



**TEACHER LEARNING THROUGH TEACHER LEARNING
COMMUNITIES (TLCs): A CASE OF CONSUMER STUDIES
TEACHERS IN ONE DISTRICT IN KWAZULU-NATAL**

BY

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degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the School of Education**

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DECLARATION

I, Lulama Nomfundo Londiwe Shange, declare that:

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to better understand how Consumer Studies teachers learned through Teacher Learning Communities (TLCs) in one district in KwaZulu-Natal. Recurring curriculum changes that have plagued the South African education system have been evident in Consumer Studies as a subject. As a result, to ensure that teachers understand the continuous changes and implementation in the subject, there is a need for Consumer Studies teachers to be developed professionally to ensure that the quality of their teaching is up to the required standard, and they are kept abreast with the latest developments. The study is grounded in the Community of Practice (CoP) theoretical framework. The study utilised a qualitative case study design supported by the interpretive paradigm. The ten Consumer Studies teachers teaching the subject were purposefully selected through purposive sampling. Data were generated through telephonic semi-structured interviews, WhatsApp-based Focus group interviews and reflective journals. The generated data were thematically analysed.

The study's findings indicated that Consumer Studies teachers learned through various platforms and forms within their schools and outside the schools. The study revealed the benefits of engaging as a community in various programmes such as developmental workshops, subject committees, moderations and conferences. Although Consumer Studies teachers were engaging in TLCs through different forms, challenges encountered during learning limited the way learning occurred in these programmes. Given the constraints imposed by the circumstances in Consumer Studies on the effective face-to-face interactions among teachers in learning communities, the participants adopted a supportive culture and interdependent strategies that facilitated their learning community engagements. This created the availability of excess resources and expertise that the Consumer Studies teachers could tap into. They utilised social media platforms with which they were conversant to communicate and share teaching materials while fostering social interaction. Based on the findings, the study found the need to improve the implementation of TLCs for better learning. The study also made recommendations to effect the needed changes to enhance teachers' engagement in Consumer Studies learning community programmes.

Key words: Teacher Learning Communities; Consumer Studies teachers; teacher learning; learning platforms; learning spaces, professional development

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ATPs	Annual Teaching Plans
BTCM	Branch Teachers Committee Meeting
C2005	Curriculum 2005
CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
CoP	Community of Practice
COVID	Corona Virus Disease
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CPTD	Continuous Professional Teacher Development
CPUT	Cape Peninsula University of Technology
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DoE	Department of Education
DSTV	Digital Satellite Television
FET	Further Education and Training
HD	High Definition
ICT	Information Communication Technology
ISPFTED	Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
LoLT	Language of Learning and Teaching
LS	Lesson Study
LTSM	Learner Teacher Support Material
MoE	Ministry of Education
MS	Microsoft
NATED 550	National Accredited Technical Education Diploma 550
NCS	National Curriculum Statement
NICT	National Institution for Compilation and Translation
NSC	National Senior Certificate
OBE	Outcomes Based Education
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PAT	Practical Assessment Task
PCK	Pedagogical Content Knowledge
PD	Professional Development
PDF	Portable Document Format
PHD	Doctor of Philosophy
PLCs	Professional Learning Communities
RNCS	Revised National Curriculum Statement
SAAFECS	South African Association of Family Ecology and Consumer Sciences
SAAFOST	South African Association for Food Science & Technology
SBA	School Based Assessment
SGBs	School Governing Bodies
SMTs	School Management Teams
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TLCs	Teacher Learning Communities
UCT	University of Cape Town
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal
USA	United States of America
VLE	Virtual Learning Environments
WCED	Western Cape Education Development
Wi-Fi	Wireless Fidelity
WISA	Writing Initiative to Support Academics

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CHAPTER ONE

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly changing world, education plays a pivotal role in preparing learners for the challenges and opportunities they will encounter in the 21st century. It is crucial for teachers to stay updated with changes and the latest developments in the education system. Therefore, teachers' engagement in professional learning development programmes is essential as it ensures that teachers are well-versed in the changes that are taking place in the subject. This ensures high-quality teaching and learning. Many countries have recognised the significance of continuous professional development (CPD) to enable teachers to implement curriculum reforms, enhancing teachers' knowledge and skills and improving learners' performance (Alemayehu, 2021; Singh *et al.*, 2021; Tannehill *et al.*, 2021).

According to Van Driel (2021), teaching is multifaceted and requires mastery of both the subject matter and pedagogical content knowledge. However, the failure of the Department of Basic Education (DBE) to equip teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge will result in teaching that is not effective. Therefore, teachers' learning development programmes have an impact on promoting self-confidence, which results in job satisfaction. Given this, the study sought to explore how Consumer Studies teachers learned within Teacher Learning Communities (TLCs).

The chapter commences with the background to the problem, followed by the problem statement. A detailed description of the rationale or motivation of the study and the purpose and significance of the study ensues. The key research questions the study sought to answer, as well as the objectives for the study, are presented. The chapter also provides an overview of existing literature on TLCs and the theory that framed the study. In addition, the research design and methodology to respond to the key research questions are presented. Finally, the chapter concludes with an overview of the chapters in this thesis.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

South Africa has undergone several education reforms in the last decade, from the National Accredited Technical Education Diploma (NATED) 550 to the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) and to the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS). These curriculum reforms were necessary to prepare learners for the global challenges of the 21st century and beyond. While curriculum reforms require changes in the classroom, teachers' readiness to implement curriculum changes is critical in determining the successful delivery of the curriculum (Handelzalts, 2019; Shawer, 2017). Consequently, implementing recurring curriculum changes is impossible without teacher support and guidance as they demand profound learning from teachers (Craig *et al.*, 2022; Dickson, 2022; Fullan, 2020; Pak *et al.*, 2020). Studies have shown that curriculum changes are not effortlessly accepted by teachers as a new curriculum is demanding on teachers who are required to make drastic changes in instructional methods as well as changes in content to be taught (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2019; Zhao & Watterston, 2021). While teachers are responsible for translating and implementing curriculum changes, continuous support and monitoring of curriculum implementation in the classroom are crucial. This necessitates effective teacher professional development. Teachers need opportunities for CPD to enhance their competency in subject matter knowledge and instructional methods, especially in rapidly evolving and continually changing subjects like Consumer Studies.

During curriculum reforms, various continuous professional teacher development (CPTD) programmes in the form of short training workshops were introduced in South Africa mainly to circulate curriculum information. The centralised model, which involves training teachers from different schools for a day or longer, has been the most popular and widely used (Engelbrecht & Ankiewicz, 2016; Kotze *et al.*, 2019). Training all teachers adequately through this once-off method was impossible since no follow-up or support was provided after training (Govender, 2018; Nkambule & Amsterdam, 2018).

Due to continuous changes in the curriculum, a cascade model was introduced, which involved training a few selected teachers, who would, in turn, pass their knowledge on to their colleagues (Singh *et al.*, 2021). This model also proved ineffective with the implementation of new curriculum reforms. Teachers frequently complained that the district trainers themselves lacked adequate understanding of the curriculum due to numerous changes in the curriculum (Retnawati *et al.*, 2016). Kolmos *et al.* (2016) explain that the training during the curriculum reforms often focuses on the new content and not how the implementation should be undertaken in class. Workshops to minimise curriculum implementation difficulties still fall short of addressing the

reality of the classroom implementation teachers encounter in schools (Shawer, 2017; Yan, 2015). Research has also shown that the follow-up after the workshop is inadequate, according to teachers (Ajani, 2020; Stickler *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, teachers continued to experience significant difficulties in implementing the changes in class due to a lack of support from the DBE officials. As a result, many workshops have been rendered ineffective in developing the teachers' subject matter knowledge or even pedagogical knowledge.

Despite all these training methods by the DBE, challenges of teacher development associated with the demands of the new curriculum persist (Pak *et al.*, 2020). Research has revealed that these initiatives have done little to improve teachers' instructional and subject matter knowledge (Darling-Hammond, 2021; Smith & Gillespie, 2023). Shortfalls in current in-service training and continuous lack of resources and support in accessing continuing professional development opportunities have given rise to school-based and cluster-based professional development (Afroz *et al.*, 2024; Mogashoa, 2018). According to these authors, these models are easily accessible as they are close to where teachers live and work. Mogashoa (2018) points out that for the training to be relevant for teachers, their needs should be identified and considered when designing professional development programmes. This resulted in a shift away from the traditional approaches towards collaborative learning in communities that promote teacher development. To promote the effective professional development of teachers in South Africa, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and the DBE (2011) launched the *Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa 2011-2025* (ISPFTED) policy. The ISPFTED is intended to improve the quality of teacher education and development. This framework puts forward a range of education and development opportunities for teachers to improve the quality of teaching and learning in South African schools. This policy is about how teachers learn in a community of practice, particularly in TLCs (DHET, 2011). The ISPFTED prioritises the establishment of TLCs in all learning areas to reinforce teacher professional development.

While there is evidence from empirical studies on how teachers learn in a community of practice, particularly in TLCs (Al Shammari *et al.*, 2020; Brodie & Borko, 2016; Cereseto, 2015), there is a shortage of studies on how Consumer Studies teachers develop themselves through TLCs. Hence, this study sought to explore Consumer Studies teacher learning through TLCs.

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Recurring curriculum changes plaguing the South African education system have been evident in Consumer Studies. In CAPS for Consumer Studies, the subject's focus has shifted from the needs and wants of the family to the needs and wants of the 21st century (DBE, 2011). As a result, in the Consumer Studies curriculum, “consumer” and “entrepreneurship” are regarded as the predominant principles. These principles are considered crucial in including the curriculum since South Africa is confronted with increased levels of unemployment. Previous research has shown that Consumer Studies as a subject can contribute to developing fundamental entrepreneurial skills and knowledge by engaging learners in entrepreneurial activities in schools (Du Toit, 2021; Ngwenya & Shange, 2019). The Consumer Studies curriculum aims to ensure that learners acquire and apply knowledge and skills in ways that will be useful for their development. However, this can only be possible if Consumer Studies teachers are provided with adequate support and effective professional development programmes.

Continuous professional development in Consumer Studies is crucial to ensure that teachers keep abreast with new research and developments in the subject. While it is mandatory for the teachers of Consumer Studies to engage themselves in various training and workshops that will equip them with better knowledge of the subject matter in realisation of the objectives of including the subject in the school curriculum, research revealed that Consumer Studies teachers were not adequately given necessary professional development strategies that would make them more active in the teaching and learning of the subject (Du Toit, 2021; Du Toit, 2022; Mbhenyane, 2019; Ngwenya & Shange, 2019). There is a lack of access to meaningful teacher development opportunities that can make a difference even though Consumer Studies teachers require regular and effective professional development programmes relevant to the 21st century (Ajani, 2020; Khumalo, 2018). In the context of South Africa, the regular curricula reforms in the Further Education and Training Band (FET) of the schooling system have been addressed by ISPFTED to expand teacher education and development opportunities such as TLC initiatives to improve the quality of teaching and learn in this school phase (DHET & DBE, 2011). This document suggested that Consumer Studies teachers who are constantly confronted with teaching a subject that continuously undergoes several changes in its content would need to be developed. This is to ensure that the quality of their teaching is up to the required standard and provide spaces where teachers can reflect together to facilitate collective and sustainable teacher learning in South African schools during curriculum reforms (Chauraya & Brodie, 2017; Feldman, 2020). Thus, the study sought to explore how Consumer Studies teachers learned in TLCs in one selected district in KwaZulu-Natal.

