interviews, participants confirmed that they work together during cluster meetings. Some participants indicated that the cluster coordinator plays an important role to

ensuring that there is strong collaboration between teachers. This is confirmed by Lizzy's response by saying, "*Cluster coordinator motivate us as teachers to keep on sharing information with one another as the way of building our subject understanding"*. Mandla responded similarly by stating, "*Cluster coordinator also ensure that there is harmony during meetings by avoiding conflicts that can be caused by poor communication between members"*.

Zethu asserted that, *"cluster leader encourages teachers to work together when they are dealing with cluster activities"*. She also highlighted that collaborative learning offers teachers the opportunity to share their expertise and to discuss educational issues together. Sipho concurs that, in clusters, "*teachers work together to address subject challenges"*. In his response, he also revealed that strong collaboration happened during assessments meetings where teachers are expected to set common assessments. He explained*:*

> *In my cluster, teachers work together to check the quality of common papers and the way memorandums are structured. Grade 12 teachers even analyse their results in order to predict their final pass percentages. To add from the above, we work as family to ensure that our learners pass the subject and we always do things together, we even share food during our break time.*

However, Mandla highlighted that collaboration happened automatically since all teachers are expected to work in groups instead of individuals. Mandla explained that*:*

> *We use group work when we are performing cluster activities like setting common papers, this strategy assists us to network with each other and to brainstorm about issues related to our subject*.

The results from cluster observations indicated that collaboration between teachers occurred. Furthermore, teachers who teach the same grades are grouped together so that no one feels excluded in the meeting. Moreover, teachers worked together during cluster meetings to set common papers which allows them to learn from their colleagues. This was in line with Stoll *et al.* (2006) who assert that successful professional learning communities provide the opportunity for collaboration and learning from each other. These scholars also emphasised that learning in a

community required all members to contribute in order to achieve the common goal of teaching and learning. It was evident from participant's responses in this study that collaboration allows teachers to work as a team. Stoll *et al.* (2006) argue that collaboration encourages teachers to offer superficial support to each other. Brodie and Borko (2016) contend that collaboration is essential for sharing teaching resources and to improve learner achievements through mutual support. Correspondingly, Vescio *et al.* (2008) affirm that collaboration improves the professional practices of teachers. Likewise, Smith (2015) contends that collaboration enables members of a community to work together and solve educational problems resulting in increased learner achievements.

4.5.2 Group as well as individual learning

The data generated showed that teachers work as a team to accomplish cluster activities. Zethu and Mandla asserted that it is essential for teachers to contribute towards cluster activities as this develops subject understanding. Zethu explained "*we all contribute towards cluster activities because we always work as a group instead of individual. Important, cluster members value the ideas of other members."*

Correspondingly, Mandla mentioned that,

> *We work together when we perform cluster activities and cluster members are free to raise their concerns without being intimidated by colleagues. We all contributes in cluster activities since we use cluster as learning environment. Teachers listen to each other when there is someone speaking*.

However, Thabo asserted that cluster meetings promote collaborative learning, but there was a challenge with teachers' personalities. He said they always work in groups when they meet in clusters even though there are teachers who prefer to work in isolation because they claim to be better than others. Thabo also explained that, "*there are colleagues who feel superior than novice teachers. I think this is because of their experience".*

The data from participant's responses showed that cluster meetings helped teachers to meet their needs as they learn from each other while performing cluster activities. It also showed that cluster meetings support teachers to improve their teaching and learning because they get the opportunity to share their knowledge and expertise. Based on cluster observations, there was collaborative

learning between teachers since members worked in groups when performing cluster activities. There was also evidence of collegiality as the majority of cluster members were actively involved in group discussions and they respected each other. However, it was noted that some of the cluster members were silent while others were talkative.

The findings of this study are in accordance to the views of Brodie (2013) who contends that learning in PLCs should result in individual and collective learning. This view suggests that learning in PLCs requires teachers to work together in order to achieve the same objectives. According to Stoll *et al.* (2006, p. 227), "all teachers are learners with their colleagues". This suggests that professional learning communities offer opportunities for group and individual learning. Ceresto (2015) asserts that teachers learn as individuals and then they share their learning with other colleagues while learning collaboratively.

4.5.3 Shared values and vision

Sharing of their visions emerged from participants when there were asked to describe the characteristics of their present cluster.

Mandla responded by stating:

> *We learn from each other when we are dealing with cluster activities. I think this is because we have same vision of improving learner's achievements in the ward. Cluster members have positive attitude because when cluster coordinator requests us to attend meetings we all attend without complaining.*

Sipho answered similarly by responding:

> *What I can say is that all teachers attend cluster meeting with the aim of improving student results because our district is not performing well in the subject. I believe that no one come with different agenda except the dream of improving results.*

From the above participants' responses, it is evident that cluster members shared the same vision and mission of improving learners' results. These participants suggested that sharing their vision allowed for mutual learning. During cluster observations, it was also noted that teachers shared the same vision as all cluster members arrived on time and they worked together during the course of the meeting.

The findings of this study correspond with Stoll *et al.'s* (2006) conceptual framework who contend that sharing of the vision and having a clear purpose is an essential characteristic for functioning PLCs. They assert that for teachers to learn collaboratively in PLCs, they should share the same vision and values about student learning. This suggests that members of a learning community should work as a unit to achieve similar goals. Similarly, the Department of Education (2015) is of the opinion that sharing the vision and mission is essential in order for members of a community to achieve a common goal. Smith (2015) contends that teachers learning in the PLC should share the same vision, norms and values in order to establish good relationships and engage in collaboration. Correspondingly, Stoll (2004) reported that members of a community are expected to share similar values of improving their practice as well as learners' achievements.