1.4 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The desire to pursue this study was motivated by my personal experiences as a Consumer Studies teacher and my professional interest in developing teacher learning through TLCs. The need for professional development for teachers of Consumer Studies has been discussed during the marking of the subject at the National Senior Certificate (NSC) marking centre. During the annual marking of NSC examination papers for the subject, the chief examiners stated that professional development training should be made compulsory for Consumer Studies teachers in all South African secondary schools.

Through my first observation, I noticed that Consumer Studies teachers have not attended the professional development programmes regularly, which may cause poor performance levels among learners in the subject. Du Toit *et al.* (2016) argue that project-based learning should be implemented as a strategy for primary teaching and learning in the pre-service teacher training of Consumer Studies teachers in order to develop an appropriate set of skills as part of their higher education qualification.

My second observation was that schools that offered Consumer Studies were located far from each other, making it difficult for teachers to interact and support one another when needed. Therefore, some teachers travelled long distances to a central venue to meet with peers. When we met with teachers, they often raised concerns that the Consumer Studies senior education specialist did not frequently visit their schools for support.

The literature reviewed indicated a dearth of research in Consumer Studies nationally and internationally (Ngwenya & Shange, 2019; Sharma, 2021). Studies on the positive output of TLC programmes have been conducted in the teaching of subjects like Natural Sciences, Mathematics and English and also during the period of curriculum reform (Dogan *et al.*, 2016; Harris *et al.*, 2017; Hord & Tobia, 2015; Tam, 2015). Even though a significant body of literature has broadly highlighted that the social capital of teacher collaboration adds value to teachers' output, it appears that no known study has so far documented Consumer Studies of teacher learning in TLCs. It is in this context that the current study sought to understand how Consumer Studies teachers learned in the TLCs. Thus, this study contributes to knowledge by addressing the gap in the literature in Consumer Studies, particularly on teacher learning through TLCs.

1.5 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to explore how Consumer Studies teachers learned through TLCs in one district in KwaZulu-Natal. The study was limited to Consumer Studies teachers in the King Cetshwayo district.

1.6 OBJECTIVES

The study sought to attain the following objectives:

1. To explore how Consumer Studies teachers learned through TLCs in one district in KwaZulu-Natal.
 - 1.1 To explore the learning platforms (including online learning platforms) Consumer Studies teachers used to learn in TLCs.
 - 1.2 To explore the learning spaces and forms Consumer Studies teachers used to engage in TLCs.
2. To explore the kind of learning that occurred in Consumer Studies TLCs in one district in KwaZulu-Natal.
3. To determine why Consumer Studies teachers learned the way they do through TLCs in one district in KwaZulu-Natal.

1.7 KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study sought to address the following key research questions:

1. How do Consumer Studies teachers learn through TLCs in one district in KwaZulu-Natal?
 - 1.1 What learning platforms (including online) did Consumer Studies teachers use to learn in TLCs?
 - 1.2 Which learning spaces and forms did Consumer Studies teachers use to engage in TLCs?
2. What kind of learning occurred in Consumer Studies TLCs in one district in KwaZulu-Natal?
3. Why did Consumer Studies teachers learn the way they did through TLCs in one district in KwaZulu-Natal?

1.8 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Based on the study's rationale, it became necessary to explore ways in which Consumer Studies teachers engaged in various professional development for effective teaching and mastery of the subject. This assisted me in theorising the Consumer Studies teachers' experiences of learning in TLCs, the reasons behind their experiences, and how they developed professionally to be on the same professional level as their colleagues worldwide. It also allowed them to learn about various personal and professional development strategies. Therefore, the significance of this study lies in the contribution to knowledge about teacher learning in TLCs in the context of Consumer Studies.

The study is significant in that, as a Consumer Studies teacher, the study will also assist me in building strong professional and academic competence while allowing me to advance my knowledge and understanding of the cutting-edge debates on the theory and practice of teacher professional development strategies that teachers engage in within Consumer Studies TLCs. The study will also allow me to engage in and contribute to discussions in TLCs. Therefore, part of the study will be a rigorous reflection of personal experience.

By researching teachers' professional development, specifically in Consumer Studies, the study hopes to contribute to a new body of knowledge. I attempted to theorise the learning of Consumer Studies teachers. I hope this theory will contribute to knowledge on teacher learning in TLCs, particularly in Consumer Studies. It revealed neglected areas for future research with regard to teacher professional development. It also proposed a theory to inform policy regarding professional strategies appropriate to Consumer Studies in particular contexts. Moreover, the study could benefit professional teachers and educational policymakers. Based on this, the study intends to contribute to a new body of knowledge by formulating relevant theories to enhance effective teaching and learning of Consumer Studies through better-informed professional development practices.

In light of the above rationale and the significance of the study, the gap created in knowledge for effective strategies in promoting professional development among teachers in general and Consumer Studies, in particular, will be filled. Furthermore, the research contributed to knowledge through the research outcomes, which invariably and significantly contributed to the existing knowledge of professional development of teachers in general and South Africa in particular.

The study made several recommendations to promote effective professional development for Consumer Studies teachers, which will help the DBE build teacher capacity in the future.

1.9 OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents a synopsis of the reviewed literature, focusing on themes related to the study under investigation.

1.9.1 TLCs

Abundant literature on TLCs, both in South Africa and abroad, has, in general, associated the notion of a learning community of teachers with teacher capacity building and positive learner attainment which eventually promotes school improvement (Bantwini, 2019; Chen & Peng, 2019; Maher & Prescott, 2017; Mansfield & Thompson, 2017). The above scholars emphasise the fact that TLC programmes are premised on building continuing teacher quality for school improvement and therefore, involve practices such as clustering of teachers, teacher collaboration, teacher network, learning circles, cooperative learning just to mention a few. In TLCs, a group of teachers work together collaboratively and critically reflect on their practice to enhance teacher learning for positive learner attainment (Chen & Peng, 2019; Baloch & Brody, 2017; Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2022). The notion of TLCs is premised on effective teacher practice to secure enhancement in learning outcomes and is, therefore, known as teacher-led action (Zhang & Wong, 2018). Learning communities of teachers are a significant instrument for effective implementation of reform in the school curriculum and have become a catalyst in shifting teachers' practice (Chen & Peng, 2019; Chauraya & Brodie, 2017).

1.9.2 Forms of TLCs

Teachers' engagements in the form of TLC initiatives, which involve a reflective, collaborative, and learning-oriented or growth promotion of teachers' practice, occur either in real or virtual time/space (Olsson, 2019).

1.9.2.1 Real-time teachers' engagement

In real-time context, programmes can take the form of physical interaction of teachers, which includes but is not limited to peer observation of teachers during teaching and learning, teachers working on joint activities across classrooms as well as teachers planning as to how effectively to teach in teams, workshops, conferences and clusters to increase learner attainment (Admiraal *et al.*, 2021; Hargreaves, 2019; Khiat, 2015). In the context of the South African secondary

schooling system, these forms of TLC have been noted in ISPFTED, which is premised on the assumption that engaging teachers in workshops, team teaching, clusters and peer observation of teachers in the teaching and learning situation provides the setting and the necessary support for classroom teachers to be actively involved in their developmental trajectory which can be termed as teacher-driven and the promotion of ownership in learning (DBE, 2011). In real-time engagement, teachers can learn through collaboration, teacher participation and involvement, and learning through direct teaching and reflection.

1.9.2.2 Virtual space as a form of TLCs

Another form of TLC occurs in Virtual Space Learning Environments (VLEs). This has been described as extending the classroom through teacher collaboration in VLEs (Hilli, 2019). This form of TLC is interactive, communicative and collaborative in digital learning environments (Hilli, 2019; Vuopala *et al.*, 2016). It relies on the use of computer-based technologies such as videoconferencing and social media as a means of sharing information among teachers to improve teacher performance to secure enhanced learner achievement (Hilli, 2019; Schindler *et al.*, 2017).

However, little is known about how teachers use virtual space to learn in the context of South Africa and, in particular, in Consumer Studies. Thus, I consider it necessary to draw on this body of knowledge to establish how the Consumer Studies teachers learn using this form of teacher learning to collaborate for enhanced knowledge.

1.9.3 The nature of Consumer Studies as a subject

The quest for highly skilled workers in an ever-changing world creates a need for a constantly evolving subject to include global issues and reflect up-to-date information related to consumers, such as changing consumer laws (DBE, 2011). Consumer Studies covers topics which address South African needs. Entrepreneurship and consumerism are integral to implementing the shift from home economics to consumer studies, with its core focus on the consumer.

McCloat and Caraher (2019) indicate that in London, the subject is still labelled as Home Economics, while in South Africa, new terminology was introduced as early as 2004. In the South African curriculum, the subject of Home Economics was replaced with Consumer Studies in 2006 when the NCS was introduced to replace the NATED 550 curriculum. Ngwenya and Shange (2019) maintain that the South African government realised the need to reposition the teaching and learning of Consumer Studies in South African schools. Although the subject name has

changed, the content in the curriculum is the same as that of similar subjects in the United States of America (USA), Ghana, and Australia.

Consumer Studies is one of the vocational subjects offered in schools. It provides opportunities for learners to embrace life and allows them to purchase wisely and at the same time to select and eat good foods which will promote healthy living (Du Toit & Booyse, 2015). The subject provides learners with relevant knowledge and understanding of how consumers make decisions, customer relations, and family finance. Mbhenyane (2019) describes Consumer Studies as a subject designed to develop the learner's skills, knowledge and values. Du Toit (2019) views Consumer Studies as the subject that brings about an attitude change - to show learners that Consumer Studies is not intended only to inform them about food, clothing, domestic issues, housing chores and household equipment. Du Toit and Booyse (2015) identify various learning outcomes of Consumer Studies among learners, including management of the consumer's role, adequate knowledge of consumer choice, responsible use of resources, and production and marketing. Consumer Studies provides various benefits to secondary school learners in South Africa, such as discovering their potential and improving their critical thinking and problem-solving skills. The subject keeps learners abreast of current consumer issues, which include food and nutrition and modification of products in order to suit consumer needs (Goldsmith, 2016; Mbhenyane, 2019).