4.5.4 Collective responsibility

Sipho and Zethu highlighted that all cluster members contribute during their meetings. These participants mentioned that sometimes cluster members do not reach a consensus easily when they are making decisions, but it does not mean that they fail to take collective responsibility. Sipho asserted that, "*cluster members used to respond positively if they are tasked by our leader to accomplish particular activities".*

Correspondingly, Zethu reported that teachers always work together to accomplish cluster activities; teachers assist one another to develop each other's skills while engaging in cluster activities. The data from participants indicates that teachers worked together to accomplish cluster activities and they made collective decisions to achieve the goal of developing each other. Furthermore, it was evident during cluster observations that when cluster members had a disagreement, the cluster coordinator made sure that teachers reached a consensus. The results of this study correspond with Stoll *et al.* (2006) who assert that taking collective responsibility includes being committed to student and teacher learning. Stoll *et al.* (2006) argue that members of a PLC should be consistent in taking collective responsibility to improve student learning.

Accordingly, Brodie (2013) maintains that members of a community should have positive conflict that would encourage them to grow in their profession. This was also evident in this business

studies cluster as participants mentioned that they took collective responsibility for decisions and reached a consensus to achieve their shared goal in spite of their disagreements.

4.5.5 Mutual trust, respect and support among staff members

The participants' responses highlighted that there was a high level of trust and respect in their cluster meetings. Participants also affirmed that teachers behaved professionally during their cluster meetings. Mandla mentioned that,

> *There is hundred percent of trust and respect between members because our cluster coordinator is very younger to us in age, but when he calls us for cluster meetings we make sure that we attend and I never take advantage of his age*.

Sipho also acknowledged that cluster members value the opinions of other members. He said, "*In our meetings, everyone is free to share opinions although there are those who fear to talk"*. Ayanda reported that the cluster coordinator ensures that there is good relationship between cluster members. Ayanda asserted that, *"cluster coordinator ensures that there is harmony during meetings by avoiding conflicts that can be caused by poor communication between members"*.

I also noticed a good relationship between teachers in cluster meetings, for example, teachers kept quiet while the cluster coordinators addressed them. Trust builds a good relationship among people who are working together because it enables them to communicate freely and share relevant information without fear (Brodie & Borko, 2016).

Similarly, according to the Department of Education (2015) guidelines, successful PLCs are characterised by trust and respect among members. The results of this study correlate with Stoll (2011) who contends that members of functioning PLCs respect their colleagues and trust their competencies regardless of their differences. Brodie and Borko (2016, p. 144) assert that "trust can be regarded as the foundation of real collaboration.

4.5.6 Inclusive membership

The data generated from interviews, showed that two of the participants enjoyed working as a team. These participants also reported that cluster members worked as a family to ensure that learner's progressed in the subject. Mandla explained:

We always do things together like sharing department documents, teaching aids and teaching skills. In our cluster, teachers who taught same grade used to organize grade 12 learners in central venue for revision purpose.

Mandla further indicated that teachers shared food during cluster meetings. Sipho asserted that, "*teachers learn together to ensure that those who are coming from under-perming school's benefits from colleagues, teachers don't discriminate each other instead they enjoy working together"*. Members of PLCs are not allowed to discriminate against each other in terms of gender (Department of Education, 2015). This suggests that members of a PLC should be open to each other.

The findings from cluster observations revealed that teachers work collaboratively. Teachers worked in small groups and no one worked in isolation. Hord (2004) contends that successful PLCs are characterized by members supporting each other. In the same vain, Brodie (2013) argues that learning in PLCs is collaborative, and it must be supported by relevant stakeholders such as departments of education, teachers and school's principals.

4.7 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to analyse data collected from five FET business studies teachers generated from semi-structured interviews and observations of cluster meetings. The chapter started with a brief description of the profiles of participants. This included their biographical details such as qualifications and teaching experience. This was followed by a discussion of the participants understanding of a cluster. Next, I discussed the type of collaborative learning activities that took place during cluster meetings. To conclude, I looked at the extent to which the cluster served as an effective PLC for FET business studies teachers.

The data generated indicated that teachers learn collaboratively in the cluster as they worked together while attending meetings. The findings presented indicated that teachers engaged in various collaborative learning activities in cluster meetings such as moderation, setting of papers, content discussions and networking with teachers from other schools. Furthermore, teachers indicated that the cluster meetings served as a mode for teacher learning and it assisted them to improve learners' achievements.

With regards to the characteristics of effective professional learning communities, the cluster displayed the majority of the features of a functioning PLC according to Stoll et al (2006). The next chapter discusses the summary of findings and recommendations for future research.

Table 4: Summary of participant's responses for research question 1

What collaborative activities do FET business studies teachers engage in during cluster meetings?

PARTICIPANTS	Zethu	Lizzy	Sipho	Mandla	Ayanda	Themes identified
Cluster activity 1	-We exchange teachers file and learner's portfolio. -Checking available documents on teachers file such as annual teaching plans, programme of assessments, question papers and CASS mark sheets.	-Teachers brought their files and 10% of learner's portfolio for moderation purpose. - Cluster coordinators distribute portfolios. -Checking documents on teacher's files using moderation tool.	- We exchange learner's portfolio for moderation purpose, teachers are expected to bring 10% of his or her learners' assessment task. - Checking teacher's files to assist colleagues who are nominated by district for provincial moderation to organize their files properly	-Brought ten % of learner's portfolio. A portfolio of learners with high marks, average marks and low marks. - Checking teacher's files using moderation tools after that cluster coordinator distribute learner's portfolio across teachers.	-Teachers swopped learner's files with each other to see whether marking and moderation was done correctly at school level by HODs.	**Moderation**

Cluster activity 1	-Our focus is on moderation and setting of assessment tasks such exam, assignment and project. -Checking accuracy of marking and provide positive feedback after marking. -Cass Grid to check whether learner's marks have been correctly captured	-its moderation of assessment tasks e.g. exam papers, assignments and projects in order to the quality of marking. - Teachers provide each other with constructive feedback about the outcome of marking.	Moderate all assessment tasks for previous term. - Cluster coordinator request teachers to feedback each other about things that were noted during moderation process. Constructive feedback must be provided in order to develop each other on mistakes that were identified during moderation process	-Remarking of papers to determine whether marking and moderation was done accordingly at school level	-Signing moderation tools - Shadow marking is being avoided during moderation - Teachers use marking guidelines and Cass mark sheet to verify learner's responses and ticks. - Teachers are not allowed to change learner's marks on Cass grid - Teachers develop each other on mistakes that we made when we marking learner's scripts	**Moderation**

Cluster activity 2 **Cluster activity 2**	-We determine the accuracy of marking -Set common papers for grade 10 and 11 and develop marking guidelines. -Analyses learner's performance and checking the fairness of marking, discussing subject content and seeking for help from other teachers.	-We set common papers for grade 10, 11 and 12 together because we are expected to submit papers to subject advisor before they are written by our learners. - We also develop marking guidelines together; this is done to develop one another. -Analyze learner's performance. -checking quality of marking	-Teachers discuss papers that were written by learners this is done to check the quality and standard of papers because previously we used to set papers with many problems. -Discuss structures of papers to determine whether papers were on standard or not. Discuss question paper and memorandum - We also check errors or errata on papers and try to correct them for future purpose. Discussion of question papers and memorandum for all grades. -Set common assessment for different grades	-We meet for setting of papers for different grades. -Check examination guideline to determine whether assessment correspond with CAPS documents or not. -Checking whether all cognitive levels have been used and the standard of the question paper. -We analyses learners results in order to identify problematic areas in the subject, -Seat down and discuss question as well the possible answers. -We analyse learners' results in order to identify problematic areas in the subject. -We come up with different strategies of how to approach different topics. -	-Analyses of questions for each section - Make recommendations of useful teaching strategies - Meet in cluster for designing common assessment tasks for grade 10 and 11 - Teachers work together to design assignment, oral presentation, projects and common papers.	**Setting assessment**

Cluster activities 3	-Sometimes teachers talk about challenges they experience at their schools.		-Teachers talk about problems they experienced from their school seeking for help from older teachers.	-we come up with different strategies of how to approach different topics this is done develop one another in the subject - We spend more time talking about subject related matters because there are many changes in the subjects. -Determine challenging topics	-We also share our opinions and request help in areas where we experience problems without being criticized since we work as a team	**Discussion of subject matter**
Cluster activities 4	-Its networking with other teachers because I get opportunity to share information with teachers from different school - Learning different teaching strategies -Team teaching	- Our cluster meeting is conducted as orientation workshops for example we used to spend about 30-45 minutes every session discussing subject challenge.	- Socialize with teachers from other wards by sharing subject information like revision materials and study guides for grade 12 -Learn from other teachers		-I enjoy networking because you get opportunity to share your experience with your colleagues - We learn various teaching strategies from them as long if you behave professional	**Networking and sharing of experience**

	Zethu	**Lizzy**	**Sipho**	**Mandla**	**Ayanda**
The concept cluster	-For me cluster is a place where teachers meet together to share knowledge and problems about the subject they teach.	-I understand cluster as a group of professional teachers who voluntary to meet together regularly to discuss issues related to the subject they teach. -The purpose of cluster is to exchange ideas about subject and also to improve learner's results.	-I think cluster is the organization of teachers from the same ward that assist them to share information about the subject. -Cluster helped teachers to improve their subject understanding.	-Cluster is about the working together of teachers to support one another by doing things together to improves teaching and learning -The focus of cluster is on improving teaching and learning from our schools through sharing teaching methodology with other teachers.	-Cluster is a team of teachers in a circuit who are teaching in the same phase or grade these teachers normally meets to discuss issues about the their subject

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1. Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore collaborative learning of FET business studies teachers in one cluster. Chapter four presented the analysis and the interpretation of data and the findings. The data was generated through semi-structured interviews and observations of five FET business studies teachers from the Pholela circuit. This chapter begins with a brief overview of the study. This is followed by a discussion of the findings. The research findings were linked with the conceptual framework that underpinned the study. Thereafter, recommendations for further research are made drawn from the research findings. Finally, the conclusion is presented. This study aimed to addresses the following research questions:

1. What collaborative activities do FET business studies teachers engage in during cluster meetings?
2. To what extent does the cluster serve as an effective PLC for FET business studies teachers?

5.2. Overview of the study

The purpose of this study was to explore collaborative learning of FET business studies teachers in one cluster. The study was conducted in five secondary schools in the Pholela circuit with five FET business studies teachers. The section below presents the summary of study chapters.

Chapter One presented the orientation and the overview of study and included the background and rationale for the study. The key research questions, concepts and the conceptual framework underpinning the study were briefly explained. Moreover, the methodological approach and research design of the study were discussed.

Chapter Two presented the literature review in relation to the study and the conceptual framework that framed the study. Chapter Three presented the qualitative approach and case study design used to generate data from the participants.

Chapter Four discussed the analysis of data and the interpretation of findings drawing on the relevant literature and conceptual frameworks. Chapter Five summarizes the main findings of study and discusses recommendations for future research.