1.10 OVERVIEW OF THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study adopted the theory of Communities of Practice (CoPs) developed by Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998). This theory suggests that a CoP is formed by people who engage in collective learning in any social activity at any place. The theory explains Consumer Studies teachers' engagement through social interaction in TLCs as they share the same area of interest to enhance their learning and improve learners' outcomes. According to Wenger (1998), learning in social practice consists of four components such as community, practice, meaning and identity. In this study, Consumer Studies teachers are regarded as the "community" when they meet in their learning engagements, their dialogue and sharing of knowledge during their learning communities is "practice", learning through their experiences in teaching is "meaning" and skills teachers acquire during their learning is "identity" such as what Consumer Studies teachers become after attending their TLCs.

1.11 OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This section provides an outline for the research design and methodology. A detailed discussion of the research design and the motivation for the choice of methodology is presented in Chapter Four.

1.11.1 Research paradigm

The study is located within the interpretive paradigm, which focuses on creating meaning and aims to understand the subjective world of human experience (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Mik-Meyer, 2020). Therefore, in this study, I interpreted teachers' responses in TLCs as lived experiences of how they understood and made meaning in their world.

1.11.2 Research approach

This study used a qualitative research approach to explore Consumer Studies teacher learning in TLCs in one district in KwaZulu-Natal. This approach is critical for qualitative researchers to understand how people add up or make sense of reality and the underlying assumptions that drive their behaviour (Frost, 2021).

1.11.3 Research design

This study used an intrinsic case study because of the nature of the research questions, which are very small, exploratory, and not used for building theory or generalising research findings (Harris, 2020). Applying a case study method to this study helps provide a better insight into Consumer Studies teachers through adopting a CoP framework provided by Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998) as a yardstick for teacher learning in TLCs.

1.11.4 Study population and sampling

Crossman (2018) describes the general population as the overall group of potential participants of a qualitative inquiry. A sample is a group of people selected from the population, thus less than the population (Andrade, 2021; Stratton, 2021). Purposive sampling was used to select the knowledgeable and informative participants about Consumer Studies. Teachers were not selected based on their years of experience. This was because I intended to discover how Consumer Studies teachers learned in TLCs in one district in KwaZulu-Natal. Twelve teachers volunteered to take part in the study. Due to commitments, the sample consisted of ten Consumer Studies teachers teaching Grades 10, 11 and 12. There were nine female teachers and one male teacher.

1.11.5 Data generation methods

An advantage of employing the case study methodology is the researcher's ability to utilise various research methods to gather data. A semi-structured interview is the type of interview in which the interviewer needs to ask a certain number of specific questions, which can also pose additional questions (Ahlin, 2019). In this study, semi-structured telephonic interviews were employed to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the learning experiences of Consumer Studies teachers in TLCs while allowing me and the teachers flexibility during the process. During this study, an interview schedule was used to conduct semi-structured telephonic individual interviews for data generation to answer my research questions. I took notes and recorded the entire conversation over the audio-tape recorder. The interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. Follow-up interviews were conducted after the data had been analysed. The follow-up individual interviews were done to explain unclear responses from the participants (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Roberts, 2020).

Focus group interviews consist of about five to fifteen people whose opinions and experiences are requested for the study under investigation (Robinson, 2020). There were two Focus group interviews with five Consumer Studies teachers per group, they were classified as Focus Group 1 and Focus Group 2. Splitting them in half prevented chaos during our meetings since it was easier to work with a smaller group (Romm, 2015). There were eight focus group sessions in total, of which each group had four sessions. Focus group interviews were conducted to elicit Consumer Studies teachers' views on learning in TLCs, and in so doing, allowing the participants to say what they think and to do so with more extraordinary richness and spontaneity. The Focus group's duration ranged between 30 to 60 minutes, and all were recorded and transcribed. Notes were jotted down during the interviews. In this study, the Focus Group allowed the participants to share their thoughts about their collective learning in TLCs.

Reflective journals were utilised to capture Consumer Studies teachers' experiences as they were engaged in various forms of learning in TLCs and to gain a deeper understanding of how they learned. The benefit of using a reflective journal is that it facilitates active learning and reflection on that learning (Howell, 2021; Vicary *et al.*, 2017). Information such as how the Consumer Studies teachers interacted with one another in TLCs provided further insight that aided in interpreting their answers to the study's objectives.

1.11.6 Data analysis

According to Braun *et al.* (2019), thematic analysis is a qualitative analytic method for identifying, analysing and identifying patterns (within) the data. Therefore, inductive and

deductive thematic analysis was applied to analyse how Consumer Studies teachers learned through TLCs. Thematic analysis was appropriate for my study as it is qualitative. In my research, I observed and identified patterns of data. In order to enable me to see such patterns, it was wise to stratify them into themes. To make the analysis more manageable, I transcribed all interviews verbatim. After transcribing and typing interviews, I started to read through data to familiarise myself with it. The second step was to allow the themes to emerge from the data by applying grounded analysis. Reflective journals were assessed to establish recurring codes and themes. A process of open coding was used, followed by clustering of specific themes used to report data findings in Chapters Five and Six.

1.12 TRUSTWORTHINESS AND RELIABILITY

Trustworthiness is using multiple strategies to ensure the accuracy of research findings (Kyngäs *et al.*, 2020). This study ensured data credibility as audio-tape recorders were used for the interviews. My peer teachers, who had PhD qualifications, and my supervisor determined through auditing whether the processes and procedures I conducted were acceptable and reviewed the interview transcripts to ensure conformity and dependability. To confirm transferability, the interview transcripts were read carefully and then transcribed to make meaning. Triangulation was used from interviews and reflective journals to validate data accuracy.

1.13 ETHICAL ISSUES

Ethics is a process, method or way of looking at things while determining what to do and how to approach problems and issues (Bos, 2020; May & Perry, 2022; Taherdoost, 2021). This research involved human beings, so ethics were very important. In order to adhere to the ethical issues, I obtained permission to conduct the research from the University of KwaZulu-Natal. I requested approval from the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education to conduct research in one district. Subsequently, permission was obtained from the school principals where the research was conducted. Lastly, consent forms were given to participants to sign their willingness to participate in this study. They were assured anonymity about the information they supplied and informed that they could withdraw at any study stage without giving reasons.

1.14 LIMITATIONS

This study had several limitations. As it is qualitative, it was only based on ten Consumer Studies teachers in one district. In this regard, the study was limited in terms of sample size. The study used only semi-structured telephonic interviews, WhatsApp-based Focus group interviews and

reflective journals as tools for data collection. Another limitation is that only one district was involved.

Since the data were collected during the COVID-19 pandemic when face-to-face meetings with participants were restricted, I resorted to using a social media platform, namely WhatsApp, to obtain data. As a result, participants experienced network coverage issues in their areas, especially those who taught in rural areas, and some lacked data bundles. Therefore, I attempted to be as quick as possible so that participants would not run out of data bundles. There was also a delay in returning reflective journals because they would be given to me through WhatsApp after completion, so I had to remind the teachers to submit them constantly.

The next section provides an overview of the chapters in this thesis.

1.15 OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTERS

This thesis is organised into eight chapters. The breakdown of each chapter is highlighted below.

Chapter Two starts by providing literature on the national and international perspectives by differentiating TLCs and professional learning communities. The chapter explains the forms of teachers' learning in TLCs, the roles of TLCs in supporting teacher learning, the learning spaces used by teachers in TLCs, factors that necessitate TLC programmes and challenges in promoting TLCs. The chapter concludes with a brief history of Consumer Studies in the South African context.

Chapter Three discusses the theoretical framework for exploring Consumer Studies teacher learning in TLCs. The chapter provides a detailed explanation of CoP and its use in this study.

Chapter Four describes the study methodology and the research methods used in collecting and analysing data. It includes a description of the research paradigm, approach, design, study population, sampling, data generation methods, data analysis approach, the study's trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and the limitations of the research.

Chapters Five and Six present data thematically based on the research questions. Chapter Five discusses learning spaces and forms used by Consumer Studies in TLCs. Chapter Six discusses the kind of learning within the Consumer Studies TLCs.

Chapter Seven discusses the findings as presented in Chapters Five and Six. The chapter explains how the study extends our understanding of existing literature about teacher learning in TLCs by relating it to the theoretical framework.

Chapter Eight presents the summary of the study. The chapter further discusses the synthesis of the study findings based on the three research questions and their contribution to the theory of teacher learning in TLCs. Thereafter, study implications and recommendations for future research in TLCs were made based on the findings. The chapter concluded by demonstrating this study's limitations.

1.16 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter presented a background to the study. Afterwards, the research problem statement was presented, followed by the rationale for undertaking this research study. The purpose and objectives were presented to clarify the intentions for the study. The key research questions that the study aimed to address were stated. Subsequently, the significance of the study, an overview of the literature and a theoretical framework on TLCs were presented. Finally, the research design and methodology were discussed.

The next chapter presents reviewed literature from national and international perspectives on TLCs.

CHAPTER TWO

CONSUMER STUDIES TEACHER LEARNING IN TEACHER LEARNING COMMUNITIES

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter focused on the orientation of the study where various issues relating to the research problem and objectives were presented. The significance of the study was also outlined. This chapter explores the literature on teacher learning, TLCs and Consumer Studies of teacher learning in TLCs. The aim of this chapter is to acquire an understanding of how Consumer Studies teachers learn through TLCs in their schools and communities of practice.

A literature review in research goes beyond the search for information and includes identifying and articulating relationships between the literature and the field of research (Papaioannou *et al.*, 2016). It can broadly be described as a more or less systematic way of collecting and synthesising previous research (Adams *et al.*, 2017; Snyder, 2023). The definition that this study will adopt is Snyder's (2019) view that a literature review is a process that shows the scholarly capacity of the researcher to classify relevant information and provide a structured overview of the existing knowledge on the subject. Reviewing the existing literature was to understand the research and debates pertinent to the research focus. The literature review process was a means to demonstrate conversance with the body of knowledge concerning the critical research questions that the study sought to address.

The literature quality depends on, among other aspects, what literature is included and how it was selected (Hiebl, 2023). The literature used in this study is mainly sourced from journal articles and academic books and e-textbooks, research reports and government publications and policies that have dealt with the topic before (Snyder, 2023). There are different types of literature reviews, such as thematic, chronological, methodological, theoretical, contextual, eclectic, historical and systematic reviews (Hänle *et al.*, 2022; Heilbrunn & Iannone, 2020).

It is worth noting that over the past years, the debate on the continuing development of teachers to secure improvement in learner achievement in education has been primarily centred around a critical phenomenon in education popularly known as the Professional Learning Community (PLC) (Bantwini, 2019; Darling-Hammond, 2017; Fullan, 2015; Tam, 2015). However, this study focuses on how teachers learn in TLCs, which is more of an extension of the scope of PLCs. The section below gives an overview of how PLCs differ from TLCs.