5.3. Discussion of findings

5.3.1 Moderation and designing assessment tasks as major collaborative learning activities during cluster meetings

The first key finding of this study was that moderation and designing assessment tasks were the major collaborative learning activities that took place during PLC meetings. The data generated from Chapter Four showed that there were two major collaborative learning activities that teachers engaged in during cluster meetings, namely; moderation and designing of assessments tasks for grade 10 to 12. Mphahlele (2014) affirms that clusters are used for moderation of learner's portfolios. Teachers moderate formal assessments tasks that were written in the previous term. Formal assessments refer to the March common test and assignments. Teachers indicated that assessments were designed to monitor learners' progress and were recorded onto mark sheets which were also known as the CASS grid. All teachers brought 10 percent of learners' portfolios for moderation to the meetings. They also brought their files with documents confirming that assessment and teaching had been done at school level. Cluster moderators re-marked learners' scripts using marking guidelines and rubrics for assignments. Furthermore, cluster moderators were encouraged by the subject advisor to provide each other with constructive feedback for development in the subject. Brodie (2013) contends that the facilitator plays an important role in maintaining the sustainability of professional learning communities.

With regards to handling feedback in a professional manner, participants indicated that they wrote positive comments on the moderation tool before it was signed by the subject advisor. Participants highlighted that moderation meetings gave them an opportunity to trace learners' progress. Brodie

(2013) maintains that PLC activities should be determined by teacher and learner needs. However, observation showed that there was little evidence of internal moderation by departmental heads at school level. This contradicts the DBE and DHET (2011) guidelines which state that professional learning community activities should be supported by relevant stakeholders such as, subject advisors, principals and teachers. The data generated showed that teachers collaborate in clusters to set examination papers for various grades. Teachers indicated that they used previous question papers and textbooks to ensure that quality assessment was being developed.

It was further noted that teachers spend more time on this activity because there were curriculum changes that needed to be implemented by designing suitable assessment tasks, especially for grade 10. Moreover, teachers indicated that this activity gave them an opportunity to comply with the business studies assessment policy and to follow examination guidelines properly.

5.3.2 More time should be allocated to discuss subject content during cluster meetings.

The second key finding of this study was that business studies teachers need to spend more time discussing subject content during PLC meetings. Teachers acknowledged that they don't spend enough time on subject content discussions during cluster meetings. The observation data also revealed that discussions of subject content was not sufficient to develop content knowledge of teachers because teachers spent most of their time on the other activities as highlighted in previous paragraphs. The discussion of subject content was not formally planned and randomly occurred during the cluster meetings.

Overall, the research findings showed that these activities assisted teachers to work collaboratively, improve their classroom practices. This is in accordance with Stoll and Louis (2008, cited in Brodie, 2013, p. 6) who described professional learning communities as "teachers critically interrogating their practice in ongoing, reflective and collaborative ways in order to promote and enhance student learning". This suggests that teachers accumulate different types of knowledge when they socialize in professional learning communities. The Department of Education (2011) affirms that there are two major objectives of professional learning communities: to improve teaching practices and to improve learner achievements. The findings showed that cluster activities

occurred in a collaborative manner. This concurs with Brodie (2013) who stated that participation in professional learning communities' activities should result in collaborative learning.

5.3.3 The business studies cluster reflected characteristics of effective PLCs

The third key finding of this study is that the business studies cluster reflected most of the characteristics of effective PLCs according to Stoll *et al.* 2006. The data generated indicated that the business studies cluster was an effective PLC since it reflected all the characteristics of successful PLCs as described by Stoll *et al.* (2006). These characteristics were collaboration, collective responsibility, promotion of the group as well as individual learning, shared values and vision, reflective professional enquiry, mutual trust, respect and support among staff members, and inclusive membership. In both cluster meetings, there was an element of collaboration between teachers and facilitators. Participants indicated that they followed the guidelines of facilitators to ensure that collaborative learning took place. Furthermore, the data showed that facilitators encouraged teachers to work in groups when they engaged in cluster activities. Participants affirmed that they worked collaboratively to accomplish cluster activities. For example, during the assessment meeting, teachers shared ideas, subject knowledge and experiences in order to design quality assessments.

Additionally, the study findings showed that teachers took collective responsibility for teaching and learning. Participants stated that they attended cluster meetings because they wanted to improve their classroom practices and learners' performance. In cluster meetings, teachers demonstrated a high degree of commitment: Firstly, they all arrived on time for both meetings. Secondly, they accepted responsibilities delegated by the cluster coordinator. Thirdly, they all contributed towards cluster activities although sometimes they had conflict about subject content. Moreover, participants stated that teachers worked together to accomplish activities and they also learnt different knowledge and strategies from their colleagues. Brodie and Borko (2016, p. 155) affirm that "collectivity is important because professions grow through the collective development of knowledge, not only through learning of individual professions". However, the data revealed that some teachers contributed less information than others at the meeting because they were afraid of being intimidated by experienced teachers who claim to be more superior to the novice teachers.

Participants stated that there was a high level of trust and respect in their cluster. They further stated that the cluster coordinator did not allow teachers to criticize the opinions of other colleagues and therefore in this way, all members were free to raise their opinions without being judged by their colleagues. Teachers performed cluster activities with integrity irrespective of their differences in age and experience. Teachers learning in a cluster should accept each other (Department of Education, 2015). The participants of this study indicated that they enjoyed working together although they sometimes experienced problems. The data indicated that teachers shared meals during lunch time as a sign of belonging to one family. Finally, successful PLCs require members to have conversations about their profession. For example, teachers could have dialogues about educational matters in order to improve teaching and learning. However, the observation data showed that some of the teachers did not fully engage in dialogue about educational issues.