2.2 HOW TLCs DIFFER FROM PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Many countries such as Brazil, USA, Canada, Chile, New Zealand, England, Portugal, Germany, Vietnam and China have encouraged the establishment of TLCs in an attempt to make the actual practice of teachers the focus of teaching processes. In this context, it is noted that the number of professional development experiences which are made possible by participation in different kinds of TLCs increase every year (Carpenter & Munshower, 2020; Dille & Røkenes, 2021; Gore & Rosser, 2022). Teacher education processes that are grounded in initiatives such as lesson study, self-study, and action research, which is a part of practical research, tend to encourage the formation of these spaces (Ho, 2024; Kager, 2023, Li, 2022). Based on this, the characteristics and underlying assumptions of these communities can be discussed. The TLCs have received different terminologies: “communities of practice” (de Carvalho-Filho *et al.*, 2020; Hofer *et al.*, 2021; Leung, 2023), “inquiry communities” (Admiraal *et al.*, 2021; Jiang & Koo, 2020; Khalili, 2020; Wu & Nian, 2021) and “professional teaching community” (Hargreaves, 2021; Ismail *et al.*, 2020; Rahayu *et al.*, 2020; Townley, 2020). If these adjectives are not enough, there is also the polysemous word “community” (Ahmed & Morgan, 2021; Dervin, 2023), which can be used to designate a number of collective, physical spaces (e.g., poor communities) (Mackenzie *et al.*, 2022) or groups (e.g., ethnic or religious groups) (Akkari & Radhouane, 2022; Buchter, 2023). Although, widely used in other fields such as linguistics, philosophy, sociology, and anthropology, the term “community” is relatively new to the traditional literature on teacher education, professional development, and educational change (Korthagen, 2017).

Zhou (2022) describes TLCs at schools as social networks that promote learning. Different terms are used for TLCs by different authors. To mention only a few: Brodie and Borko (2016), Farmer and Childs (2022) refer to them as “discourse of communities”; Lund (2020) and Wilson-Mah (2020) call them “communities of practice”; Guberman *et al.* (2021) refer to them as “professional communities”; Hawk (2020) name them “TLCs”; and Demir (2015) call them “a collaboration of cultures”. Akinyemi (2020) argued that these communities stem from an environment of trust, safety, support and mutual respect. According to Kooy (2015), they are social, spontaneous and voluntary, and development oriented, can extend into joint work and mutual observation, and focus on reflective inquiry for the improvement of teaching practice. Griffith *et al.* (2021) define TLCs as a shorthand term for different relationships that can support change of the individual in the classroom and for the whole school. A TLC is a systematic process in which teachers work together to analyse and improve their classroom practice. The TLC is a key concept in improving teacher performance (Prenger *et al.*, 2021).

Chow (2016) states the term TLCs embodies the concept of teacher learning in a community setting in which teachers come together over time for the purpose of reconsidering their existing beliefs and practices. He adds that TLCs are about gaining new professional knowledge and skills and constructing a reform agenda that enhances professional practice. Usually, TLCs function over relatively extended periods, such as a school year, with a stable membership that includes experienced and beginning teachers (Chow, 2016). In most TLCs, teachers examine school and classroom data, questioning existing assumptions and generating alternative strategies and analysis (Brodie, 2021; Zhang *et al.*, 2022). Some TLCs adopt formal structures for inquiries into teaching, such as learning/ lesson studies, as a kind of teacher action research (Lim & Liang, 2020). Hadar and Brody (2021) argue that collaborative and practice-oriented renewal projects undertaken by TLCs in schools that significantly involve teachers at all levels of planning and action are seen as effective in helping teachers to conceive and attempt alternative pedagogies and develop their dual roles as learners and practitioners.

Regardless of the formats adopted, the common practice among all TLCs features teachers disseminating ideas and engaging in reflective dialogues on beliefs, principles, learning outcomes and teaching practices. It is also believed that teachers who have entered learning communities tend to act more autonomously, displaying a stronger sense of self-efficacy, enthusiasm for collaborative practice and a more significant commitment to changing practice and trying things out (Chow, 2016; Somprach *et al.*, 2017). Most TLCs embrace a change strategy emphasising collaboration, collective empowerment and mutual independence for advancing professional autonomy and improving learner learning. In a nutshell, TLCs focus on teachers' professional learning, which occurs within a cohesive group and generates collective knowledge. The notion of TLCs is premised on effective teacher practice to secure enhancement in learning outcomes and is, therefore, known as teacher-led action (Johnson, 2023). It is, therefore, the extension of the scope of PLCs to a collaborative approach with an attempt to scale up the improvement of schools through lateral capacity building among teachers. On the other hand, the PLC is a key concept in improving performance (Harris & Jones, 2017). In this case, it is not only for teachers. It is for the general performance of workers. In PLCs, strategies for effective teaching are intended to be modelled by school administrators, in collaboration with classroom teachers, to improve specific teaching skills.

A PLC is about the synergy of collaborative action (Deney, 2024; Han, 2023; Hudson, 2023; Maxwell, 2023; Shah & Malik, 2024). The term synergy is derived from the Greek word *synergos*, meaning “working together” (Jaffe, 2023) and describes instances where increased effectiveness and achievement are produced by combined action. More recently, within the South African

school context, PLCs have been presented by the DBE as collaborative learning communities that are fundamentally social and should be established in all schools to involve all stakeholders in improving school teaching and learning (DBE, 2015). In order to consider the role of PLCs in supporting teacher development within the current South African schooling context, Feldman (2020) provides an exposition of practice theory as a framework for discussing the role of PLCs as a teacher development initiative to change or improve teachers' pedagogical practice.

The concept of PLCs in school communities is not new. Over the past decade, PLCs have gained widespread recognition within the international teaching context as a supportive and organising structure for substantive improvement in teaching and learner learning outcomes (e.g., Burns *et al.*, 2019; Feldman, 2020). The distinguishing feature of PLCs is the focus on professional learning (Brodie & Borko, 2016). Professional learning can be described as learning that draws from a knowledge base specific to a particular profession and supports an individual in becoming more confident and competent in their professional endeavours (Darling-Hammond, 2017). In PLCs, learning is fundamentally social, collective, and situated within teachers' daily practice in schools, constituting the education profession (Hairon *et al.*, 2017). Teacher learning and development in PLCs focuses on collective reflective inquiry into becoming better practitioners as well as teachers "being able to talk more substantially about their practice, and justifying their thinking, decisions and actions in relation to their knowledge base" (Brodie & Borko, 2016, p.9). According to Cheah *et al.* (2019), the role of PLCs as joint enterprises in school contexts is therefore aimed at creating network communities that provide ongoing support for teachers in transforming the quality of their pedagogy through systematic enquiry into their current practices. In both the PLCs and the TLCs, there are collective efforts to collaborate, shared vision and collegiality, experiment with new practices, and engage in pedagogical innovations through the exchange of ideas to enhance learning (Barlett, 2022; Farmer, 2024; Harris *et al.*, 2017; Hornsby, 2024; Johnson, 2023; Lund, 2020; Pan, 2023). The distinctive features of TLCs, as opposed to PLCs, are the scale and density of interconnections among a group of teachers, which enables teachers from different schools to exchange ideas and practices and transfer knowledge across school boundaries, which in the end improves teacher practice and learning outcomes, (Wieczorek & Lear, 2018).

TLCs are viewed differently in different countries, such as Taiwan. Taiwanese teachers consider any site-based teacher collaboration, teachers' meetings for pedagogical purposes, or TLCs for off-site workshops (Chuang & Ting, 2021). In TLCs, supportive leadership is one factor that has changed the views and mind-sets of the teachers (Admiraal *et al.*, 2021; Ricci, 2021), collegial trust (Brodie, 2021; Valdivia, 2021), shared practice (Hargreaves, 2021; Khalili, 2020) and

teacher autonomy (Chuang & Ting, 2021). The use of TLCs may result in changes to teachers' abilities to design curriculum or their methods of instruction (Tam, 2015; Voogt *et al.*, 2018). However, research indicates that few teachers accept change (Admiraal *et al.*, 2021). Effective TLCs provide the conditions necessary for the synergy that drives school improvement. Teachers and school leaders are the recipients of the powerful effects of collaborative action as practised in professional learning communities (Brodie, 2021; Engelhardt & Brown, 2023; Fullan & Quinn, 2015; Tayag, 2020). Feldman (2020) discusses the recent DBE initiative that introduces the idea of PLCs "to increase the capacity of the school to achieve sustainable improvement in the learning that takes place in the school" (DBE, 2015, p.5). The section below presents literature on the components of TLCs.

2.3 THE COMPONENTS OF TLCs

This section discusses the components of TLCs, which involve practices such as the CoP, clustering of teachers, teacher networks, learning circles and cooperative learning.

According to Wenger *et al.* (2011, p.12), a network is defined as "the set of relationships, personal interactions, and connections among participants who have a personal reason to connect" whereas community is defined as "the development of a shared identity around a topic or set of challenges" (Wenger *et al.*, 2011, p.12). They further mention that learning within the community focuses on strengthening the subject matter in the field, which is fostered by shared traditions of learning, shared procedures, and a willingness to discuss, acquire, and create ideas and resources jointly. Communities and networks may function on their own, but it is more prevalent to see them grouped. A group of teachers at a similar school, for example, might be considered a community because they share an identity and work together to create shared practices, but they could also be considered a network because they share knowledge and resources (Ghbban, 2021; Townley, 2020). Additionally, teachers at the school might simultaneously be a part of other networks, providing extra information useful for the learners' learning (Macia & Garcia, 2016). Therefore, this study adopted the community of practice by Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998) to examine what Consumer Studies teachers learn in their engagements.

In contrast to teacher networks, clusters tend to describe grouped schools that come together jointly for intentions that are primarily related to administrative tasks or organisational capacity (Abreu *et al.*, 2023; Révai, 2020). Teacher clusters are a relatively new continuous professional development experiment, particularly in South Africa and are thought to be better suited for assisting teachers in changing their teaching methods and understanding of the subject matter (Ajani, 2020, 2021; Mdodana-Zide & Mokhele-Makgalwa, 2021; Philander & Botha, 2021).

According to Smith and Gillespie (2023), learning circles offer teachers exciting possibilities for professional development. It is one of the most effective methods of academic development because it relies primarily on the exchange of information of field experiences and the sharing of best practices among teachers. Furthermore, it allows the combination of ideas, experiences and opinions collectively, as is the case in workshops.

Cooperative learning has been discovered to enhance interaction with others, academic achievement and mental and emotional health (Loh & Ang, 2020; Millis, 2023). Despite having a wide adoption in schools across the globe and a strong research foundation, cooperative learning still has some limitations (Bandonio *et al.*, 2023; Qureshi *et al.*, 2023). There is a dearth of literature on how Consumer Studies teachers learn cooperatively in South Africa. In the next section, I present literature on teacher learning in TLCs.