5.4 Limitations of study

The limitation of this study is that it was a small-scale case study which comprised of five FET business studies teachers learning in one cluster. The findings of this study may not reflect what is happening in the other clusters in the Harry Gwala district. Therefore, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to other contexts. It is only limited to participants and the context of this study. Another limitation was the withdrawal of one participant because of personal reasons. The study ended up with five participants from five schools. The study would have generated more data if a larger number of participants were used. Finally, some of the participants were not comfortable to disclose certain information to me as they viewed me as a young researcher. To overcome this, I tried to explain to them that the findings of this study were going to be used for educational purposes and they were going to remain anonymous.

5.5 Recommendations

In terms of collaborative learning activities that took place in the cluster meetings, the findings revealed that teachers spend most of their time on moderation and setting of examination papers. The study recommends that subject advisors should organise workshops for teachers so that they can be informed about possible activities to be carried out during cluster meetings. All participants

did not seem to be aware of other cluster activities except re-marking of learner's scripts and setting of common assessments. The Department of Education (2015) affirms that there are a range of activities that can be done by teachers when they collaborate in professional learning communities and these activities are determined by teacher and learner needs. With regards to the characteristics of successful PLCs, the study recommends that teachers engage frequently in dialogue about teaching and learning. A further recommendation is that research should be conducted which focuses on the subject content knowledge of business studies teachers during PLC meetings as well as specific business studies topics, the challenges experienced and possible strategies to overcome these challenges.

5.6 Conclusion

The main purpose of this study was to explore collaborative learning of FET business studies teachers in one cluster. The objectives of the study were to understand the collaborative learning activities that FET business studies teachers engaged in during cluster meetings and to examine the extent to which the cluster served as an effective PLC for business studies teachers. The findings of the study showed that teachers engaged in various collaborative learning activities during cluster meetings. The data further demonstrated that teachers focused on moderation and setting of examination papers as required by the department. Furthermore, the study findings indicated that cluster activities promoted collaborative learning between teachers and it positively influenced teacher's professional practice. Finally, the findings revealed that the business studies cluster was an effective PLC since it reflected the majority of the characteristics of effective PLC's as described in the literature review and conceptual framework. However, the study found that there is room to engage more in dialogue by teachers.

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APPENDIX 1: ETHICAL CLEARANCE

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

1 February 2018

Mr Siyabonga Andrias Magoso 217077179
School of Education
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Mr Magoso

Protocol reference number: HSS/2290/017M
Project Title: Exploring collaborative learning of FET Business Studies teachers in one cluster in the Pholela Circuit

Full Approval – Expedited Application

In response to your application received 7 December 2017, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL.**

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

.....

Professor Shenuka Singh (Chair)
Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

/pm

cc Supervisor: Dr J Naidoo
cc. Academic Leader Research: Dr SB Khoza
cc. School Administrator: Ms Tyzer Khumalo

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
Professor Shenuka Singh (Chair)
Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000
Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 3587/8350/4557 **Facsimile:** +27 (0) 31 260 4609 **Email:** ximbap@ukzn.ac.za / snymanm@ukzn.ac.za / mohunp@ukzn.ac.za
Website: www.ukzn.ac.za

APPENDIX 2: GATEKEEPER'S PERMISSION

education

Department:
Education
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Enquiries: Phindile Duma | Tel: 033 392 1063 | Ref.:2/4/8/1414

Mr SA Magoso
PO Box 72
DonnyBrook
3237

Dear Mr Magoso

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **"EXPLORING COLLABORATIVE LEARNING OF FET BUSINESS STUDIES TEACHERS IN ONE CLUSTER IN THE PHOLELA CIRCUIT",** in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the Intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 11 January 2018 to 30 June 2020.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Miss Phindile Duma at the contact numbers below
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

Harry Gwala District

Dr. EV Nzama
Head of Department: Education
Date: 15 January 2018

...Championing Quality Education - Creating and Securing a Brighter Future

KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Postal Address: Private Bag X9137 • Pietermaritzburg • 3200 • Republic of South Africa
Physical Address: 247 Burger Street • Anton Lembede Building • Pietermaritzburg • 3201
Tel.: +27 33 392 1063 • **Fax.:** +27 033 392 1203• **Email:**Phindile.Duma@kzndoe.gov.za •**Web:**www.kzneducation.gov.za
Facebook: KZNDOE....Twitter: @DBE_KZN....Instagram: kzn_education....Youtube:kzndoe

APPENDIX 3

SA Magoso

P. O Box 72

Donnybrook

3237

07 February 2018

The Principal

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN YOUR SCHOOL

My name is Siyabonga Andrias Magoso (217077179) a Master of Education (Teacher Development Studies) student in the School of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Pietermaritzburg campus). As part of requirement for this degree, I am conducting a research project titled "**Exploration of collaborative learning of FET business studies teachers in one cluster in the Pholela circuit**". The study aims to explore what collaborative activities do FET business studies teachers engage in during cluster meetings and also to examine how the cluster serves as an effective PLC for FET business studies teachers.

I hereby request your assistance in this research project by being granted permission to conduct my study in your school. The participants in my study will be one of your Business Studies staff members in your school. Participants will be required to participate in semi- structured interviews that are expected to last between 50 to 60 minutes at the time suitable to them which will not disturb teaching and learning. Follow-up interviews may be conducted if necessary. Each interview will be tape-recorded and also participants will be observed during cluster meetings.