2.3.1 The concept of teacher learning in TLCs

Révai (2020) shows that teacher knowledge, teacher learning, and professional practice co-exist in educational policy, research, and practice and that these ideas are invoked by different positioned agents to justify very different approaches to improve teaching and learning through communities. Abundant literature on TLCs, both in South Africa and abroad, has in general, associated the notion of TLCs with teacher capacity building and positive learner attainment, which eventually promotes school improvement (Baloche & Brody, 2017; Bantwini, 2019; Chen, 2022; Chen & Peng, 2019; Darling-Hammond, 2017; Eckert *et al.*, 2023; Hargreaves, 2019; Maher & Prescott, 2017; Mansfield & Thompson, 2017; Pan, 2023). These scholars emphasise that TLC programmes are premised on building continuing teacher quality for school improvement.

Chow (2016) states that TLCs formed within subject departments are conceptualised as reform platforms for facilitating school improvement and teacher development. Hanemann (2015), in a working paper commissioned by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), locates this trend within the wider policy agenda of lifelong learning and identifies certain desirable characteristics associated with successful in-service provision, as follows:

- It should incorporate both on- and off-site school dimensions;
- Teachers should have a greater role in setting the agenda and being actively engaged in an experiential process (OECD, 2017, p.29).

In many countries, through training of trainers' courses, teachers have been assisted to work with their peers as facilitators and team leaders (Bodner & Elmas, 2020; Clark & Raker, 2020). This fosters a sense of empowerment and confidence-building, which fosters a sense of pride and mutual loyalty among group members, and collaborative, interactional techniques are preferred over lectures to large groups (Bejrajh, 2022; Miller, 2021). A study conducted internationally (Chow, 2016) recognised that teacher development is often best promoted within the context of school development, with more and more schools being encouraged to engage in collaborative development planning. While this view tends to emphasise the interests of the education system, this need not be to the exclusion of the personal and individual needs of teachers. This contrasts the "top-down" approach of traditional models of in-service education with what is described by the OECD (2019) as a "bottom-across" approach whereby teachers in clusters of schools may collaborate on professional learning and development activities. Indeed, it is acknowledged that conceptions of teaching and teachers are influenced heavily by global agendas. According to Clark and Phelan (2017), teacher autonomy is useless, even unhelpful, if teachers continue to work in isolation, unsupported by ideas and resources.

In TLCs, there is transparency about what teachers must know and be able to do. Teachers should share their mission, vision, values and goals (DuFour *et al.*, 2016; Johnson., 2023; Prenger *et al.*, 2021; Zheng *et al.*, 2021). A TLC is seen as an influence on staff development and an essential strategy for school change and improvement (Admiraal *et al.*, 2021; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015; Miedijensky *et al.*, 2021; Saputra *et al.*, 2024). Teachers participating in TLCs in the USA show changes in their teaching practices (McMaster *et al.*, 2020; Strahan, 2016). Empirical evidence suggests that TLCs affect improving learner achievement (Hargreaves, 2019; Miedijensky *et al.*, 2021; Pan & Cheng, 2023). Scholars around the globe studying teacher practices noted the different forms educational systems use to support teachers' collaboration and the development of TLCs (Cheng & Wu, 2016; Zheng *et al.*, 2019). In Japan "lesson study" is an established TLC practice that began in the early 1900s (Manzanares, 2016). This scholar explains that lesson study consists of teachers' collaboration and systematic inquiry into teaching and learning in the context of peer observation, critique and discussion around specific learners' learning objectives.

To create a TLC culture, teachers must understand how to share ideas about their teaching strategies. Brodie (2021) identifies five characteristics needed to create a culture of TLCs. Firstly, teachers and school leadership need to hold a common goal collectively for learner achievement and work together on strategies and interventions to reach academic goals. Secondly, school leadership and teachers must share the responsibility for improved learner achievement by being

accountable and encouraging staff members to work collaboratively. Thirdly, teachers and school leadership must work together to develop strategies that promote effective teaching and learning. Fourthly, they must exchange ideas and teaching practices and analyse assessment data. Fifthly, team members must share data for analysis and interpretation to plan intervention strategies. Brodie (2021) adds a sixth characteristic: mutual respect and trust between all members must be mutual.

According to Kim *et al.* (2019), TLCs allow adults across the school system to learn and think together about improving their performances which can lead to greater learner achievement. Bantwini (2019) found that in South Africa, clusters as a component of TLC were introduced where subject teachers meet to share their subject knowledge, but it does not seem that there is any noticeable change in their subjects. Unlike in other countries, South African school leaders do not encourage teachers to share educational practices (Botha, 2015). In some countries, this isolation is overcome by the creation of TLCs which challenge teachers to work together with others to improve their own practice and learner achievement (DuFour *et al.*, 2016; Murphy & Masterson, 2022; Pan & Cheng, 2023).

Implementing a TLC requires an understanding of its purpose and how it will benefit school effectiveness (Al Shammari *et al.*, 2020; Botha, 2015). TLCs were introduced in the ISPFTED 2011-2025, designed to enhance teacher professionalism (DBE & DHET, 2011). So far, no empirical evidence exists about the impact of TLCs on teaching and learning. This may be expected because many teachers are still experiencing challenges in providing effective teaching and learning (Bantwini, 2019). That motivates the current study, which researches Consumer Studies teacher learning in TLCs.

Farmer and Childs (2022) argue that professional learning is embedded in the culture of a TLC as staff members learn from one another and attend workshops and other outside development. It is a group of individuals formed to achieve common goals to improve their learners' grade levels for their school (Keung *et al.*, 2020). Teachers must understand how to share ideas about their teaching strategies to create a TLC culture. A TLC helps teachers to use a pedagogy that establishes the relevance of the curriculum, and teachers are engaged in learning activities that respond to their cultures and needs as learners (Kessler & Casal, 2024). In a TLC, teachers work in teams, engaging in a cycle of questions promoting deep team learning. This process in turn leads to higher levels of learner achievement (DuFour *et al.*, 2016). However, a review of related literature points to a significant gap in research about teachers' roles in the support of TLCs (Allen, 2018). Therefore, it would be beneficial if the DBE and colleges would use their influence

to implement the idea of developing TLCs in various schools under their jurisdiction. Hence in this study I explore Consumer Studies teachers' learning through various learning platforms, as discussed above.

In this section, I have reviewed the components of TLCs as a type of system where teachers share the knowledge they need to teach in the classroom. I have drawn on the literature to explain how teachers learn in TLCs, and explored other settings where teachers can also learn. I noticed that the DBE has set up clusters of schools as component of TLCs where teachers from different schools work together in subject groupings, and the ISPFTED (DHET & DBE, 2011) envisions the establishment of TLCs in schools. However, there is paucity in research at present to show how these communities work, and to what extent teachers learn from them, especially given Brodie's (2021) finding that TLCs need a subject knowledge expert. A study of science teachers in poorly resourced schools showed that they did learn from the subject cluster meetings because the Subject Advisor was seen as an expert (Thomas & Songqwaro, 2021). Therefore, in this study I need more evidence to know what kind of teacher learning takes place in these groups of Consumer Studies teachers. The next section discusses literature on forms of TLCs.

2.4 FORMS OF TLCs

This section discusses the two dominant forms of TLCs. Teachers' engagements in the form of TLC initiatives which occur either in real or virtual time/space (Reisenwitz & Fowler, 2021). The first section will discuss face to face teachers' engagement in TLCs.

2.4.1 Teachers' face-to-face engagement in TLCs

In a face-to-face context, renowned scholars in teacher education and development argue that TLC programmes can take the form of physical interaction between teachers. This includes, but is not limited to, peer observation of teachers during teaching and learning, teachers working on joint activities across classrooms, and teachers planning how effectively to teach in teams, workshops, conferences, subject committees, and clusters to increase learner attainment (Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2017; Khiat, 2015; Hargreaves, 2019). According to Tytler (2020), who conducted a study in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), numerous formal professional development activities include face-to-face meetings that are scheduled at specified times.

In the context of South African high schools, these forms of TLCs have been demonstrated in the key educational policy document of ISPFTED. This policy is premised on the assumption that engaging teachers in workshops, team teaching, clusters and peer observation of teachers in the

teaching and learning situation provides the setting and the necessary support for classroom teachers to be actively involved in their own developmental trajectory, which can be termed “teacher-driven”, and “the promotion of ownership in learning” (DHET & DBE, 2011). In real time engagement teachers can learn through collaboration, teacher participation and involvement – learning through direct teaching and reflection.

Various scholars in the field of teacher professional development have emphasised the benefits of teachers gathering face-to-face to exchange ideas, resources, and expertise, which contributes to the improvement of teaching and learning (Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2015; Hargreaves, 2019; Macià & Garcia, 2016; Trust *et al.*, 2016; Tytler *et al.*, 2017, 2020). Trust *et al.* (2016) maintain that teacher collaborative meetings provide opportunities for teachers to exchange resources and ideas, fostering the growth and enhancement of their professional expertise and knowledge. A different view was stated by another scholar, who argued that the importance of face-to-face teacher engagement is that they enable the sharing of practical knowledge (Ansarimoghaddam *et al.*, 2017). In this scenario, it is noted that such communities emerge and are motivated based on different understandings of the concepts of “learn better” and “teach better” (Bryk *et al.*, 2015). The ways in which TLCs organise and design various perspectives of professional development enable teachers to be and live in the profession in various ways.

The views of these scholars differ to that of the previous scholars as they revealed shortfalls for teachers meeting face-to-face. They posit that rural schools face substantial challenges in providing effective professional development opportunities for teachers due to geographic isolation and physical distance. Consequently, teachers are sometimes required to travel to locations that are not in close proximity to their schools (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; Glover *et al.*, 2016; Lavalley, 2018).

The next section presents literature on teachers’ virtual engagement in TLCs.

2.4.2 Teachers’ virtual engagement in TLCs

Another form of TLC occurs in virtual learning environments (VLEs). This is what has been described as extending the classroom situation through teacher collaboration in VLEs (Hilli, 2019). This form of TLC has also been seen as interactive, communicative and collaborative in digital learning environments (Vlachopoulos & Makri, 2021; Hilli, 2020). It relies on the use of computer-based technologies such as the use of videoconferencing, and social media as a means of sharing information among teachers to improve teacher performance with the aim to enhance learner achievement (Chinagolum *et al.*, 2022; Razmak *et al.*, 2021; Hilli, 2020). Various scholars posit that technology fosters connection between teachers (Carpenter & Krukta, 2015; Kendall,

2019; Lee & Hwang, 2022; Stone, 2019; Van den Berg & Mudau, 2022). According to Dhawan (2020), during online teachers' learning numerous technological gadgets like smartphones, laptops and tablets together with network connectivity are used; the process of learning can be achieved in both synchronous and asynchronous environments.