Please note that the school and participants will not receive financial gains for participation in this research project. Teachers will be expected to respond to each question in a manner that will reflect their own personal opinion. The school and the participant's identities will not be disclosed under any circumstances. All teachers' response will be treated privacy. Pseudonyms will be used instead of real names (participant's details will not be mentioned for the duration of project). Participation is voluntary; therefore, participants have at a liberty to withdraw from the study

anytime they desire. Tape recording of interviews will be done after permission has been obtained from participants. All data collected from participants will be stored at my supervisor's office in the University of KwaZulu –Natal in safety storage for a maximum of five years, thereafter it will be destroyed.

Should you have any queries or questions related to this project, you may contact my supervisor or the UKZN Research Office or the Researcher.

Supervisor

Dr Jacqui Naidoo

Telephone 033 260 5867

Email address: naidooj@ukzn.ac.za

UKZN Mr. P. Mohun
HSSREC Research Office Ethics
Tel: 031 260 4557
E-mail: mohunp@ukzn.ac.za or hssrec@ukzn.ac.za

Researcher's contact details

Cell: 078 7190 458/ 072 927 8380

Email: smagoso@yahoo.com

Thank you for your cooperation.

Yours in Education

SA Magoso …….

DECLARATION

I……. (Full names of the school principal) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project. I also consent for the school and teachers to participate in the research project mentioned above.

I understand that the school and teachers are at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should they so desire.

…… ……

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL DATE

SCHOOL STAMP

APPENDIX 4: OBSERVATION PERMISSION CONSENT LETTER

SA Magoso
P. O Box 72
Donnybrook
3237
07 February 2018

The subject Advisor (Business studies)

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO OBSERVE BUSINESS STUDIES CLUSTER MEETINGS

My name is Siyabonga Andrias Magoso (217077179) a Master of Education (Teacher Development Studies) student in the School of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Pietermaritzburg campus). As part of requirement for this degree, I am conducting a research project titled "**Exploration of collaborative learning of FET business studies teachers in one cluster in the Pholela circuit**". The study aims to explore what collaborative activities do FET business studies teachers engage in during cluster meetings and also to examine how the cluster serves as an effective PLC for FET business studies teachers.

I hereby, to request your assistance in this research project by being granted with a permission to observe business studies cluster meetings in one cluster in the Pholela Circuit. The participants in my study will be six FET business studies teachers and they will be required to be observed during cluster meetings. I will also take field notes of activities taking place during cluster meetings.
Please note that the participants will not receive financial gains for participation in this research project. Participant's identities will not be disclosed under any circumstances.

All teachers' response will be treated privacy. Pseudonyms will be used instead of real names (participant's details will not be mentioned for the duration of project). Teachers' participation is voluntary; therefore, participants have a liberty to withdraw from the study anytime they desire. Data collected from teachers will be stored at my supervisor's office in the University of KwaZulu-Natal in safety storage for a maximum of five years, thereafter it will be destroyed.

Should you have any queries or questions related to this project, you may contact my supervisor or the UKZN Research Office or the Researcher.

Supervisor

Dr Jacqui Naidoo

Telephone 033 260 5867

Email address: naidooj@ukzn.ac.za

HSSREC Research Office Ethics

Mr. P. Mohun

Tel: 031 260 4557

E-mail: mohunp@ukzn.ac.za or hssrec@ukzn.ac.za

Reacher's contact details

Mr. S.A Magoso

Cell: 078 7190 458/ 072 927 8380

Email: smagoso@yahoo.com

Thank you for your cooperation.

Yours in Education

SA Magoso

DECLARATION OF CONSENT

I…… (Full names of the Subject Advisor) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature and purpose of the research project. I also consent for teachers to participate in the research project mentioned above.

I understand that teachers are at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should they so desire.

…….. ……..

SIGNATURE OF SUBJECT ADVISOR DATE

APPENDIX 5: PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

SA Magoso
P. O Box 72
Donnybrook
3237

07 February 2018

Dear Participant

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

My name is Siyabonga Andrias Magoso (217077179) a Master of Education (MEd) student in the School of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Pietermaritzburg campus). As part of requirement for this degree, I am required to conducting a research. I therefore, kindly seek your permission to participate in my research study. The tittle of my study is: "**Exploration of collaborative learning of FET business studies teachers in one cluster in the Pholela circuit"**.

The purpose of this study is to explore what collaborative activities do FET business studies teachers engage in during cluster meetings and to examine how the cluster serves as an effective PLC for FET business studies teachers. You will be interviewed for approximately 50-60 minutes at a time convenient to you which will not disturb teaching and learning. You may be requested to do follow-up interview if necessary. You will be required to participate in interviews and observations. Your response will be treated with confidentiality and pseudonyms will be used instead of real names. You will be contacted in advance for interviews. Your participation will always remain voluntary which means that you may withdraw from the study anytime you wish to do so. There will be no financial benefits that you may gain as a result of your participation in this research project. Your identity will not be disclosed under any circumstances, during and after the research process. Pseudonyms will be used to represent the school and your name.

All data collected will be stored at my supervisor's office in the University of KwaZulu-Natal in a safe storage for a maximum of five years, thereafter it will be destroyed.

Should you have any queries or questions related to this project, you may contact my supervisor or the UKZN Research Office or the Researcher.

Supervisor

Dr Jacqui Naidoo

Telephone 033 260 5867

Email address: naidooj@ukzn.ac.za

HSSREC Research Office Ethics
Tel: 031 260 4557
E-mail: mohunp@ukzn.ac.za or hssrec@ukzn.ac.za

Reacher's contact details

Mr. SA Magoso

Cell: 078 7190 458/ 072 927 8380

Email: smagoso@yahoo.com

Thank you for your cooperation.

Yours in Education

SA Magoso

……...

DECLARATION

I……. (Full names of the school principal) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project.

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

I hereby provide consent to the following data collection activities (please tick):

	YES	NO
Interviews		
Audio recording of interviews		
Observations of cluster meeting		

…….. ……

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT DATE

SCHOOL STAMP

APPENDIX 6: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Topic

Exploration of collaborative learning of FET business studies teachers in one cluster in the Pholela circuit.

Research questions

1. What collaborative activities do FET business studies teachers engage in during cluster meetings?
2. To what extent does the cluster serve as an effective PLC for FET business studies teachers?

SECTION A: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. What is your highest qualification?

3 year teaching diploma	
ACE	
B.A/ B Paed/ B.Ed./ PGCE	
B.Ed. honours	
Master's Degree	
PhD	

2. How many years have you been teaching business studies in the FET phase?

3. Why did you choose to teach business studies instead of other commercial subjects?
4. What are the challenges you experience in teaching business studies?
5. What is your present position?

SUBJECT ADVISOR	
PRINCIPAL	
DEPUTY PRINCIPAL	

HEAD OF DEPARTMENT	
POST LEVEL 1	

6.

7. How long have you been attending business studies cluster meetings?

SECTION B

What collaborative activities do FET business studies teachers engage in during cluster meetings?

8. Who is responsible for organising cluster activities in your circuit? Why?
9. How often do you meet in your cluster?
10. Tell me more about the collaborative activities that you engage in during your cluster meetings? Give examples.
11. In your view, which activities dominate in your cluster meetings? Explain further.
12. Which collaborative activities do you find most useful to your teaching practice? Please elaborate.
13. Which collaborative activities do you find least useful to your teaching practice? Elaborate.
14. To what extent do cluster members share collaborative activities during cluster meetings?
15. Does your participation in a cluster meetings change the way you teach as a business studies teacher? Please elaborate.
16. What tools? Teaching strategies/resources do you use in your cluster meetings? And in what ways are those tools? Teaching strategies/resources helpful or not helpful?

To what extent does the cluster serve as an effective PLC for FET business studies teachers?

17. What do you understand by the term 'cluster'?
18. What is the role of cluster coordinator or subject advisor in your cluster meetings? Please explain.
19. In your own understanding describe the characteristics of the cluster that you are presently participating in
20. How does your cluster promote collaborative learning amongst teachers? give examples
21. How often do cluster members take collective responsibilities for activities happening in your cluster?
22. How do cluster members show mutual trust and respect for one another in your cluster meetings? Elaborate

23. Describe how the facilitator encourages teachers to share experiences and expertise? Give examples
24. How would you describe your relationship with other teachers after collaborating with them in cluster meetings?
25. What else would you like to tell me about cluster meetings which you did not mention in our interview?

APPENDIX 7: OBSERVATION SCHEDULE

Observation Date:	**Type of meeting:**
Number of participants:	**Duration of the meeting:**

1. Teachers attendance

_____

_____

_____

2. The main focus of cluster meeting

_____

_____

_____

3. Type of activities taking place during cluster meeting

_____

_____

_____

_____

4. Distribution of activities among teachers

_____

_____

_____

5. Dialogues about teaching and learning.

_____

_____

6. Sharing of resources and experiences (democratic practice by teachers)

_____

_____

7. Atmosphere between teachers during cluster meeting

_____

APPENDIX 8: CASS GRID

KZN DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION: BUSINESS STUDIES GRADE 11

NAME OF SCHOOL: NAME OF TEACHER:

YEAR:

	NAME OF LEARNER	FIRST TERM			SECOND TERM				THIRD TERM							
		Assignment	Controlled Test	SUB TOTAL	Presentation	Mid -year Examination		SUB TOTAL	Project	Controlled Test	SUB TOTAL	TOTAL	CONVERTED	FINAL EXAM		TOTAL
						P 1	P 2							P1	P2	
		50	100	150	50	150	150	350	50	100	150	650	100	150	150	400
1																
2																
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19																		
20																		
Moderation / Monitoring			**Date**	**Sign**		**Date**	**Sign**			**Date**		**Sign**						
1.	School	Principal																
2	School	HOD																
3	Cluster	Panel																
4	District	Subject Adv.																
5	Other																	

School Stamp

APPENDIX 9: MODERATION TOOLS

BUSINESS STUDIES MODERATION TOOL

Moderator		**Educator**	
School		**School**	
Circuit		**Circuit**	
Contact details		**Contact details**	

Teachers file	**yes**	**no**	**Comments-make note on challenges, examples of best practices**
Does the teacher file contain the following • PACE SETTER/ATP			
• CAPS and POA			
• The assessment tasks			
• Marking tool			
• Diagnostic analysis			
• Cass Grid			
• Class mark sheet • Proof of moderation			

Indicate type of assessment applicable this term

Task	**Marks**			**marks**	
Assignment	**50**		**Controlled test**	**100**	
Presentation	**50**		**Mid-year exam**	**300**	
Project	**50**		**Controlled test**	**100**	
			trial	**300**	

1.1. COMPLIANCE WITH NATIONAL CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT POLICIES			SCHOOL			CLUSTER/DISTRICT
	Y	**N**	**COMMENTS**	**Y**	**N**	**COMMENTS**
a. Do the tasks comply with the current policy/guideline document? I.e. Curriculum and assessment policy statement, CAPS and other supporting documents?						
1.2. CONTENT COVERAGE AND VALIDITY						
a. Does the content tested in the assessment tasks adequately cover the prescribed content in the policy and guideline documents?						
b. Is the scope and depth of the content appropriate for grade 10/11/12?						
c. Do items comply with content, construct validity?						