Due to the COVID-19 global outbreak, the governments made online learning mandatory for all teachers. As a result of the rise of COVID-19 cases, physical meetings were put on hold (Bahar *et al.*, 2022; Carrillo & Flores, 2020; Noor *et al.*, 2020; UNESCO, 2020). The Ministry of Education and Federal Training in Pakistan identified technologically driven education interventions as a way to support teachers' learning through television, radio, and online tools like Zoom, Google Classroom, and Microsoft Teams that can be accessed through computers linked to the internet as well as through smartphones (Tahira *et al.*, 2020).

According to Jena (2020), a study conducted in India, teachers can learn while remaining at home and maintaining social distance. He also adds that virtual learning allows for flexible scheduling for teachers; furthermore, recordings of online meetings are uploaded for teachers to use as a point of reference after the meetings. Although the COVID-19 pandemic caused confusion and stress for many people, it also gave teachers a better understanding of the tools that are available online and the need to step outside of what they consider comfortable, giving teachers the knowledge and skills they will need in future (D'Mello, 2021). Online learning is flexible because it gives teachers access to materials at their convenience and from any location (Cakrawati, 2017; Sadeghi & Ashegh Navaie, 2021; Sujarwo *et al.*, 2020). Kaden (2020) notes that online learning is cheaper as there are no costs for travelling.

In addition to the beneficial effects of online learning, difficulties were encountered. Poor access to internet connection and not being able to access teaching materials and learning resources are limitations discovered (Agung *et al.*, 2020). According to Lassoued *et al.* (2020), one of the biggest obstacles in introducing online learning is the lack of internet access in rural areas. Online learning allows teachers to easily access and disseminate materials, through direct upload in cloud storage and make distribution through any type of social network (informal as well as formal) (Kumar & Sharma, 2021). The next section presents literature on social networks used in TLCs.

2.4.2.1 Using social networks as educational platforms

Educational institutions have seen extensive use of such web-based platforms. Due to the educational advantages that these social media platforms provide to teachers, numerous studies have demonstrated that they can be used as online communities for e-learning (Faizi & Rudneva, 2021). The primary benefit of social networking in learning is that it has the ability to improve

teacher communication and interaction (Ansari & Khan, 2020; Kumar & Nanda, 2020). These scholars go further by mentioning that the outcome for teachers' collaboration on meetings yields great result for achieving a common goal. In Nigeria 243 Information and Communication Technology (ICT) teachers utilised social media platforms for virtual meetings especially during the COVID-19 pandemic (Ajamu *et al.*, 2024). In India, social media channels, such as WhatsApp and Facebook groups, were used for teachers learning during the pandemic (Al-Bashabsheh & Pradhan, 2022). Papademetriou *et al.* (2022) conducted a study in Greece which suggests that Information Technology teachers in Greece have embraced the use of social media as a means to learn from their peers. This adoption of social media platforms has been found to boost the teaching and learning of the subject, hence motivating the teachers to further their own learning. Abundant literature suggests that technology plays a pivotal role as it facilitates communication and collaboration among teachers (Carpenter & Krukta, 2015; Davis, 2015; Kendall, 2019; Stone, 2019; Van den Berg & Mudau, 2022).

Users of these platforms are able to upload audio, video, images, and text documents in addition to sending messages and leaving comments on these platforms (Zhao, 2023). Instead of working independently, teachers of the learning communities will have access to a single virtual space where they can work together, exchange knowledge, and discuss how to better understand the learning materials (Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2021). Social networks can act as a digital library of useful teaching and learning support materials in addition to improving interaction, cooperation and teachers' involvement in learning communities (Gurjar, 2020). In reality, because any user can now create, upload and share content on the internet (Farsi, 2021), the amount of learning and teaching resources available on social networks on any given subject matter is enormous (Manca, 2020). According to Sobaih *et al.* (2022), using social networks in TLCs has several benefits, including improved academic performance, community building, maintaining trust, job satisfaction and enhancing teachers' learning experiences. Although social networks in education provide opportunities for teachers to meet online, some teachers are still reluctant to adopt these online communities (Aduba & Mayowa-Adebara, 2022). In South Africa, the most popular online platforms used for learning are WhatsApp, Facebook and Microsoft Teams (Joaquim *et al.*, 2023; Msekelwa, 2023; Murire & Gavaza, 2023; Van den Berg & Mudau, 2022). Hence, this study reveals literature on WhatsApp, Facebook and Microsoft Teams.

The section below, I present literature on WhatsApp platforms used widely by teachers.

2.4.2.1.1 WhatsApp platform

During the COVID-19 lockdown across the globe, WhatsApp messages are the most popular mode of communication (Kapasias *et al.*, 2020; Pandey *et al.*, 2020). According to Kaufmann *et al.* (2021), WhatsApp is a smartphone software designed for instant messaging. It allows you to chat with multiple people at once and send messages both individually and in group form (Cronje & Van Zyl, 2022; Dahdal, 2020; Baishya & Maheshwari, 2020; Udenze & Oshionebo, 2020). Ajani (2021) argues that teachers using WhatsApp have equal rights such as the ability to form new groups and add or remove teacher participants. Teachers suggest using WhatsApp as a learning tool since they are aware of the lack of knowledge surrounding other online learning platforms (Ajani & Khoalenyane, 2023). Maru *et al.* (2022) explain that WhatsApp allows immediate form texting or communication together with simple information and media content (such as voice, video, and picture) sharing.

According to Bülow (2022), WhatsApp saves time and resources because it enhances online and mobile learning experiences for teachers. In addition, he adds that WhatsApp enables teachers to meet whenever they desire as long as there is an internet signal in their areas. In a study conducted by Thaba-Nkadimene (2020), he notes that WhatsApp learning promotes learning regardless of location, assists in reaching communities with limited physical resources and provides teachers with a unique learning experience. Ali *et al.* (2023) state that WhatsApp offers a range of learning methods and approaches across various settings and social interactions. This is also confirmed by Mbolekwa (2021) who opines that WhatsApp can foster peer-to-peer relationships.

Dahdal (2020) asserts that WhatsApp provides a platform where teachers' discussions increase subject matter knowledge, improve their problem-solving skills, and motivate teachers to be actively engaged. Macià and García (2016) note that teachers meet in WhatsApp for the purpose of professional development. Several studies conducted in the United Kingdom, Finland, China, and Australia have shown the effectiveness of various technologies, including video conferencing, Twitter-based professional learning, and the usage of WeChat and WhatsApp in facilitating the exchange of pedagogic information among teachers (Hilli, 2020; Maher & Prescott, 2017; Qi & Wang, 2018).

WhatsApp networks are addressed in the context of teacher learning on the basis of CoPs (Ajani, 2021). He further mentions that there are three main characteristics of communities of practice. These are the terms: field, community and practice. The field contributes to sharing while also having an identity. In the community of practice, there is a common and clearly defined field. The focus of the community of practice is on the shared resources and experiences that originate from the participants (Wenger, 1998 & Wenger *et al.*, 2002). In a study conducted by Cronje and

Van Zyl (2022), they discovered that WhatsApp is an appropriate communication tool for maintaining CoPs among teachers. According to Alubthane and ALYoussef (2021), incorporating WhatsApp into novice teachers' learning may provide a number of benefits. The next section presents Facebook as a learning platform used by teachers.

2.4.2.1.2 Facebook platform

Facebook is used to stay in touch with loved ones and friends, meet new people, exchange ideas with people who share the same interests, and most importantly to deepen knowledge and understanding of a variety of topics to enhance learning (Nelimarkka *et al.*, 2021; Shraim & Crompton, 2020). Bett and Makewa (2020) note that Facebook is an ideal platform to enhance teachers' professional development. Manca (2020) opined a different view as he states that there is not much research supporting the value of Facebook as a learning environment. For future teachers, Facebook could serve as a platform for them to gain initial experience developing and carrying out online learning activities that are compatible with current teaching methodologies (Ghounane, 2020).

According to Woodford *et al.* (2024), by means of teacher-specific Facebook pages, groups can be created and joined by teachers from all over the world. These Facebook pages are online learning communities that allow for extensive peer to peer communication, interaction and support (Peeters & Pretorius, 2020). Giannikas (2020) discovered that a Facebook group is the most preferred learning platform and is valued for its significant contribution to teachers' learning experience. He further mentioned that a Facebook group was perceived as a safe environment that promoted social learning and emphasised participation and active contributions among teachers. According to Bett and Makewa (2020), teachers' interactions in Facebook groups focuses on educational issues in Kenya. A study conducted in Sweden by Lundin *et al.* (2018) argue that teachers utilised Facebook groups to exchange teaching resources, as well as provide and receive emotional and professional support. Facebook is viewed as a platform of learning by teachers (Todorovic *et al.*, 2021), and it can be utilised for quicker distribution and exchanging of learning materials and enhances cooperative learning among teachers. According to Luo *et al.* (2020), there is a challenge related to sustaining participation and engagement, as well as effectively navigating Facebook, particularly for novice social media users among teachers. The next section presents another platform teachers use namely video conferencing.

2.4.3 Video conferencing in TLCs

The COVID-19 pandemic made the education sector re-examine the use of MS Teams, Zoom and virtual learning as a legitimate means of teacher learning. Studies have been carried out on the effectiveness of virtual space as a ground for learners in schools but there is paucity of literature in South Africa on its use as TLCs.

According to Themelis and Sime (2020), video conferencing may assist communication with teachers from everywhere, which can help with online learning. Video conference conversations may be formal or informal (Carraro & Trinder, 2021; Maher, 2020). Through the use of video conferencing, teachers feel a sense of community and communicate effectively with their peers (Pratama *et al.*, 2020). In the next section, I present literature on MS Teams platform utilised by teachers.

2.4.3.1 Microsoft (MS) Teams platform

According to Sobaih *et al.* (2022), MS Teams is a collaborative platform that is integrated with Microsoft Office 365. MS Teams is a teamwork application that displays the most recently interactive group content to ensure that individuals are always up to date with the organisation's operations. Microsoft declared Teams at a conference in New York and introduced the service worldwide on 14 March 2017 (Yen & Nhi, 2021). They added that MS Teams incorporates exceptional features which can make it one of the most efficient online instructional tools for teachers.

The benefits of MS Teams include user-friendliness, an interesting display, high-definition (HD) video display, and the capacity to accommodate 100 or 250 participants (Rini & Sawitri, 2021). MS Teams video conference is one of the alternatives to online communication, as it encourages negotiation and interaction among teachers (Martin, 2021). Ibrahim and Hashim (2021) argue that the use of MS Teams aided teachers in gaining confidence and enhanced their communication skills, as well as expanded their subject knowledge. During lockdown, teachers shared learning materials by uploading Power Point presentations, Word and PDF files in their TLCs (Pane & Siregar, 2023). MS Teams increases teachers' motivation, facilitating easy interaction with peers and providing the highest level of support for a proper learning environment for teachers (Sobaih *et al.*, 2022).