d. Are task items measuring the content and skills they intend to measure?						
1.3. COGNITIVE SKILLS						
a. Do the assessment tasks cover low, medium and higher order thinking skills?						
b. The assessment task covers a minimum of two assessment types, multiple choice question, paragraph, constructed response questions, extended writing question.						
c. Do the tasks provide opportunities to assess the following intellectual skills : - Critical thinking - Ability to compare and contrast - Ability to translate from verbal to symbolic - Ability to see causal relationship - Ability to express argument clearly?						
1.4. QUALITY OF INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS						
a. Questions are clear, concise, precise, intelligible and worked using language appropriate to the range of candidates for whom the tasks intended						
b. Questions can be answered by the majority of candidates in the time allowed						
c. Repetition of questions from previous examinations is avoided						
d. Questions do not advantage or disadvantage particular groups of candidates on grounds other than competence in the subject						
e. Material accompanying the questions, whether text or graphics, is necessary.						
f. For each question, or part question, is there sufficient indication to the candidate of the length and type of answer required and a clear indication of the allocation of marks available						
g. All cartoons and illustrations are clear, accurate and legible						
1.5. LANGUAGE AND BIAS						

a. Is the subject terminology used correctly?						
b. Is the language appropriate for the level of the candidate?						
c. Are there any ambiguities in the grammar that might create confusion?						
d. Does the paper have any evidence of bias in terms of gender issues, race, cultural issues, and provincial and regional bias?						
e. When passages are used, are the text of appropriate length and are the level of complexity of the vocabulary appropriate?						
1.6. TECHNICAL CRITERIA						
a. The question paper is complete with relevant marking grid and/or marking guideline.						
b. The cover page has all relevant details such as time allocation, name of the subject, level of language and instructions to candidates.						
c. The instructions to candidates are clearly specified and unambiguous.						
d. The layout of the paper is candidate friendly						
e. The paper has the correct numbering						
f. Appropriate fonts are used throughout the paper. g. Mark allocations are clearly indicated on both paper and memo.						
1.7. MARKING GUIDLINE						
a. The marking guideline/rubric is accurate						
b. Marking guide/rubric corresponds with the questions in the paper.						
c. The marking guideline/rubric makes allowance for alternative responses.						
d. Marking guideline/rubric facilitates marking						
e. The marking guideline is laid out clearly and neatly typed.						
f. The marking guideline clearly indicates the mark allocation and distribution of marks within the questions.						
1.8 RECORDING OF MARKS						

a) Are the marks correctly added?						
b) Are the marks correctly entered in mark sheet (transfer and conversion)?						
1.9 OVERALL IMPRESSION						
a. The SBA as a whole assesses all tasks and topics of the curriculum and assessment Policy Statement						
b. The tasks are of appropriate standard						
c. Throughout the SBA, there is a balance between the assessment of skills, knowledge and values as required by tasks.						
d. The SBA is in line with the relevant and correct guideline documents.						

DESIGNATION	**SIGNATURE**	**DATE**
Educator(s) :		
Head of Department:		
Principal:		
Cluster moderator:		
Subject advisor:		

SCHOOL STAMP

APPENDIX 10: TURNITIN REPORT

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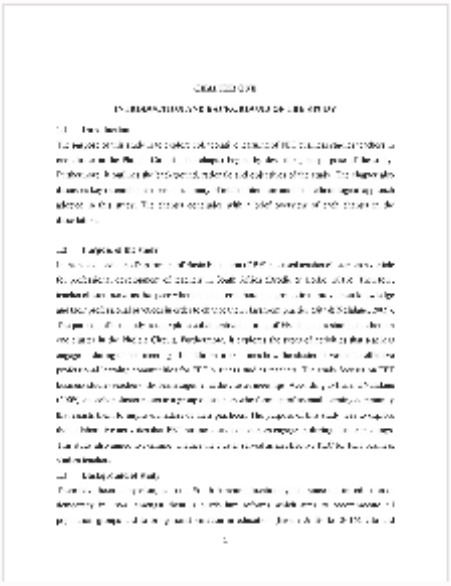

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APPENDIX 11: PROOF OF EDITING

Proofwrite Solutions

WRITE - EDIT - RESEARCH - DESIGN

27th of January 2019

To whom it may concern

EDITING OF DISSERTATION FOR MR SIYABONGA ANDRIAS MAGOSO

I have a master's degree in Social Science, Research Psychology and a TEFL qualification from UKZN. I also have an undergraduate and honour's degree Bachelor of Arts in Health Sciences and Social Services from UNISA.

I have 15 years of teaching experience and have been editing academic theses for students from UKZN, UNISA, the University of Fort Hare, and DUT for the past seven years. I have further done editing, transcribing and other research work for private individuals and businesses.

I hereby confirm that I have edited Siyabonga Andrias Magoso's dissertation titled **"EXPLORING COLLABORATIVE LEARNING OF FET BUSINESS STUDIES TEACHERS IN ONE CLUSTER IN THE PHOLELA CIRCUIT"** for submission of his master's dissertation in education at the University of Kwa-Zulu-Natal. Corrections were made in respect of grammar, tenses, spelling and language usage using track changes in MS Word 2010. Once corrections have been attended to, the dissertation should be correct.

PLEASE NOTE: Should the student add content to their dissertation after my editing and suggested corrections, I cannot guarantee their work is correct in respect of grammar, tenses, spelling and language usage.

Yours sincerely

Shuttleworth

Terry Shuttleworth (Tefl, UKZN, MSocSc, Res Psych, UKZN).