According to Yen and Nhi (2021), along with benefits of using MS Teams for online instruction there are some unexpected drawbacks. First, there is the issue with the internet transmission that occasionally affects teachers. Some teachers have trouble logging in, their access is disrupted or

the audio and visual quality is poor. Secondly, teachers must put in a lot of work in preparation. Sobaih *et al.* (2022), argue that there is a barrier in using MS Teams, which includes a lack of an explanation about how to use this platform, and the need for a stable internet network. They add that in Egypt, teachers face issues of insufficient internet access, image display not visible and unclear voices. According to Suleri and Cavagnaro (2016), if teachers have a limited knowledge of MS Teams, it can lead to unwillingness to interact with others through MS Teams.

The next section discusses various spaces and various forms of engagements in TLCs.

2.5 LEARNING SPACES AND VARIOUS FORMS OF ENGAGEMENTS IN TLCs

2.5.1 Learning spaces and forms used by teachers in TLCs within the school

This section discusses learning spaces within the schools regarding departmental meetings which are organised by the departmental head followed by master teachers and teachers' peer observation.

2.5.1.1 Departmental meetings

Literature from studies in the United Kingdom, Singapore and USA define departmental meetings as the team gathering when members engage in discussions regarding the school's vision and mission, recent developments, obstacles, and the collective actions required to enhance teaching and learning within the school (Admiraal *et al.*, 2021; Doten-Snitker *et al.*, 2021; Nguyen & Ng, 2020). In South Africa, the DBE (2011) posits that departmental heads need to play an important role in teachers' development. Departmental heads can help or make it difficult for their schools to achieve more and be successful (Hudson *et al.*, 2020). According to So-Oabeb (2023), who conducted a study in Namibia, departmental heads must be highly skilled in different competencies so that they can effectively lead their departments towards the achievement of educational goals by setting up TLCs in their schools. A similar notion is expressed by Ruto (2023), who states that departmental heads in Kenya are considered to possess expertise in their subjects and have the ability to cultivate the skills of others.

Studies in Turkey, Hong Kong, South Korea, United Arab Emirates and USA (Gümüş *et al.*, 2024; Gümüş & Bellibaş, 2020; Kilag & Sasan, 2023) indicate that a departmental head's leadership has a positive effect on professional relationships, school and professional development. Other scholars suggest that a departmental head as an organiser for departmental meetings fosters personal and collective learning by empowering teachers to actively engage and take responsibility for pedagogical transformation. Literature in United Kingdom and USA opine

that departmental heads facilitate the establishment of a TLC (Brennan & King, 2022; Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2017). A study conducted in Portugal posits that within the departmental meetings the departmental heads are persuaded to learn rather than their teachers, and can be supportive by dialoguing with TLC about goals, inspecting teachers' action plans, reporting back and giving specific direction, and showcasing the school's accomplishments (Lacerda, 2022).

The benefits of teachers gathering in departmental meetings, exchanging ideas, resources, and experience to enhance teaching and learning in their respective subjects, have been emphasised by numerous scholars in the field of teacher professional development in China, United Kingdom, Indonesia and Taiwan (Aslam *et al.*, 2020; Lee *et al.*, 2023; Chai *et al.*, 2020; Demir, 2022; Johnston *et al.*, 2020). A study conducted in Australia by Kelly *et al.* (2019) revealed that teachers frequently convened within their respective departments to improve their understanding of the subject matter and improve their pedagogical methods for effectively imparting this knowledge to learners. A scholar in the Philippines affirms that during the departmental meetings, the departmental head stressed the importance of utilising videos for teaching and learning (Setiawan *et al.*, 2022). A study conducted in Kuwait highlighted the significance of teachers' exposure to instructional skills and subject-specific knowledge during departmental meetings. The aforementioned exposure has been determined to have a positive impact on improving the quality of education within schools in Saudi Arabia (Alsaleh, 2021, 2023).

The next section reviews literature on master teachers.

2.5.1.2 Master teachers

Almost all scholars stress the importance of master teachers in providing guidance and acting as a mentor. A study conducted in Sweden stress the importance of establishing a collaborative network for providing support to the novice teachers within the school (Karlberg & Bezzina, 2022). Shanyengana (2023) states that in Namibia, the primary duty of a master teacher is acting as a mentor to assist novice teachers in developing a profound and significant understanding of teaching. The similar view is conveyed by other scholars in Israel, Netherlands and the USA who suggest that master teachers play a crucial role in helping novice teachers examine different aspects of teaching and provide them with the necessary materials and resources to properly teach (Boice *et al.*, 2021; Colognesi *et al.*, 2020; Hite & Milbourne, 2022). Abundant literature from USA, Singapore, Zimbabwe and China, posit that master teachers frequently act as mentors to facilitate the professional growth of their peers, aiming to improve effectiveness in teaching (Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2017; Mpofu & Chimhenga, 2016; Smith & Gillespie, 2023; Zhang *et al.*, 2021). In Germany, master teachers equipped novice teachers with classroom management styles for the effective functioning of a classroom (Stahnke & Blömeke, 2021).

According to Evert and Stein (2022) who conducted a study in the USA, when teachers actively participate in collaborative efforts with like-minded individuals who have common aims and interests, it fosters the mutual growth of staff members' specialised knowledge and skills. This creates a nurturing environment that facilitates the provision of emotional support and help among colleagues (Patton & Parker, 2017). In the next section, I review literature on peer observation.

2.5.1.3 Peer observation

According to Breiman (2019), peer observation is most successful when teachers possess similar disciplinary knowledge and when it occurs between experienced teachers and less experienced colleagues. The benefits of teachers observing each other's practice have been emphasised by most scholars in Netherlands, Sweden, China, Japan, Singapore and Korea (Admiraal *et al.*, 2021; Bergmark, 2023; Haiyan & Allan, 2021; Kim *et al.*, 2020). According to Alsaleh (2020), in Saudi Arabia teachers can acquire new strategies and methods, as well as develop innovative approaches to challenges or problems, by engaging in discussions with their colleagues after observing each other. This notion is consistent with a study conducted in Iran by Pazhoman and Sarkhosh (2019), who argue that the purpose of peer observation is to facilitate the exchange of teaching methods and enhance one's understanding of how their teaching practices influence outcomes, with the goal of promoting improvement. In the USA, engaging in peer observation as a means of professional development permits teachers to utilise the resources within their setting to enhance teaching and learning (Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2024). Brookfield (2017) states that it is important that teachers observe good practice, produce their own teaching activities, and then allow other colleagues or experts to observe and critique their productions.

The following section presents literature on teacher learning activities that happen outside the school.

2.5.2 Learning spaces and forms used by teachers for learning in TLCs outside the school

Teachers engaging with others outside their schools establishes partnerships, and networking which are seen as essential in the development and promotion of TLCs (Harris *et al.*, 2017; McIntyre & Hobson, 2016). Literature on professional development activities which happened outside the school context is reviewed below on developmental workshops.

2.5.2.1 Developmental workshops

According to Crane *et al.* (2017), the main approach to teacher learning has been to use formal workshops or courses, generally underpinned by a cognitive perspective of learning. The

understanding is that teachers would unproblematically transfer their workshop learning to their classroom practice (Diamond *et al.*, 2021). Literature from various scholars show that the more effective professional development interventions are those that are learnt using direct modelling or video footage (Gaudin & Chaliès 2015; Harris *et al.*, 2015; Hennessy, *et al.*, 2022; Kennedy, 2016). Literature stresses the importance of developmental workshops for teachers. Ajani (2020) suggests that the attendance of teachers in professional development workshops should aim to empower teachers, and therefore increase their knowledge of their work. While Alsubaie (2016) asserts that teachers need guidance in many different areas as they attempt to implement a constantly changing curriculum and other policies. It is, however, an adverse situation when teachers attend a once-off workshop and hope that they have gained in terms of their professional development. Workshops give teachers the opportunity to practise these new processes with their peers under supportive supervision (Darling-Hammond, 2017).

The well-known South African professional development approach in the form of teacher workshops provided by the districts has been receiving much criticism from both teachers and various other stakeholders (Bantwini, 2019; Helmbold, 2021; Mpahla *et al.*, 2021) for not meeting teachers' needs. These kinds of meaningful learning opportunities are labour intensive, and thus expensive, and also require learning and support over a sustained period of time. However, in the last two decades there have been growing critiques of once-off workshops for teachers (Ngqondi & Mauwa, 2019), mostly because the kind of transfer expected seldom takes place.

At a time of educational reform, once-off workshops which focus on a particular new policy tend to dominate professional development. Black *et al.* (2020) suggest that this is happening in the USA with the No Child Left Behind policy, and it has been true in South Africa also. Teachers are often offered “one size fits all” workshops where they are told how to implement the new policy and follow the official requirements, rather than engaging in more conceptual issues such as the philosophies of pedagogy and knowledge that underpin the new curriculum (Bantwini, 2019; White *et al.*, 2015). This is not to say that formal professional development initiatives like workshops or university courses cannot provide meaningful learning opportunities for teachers. Teachers' collaboration is essential for achieving success in schools and districts (Bantwini & Moorosi, 2018).

Professional learning opportunities delivered from top to bottom, lectured by subject experts and the knowledgeable, emphasise prescribed curriculum packages and support reproduction of work, promoting a “culture of compliance” or “culture of conformity”, but not a “culture of professionalism” (Ho, 2024). Learning which occurs on this type of platform is considered as

transmissive. A study conducted in South Africa by Sithole (2020) suggests that teachers might enhance their learning by collaborating with each other in workshops, where they can discuss CAPS interpretation and instructional materials.

Below, I review literature on assessment workshops.

2.5.2.1.1 Assessment workshops

Teacher assessment is defined as teachers' 'basic understanding of educational assessment and related skills to apply such knowledge to various measures of learner achievement' (Xu & Brown, 2016, p.149). Scholars have been developing comprehensive frameworks for understanding assessment of teachers. These frameworks aim to establish a clear plan for professional development (Lian & Yew, 2016; Xu & Brown, 2016). Studies conducted in Malaysia posit that assessment workshops provides teachers with a comprehensive understanding of the learning goals they need to test, the procedures for conducting assessments, the purposes behind their assessments, and how to effectively utilise the data obtained from assessments for decision making (Khadijeh & Amir, 2015; Vahid & Nasree, 2019). The scholars in Portugal, Turkey, USA and China concur that teacher learning is crucial in providing teachers with a profound understanding of assessment (Monteiro *et al.*, 2021; Sancar *et al.*, 2021; Suchyadi *et al.*, 2020; Uy *et al.*, 2023; Zhang *et al.*, 2021).

Literature in China and India argues that the shortfalls of teachers' assessment emerge from studies that neglected to train teachers adequately for their significant role in assessment (Chan & Luo, 2020; Joshi *et al.*, 2021). While a study conducted in Ghana argues that the primary problem that hinders the success of conducting school-based assessment (SBA) is the teachers' incapacity to choose suitable assessment methods and design appropriate assessment tasks (Sewornoo, 2016). In order to ensure a high level of assessment validity, the process of choosing suitable assessment techniques and creating assessment tasks necessitates for teacher learning in the form of assessment workshops (Lian & Yew, 2020). Hussein (2021) posits that teachers cooperate when they decide to either move forward with a task or seek further explanation and discussion of concepts and skills. They also collaborate when they choose from learning tasks that vary in levels of complexity. Therefore, it is necessary to evaluate the combination of knowledge and abilities in assessment thoroughly in order to clearly pinpoint the gaps and challenges encountered by teachers.

The next section reviews literature on content workshops.

2.5.2.1.2 Content workshops

Scholars lend different meanings to content knowledge. According to Kim and Ko (2020), content knowledge is crucial in enhancing pedagogical content knowledge (PCK). Van Driel (2021) defines content knowledge as the requisite knowledge to execute a specific task which encompasses the understanding of methodologies. Hudson (2023) asserts that content-based workshops offer several benefits, including developing a positive mindset among teachers and the enhancement of their ability to handle challenging subjects effectively.

Some scholars argue that teachers learn most effectively by active participation and engagement. This includes participating in conversations, exchanging ideas, discovering new teaching practices, and interacting with other teachers (Cereseto, 2015; Khenan, 2019). Darling-Hammond *et al.* (2017) maintain that teachers derive benefits from participating in content-based workshops, which involve engaging with other teachers, acquiring new skills and knowledge, and collaboratively addressing challenges. Other studies indicate that teachers who have insufficient understanding in the subject matter are not adequately prepared to explain topics in a manner that is understandable to learners (Kennedy *et al.*, 2023; Molise, 2020; Stephenson, 2018; Tachie, 2020). This view is consistent with Sekao and Engelbrecht (2022) who argue that teachers who have little content expertise and are uncertain about the organisation of their subject curriculum tend to teach it in a disorganised manner, focusing on content that is not related. Therefore, TLCs are established when teachers participate in collective learning within a shared domain during content-based workshops (Farnsworth *et al.*, 2016). According to Olufolarin and Abolore (2023), teachers need to regularly update and familiarise themselves with the content knowledge that is relevant to the specific topic and the level of the learners they are teaching.

Moderation of school-based assessment is reviewed in the next section.

2.5.3 Moderation of SBA

According to Adie *et al.* (2021) and Didion *et al.* (2020), teachers come together for social moderation to talk about how well learners' work is done and to decide on the standard that will be given. Scholars mention that moderation is used to guarantee the reliability and consistency of marking assessments and they further define moderation as an act of socialisation whereby teachers review their judgements based on the sample of portfolio of work (Bellibaş *et al.*, 2021; Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2020). Teachers allow their peers to observe their practice and react to criticism about their decision making. Although a corresponding rubric makes marking decisions simpler and transparent to learners, there is still room for different interpretations of the required standards among marking staff (Ajjawi *et al.*, 2021). When teachers critically evaluate how well

they comprehend the standard and formulate objectives to enhance their upcoming teaching and evaluation practices, this is a form of professional learning (Adie *et al.*, 2017). In moderations, when teachers analyse learners' work and data together, they develop a common understanding of common misconceptions, what teaching approaches best work and what quality work is (Wyatt-Smith, *et al.*, 2024). The same sentiments are shared by scholars who conducted research in Australia as they posit that teachers participate in moderation to ensure that there is consistency of their judgements of learners' achievement (Brandenburg *et al.*, 2023; Stacey *et al.*, 2020). Trust *et al.* (2016) assert that during the moderation process, teachers share their expectations and understandings of standards by interpreting and applying agreed standards and assessment criteria when marking.

Wyatt-Smith and Adie (2021) organise the purpose of moderation into two categories. The first of these categories focuses on the objective of achieving consistency in the application of the standards and associated criteria in the evaluation of learners' work, as well as the comparability of the conclusions drawn. Comparability is the concept used to describe how consistent, with one another, and with the achievement standards, the judgements are. The second category includes attaining quality assurance to enhance the teachers' assessments and pedagogy for better learning. This fosters credibility with the excellence of moderation practices and results. There are notable differences in moderation processes as confirmed by Li *et al.* (2022). This is because there is no common interpretation, comprehension or categorisation of assessment criteria standards. Moderation as a social process is associated with communities of professional practice. Communities of practice are described as having a "joint enterprise," "mutuality," and a "shared enterprise" (Wenger, 2000, p. 229).

The next section is on subject committees.

2.5.4 Subject committees

Literature affirms that subject committee meetings involve collaborative efforts among teachers from different schools or those who teach the same grade or discipline (Hargreaves, 2019; Ronfeldt *et al.*, 2015; Vangrieken *et al.*, 2015). Scholars suggest that the subject committee is crucial for assessing and enhancing teaching and learning (Shankar & Dakubo, 2018). In a study conducted in India by Shrivastava and Shrivastava (2020), the subject committee is essential in the design, execution, and assessment of any teaching programme. They also add that members of the subject committee should conduct a 'curriculum mapping' which includes evaluating what is taught, how it is taught, when it is taught and what assessment methods are used to determine the extent of teacher learning. The term used in Turkey for subject committee meetings is "Branch

Teachers Committee Meeting” (BTCM) which consists of teachers teaching the same subject as well as other educational staff (Canbolat, 2020). In Turkey, teacher committees are the places that teachers of the same branch convene at specific times to organise education-training activities and make suggestions about the work they will do together throughout the year (Tosun, 2021).

Within the same committee, colleagues working together may enhance not only educational effectiveness and learners’ achievement but also job fulfilment for teachers and devotion to work (Toropova *et al.*, 2021). In South Africa, the district effectively supports teacher learning by implementing a policy that designates highly qualified and knowledgeable teachers and Subject Advisors to train new teachers in the profession. This is done through subject committee meetings (DBE, 2015; DHET & DBE, 2011). Furthermore, engaging in collaborative learning during subject committee meetings offers teachers opportunities for professional advancement and improvement in teaching practices (Bantwini, 2019; Tam, 2015). In another study, Tarnanen *et al.* (2021) mention that a recommendation for enhancing the strength of the subject committee involves implementing a systematic ongoing professional development through the schools’ partnerships which aim to support and collaborate with one another in addressing challenges during face-to-face encounters. A barrier to continuous teacher development is the absence of consistent subject meeting schedules (Karpen, 2015).

The following section presents literature on conferences.

2.5.5 Conferences

Many scholars worldwide argue that conferences provide teachers with new opportunities to improve their professional development. This is achieved by promoting growth and learning through the support of a diverse network of individuals and resources, facilitated by internet connections that go beyond traditional face-to-face interactions (Carpenter & Krutka, 2015; Carpenter & Linton, 2016; Trust *et al.*, 2016). According to Raby and Madden (2021), academic conferences are typically seen as offering social and informal learning opportunities. Barahona (2018) agrees that conferences promote knowledge sharing and reflection on own beliefs and perspectives on teaching.

The practice of “academic citizenship” includes attending conferences (Davids, 2023). Yoon *et al.* (2020), notes that many academic, scientific and professional conferences do not appear to provide sufficient opportunities for participants to participate fully in collaborative learning through discussion, exchange, and critical reflection. Technologies have been used in hybrid formats to improve traditional conference formats since 2008 (Roos *et al.*, 2020). According to

Penuel *et al.* (2020) effective conference participation can create exciting new possibilities for research capacity and partnerships with teachers. Online formats, which allow for more remote collaboration and almost no travel expenses, can be more effective than the physical (Adipat, 2021). The benefit for the online conference is that you are able to rewind and pause the recorded talks. So these inputs can become a form of asynchronous e-learning that attendees can self-manage from afar using a conference platform tool (Rigo & Mikuš, 2021). According to Ying *et al.* (2021), some conferences try to build social networks that will keep participants connected after the conference. The goal of the majority of conferences is to some degree to equip attendees with information they can apply to their everyday work (Lal *et al.*, 2023).

The next section presents literature on teachers' participation and involvement in TLCs.

2.6 THE ROLES OF TLCs IN SUPPORTING TEACHER LEARNING

TLCs serve as a means to enable teachers' continuing development. In TLCs a group of teachers work together to collaboratively and critically reflect on their own practice with the view of enhancing teacher learning for positive learner attainment (Baloche & Brody, 2017; Chen & Peng, 2019; Darling-Hammond, 2017; Hargreaves 2019). The notion of TLCs is premised on effective teacher practice to enhance learning outcomes, and is therefore known as teacher-led action (Zhang *et al.* 2018). Learning communities of teachers are seen as major instruments for effective implementation of reform in school curricula, and have become catalysts in shifting teachers' practice (Chauraya & Brodie, 2017; Chen & Peng, 2019; Hargreaves, 2019).

Abdus Salam (2018) believes that to accommodate specific needs, facilitators adopt diverse roles to support the TLCs in its development; from its early emphasis on coordinating the work (e.g., through communication and keeping focus) and supporting community building (e.g., through developing trust and nurturing collaboration) to promoting teacher learning (e.g., continuous feedback and opportunities for reflection) at later stages. The main challenges associated with these roles were time, avoiding the image of being the expert, and keeping a critical stance whilst building a close relationship with the members of the TLCs.

The next section discusses how TLCs enhances continuing professional development of teachers.

2.6.1 Enhancement of continuing professional development of teachers

A systematic approach to professional inquiry, linked with effective continuing professional development has been shown in much of the research literature to be effective in inculcating sustainable change (Ahmad *et al.*, 2023; Dhakal *et al.*, 2024; Namaganda, 2019; Ragupathi, 2022). Researchers have long recognised that teacher professional development is essential to

changing classroom practice, improving schools, and enhancing pupils' learning outcomes (Adolfsson & Håkansson, 2019). Professional learning often takes place in formal settings, such as professional development programmes, teaching research groups, and formal mentoring programmes (Admiraal *et al.*, 2021; Cooper *et al.*, 2020; Dalby, 2021; Prenger *et al.*, 2021). Teachers can also learn through informal interaction that occurs during peer teaching, collaborative planning, and mentoring between colleagues (Avidov-Ungar *et al.*, 2023; Nguyen & Ng, 2020; Yang *et al.*, 2022). In so doing, this research takes the perspective of teachers' professional learning as emphasising schools as the environment for development (Bergmark, 2023; Gore & Rosser, 2022). Postholm (2018) posits that professional learning in context is the only education that ultimately changes classroom practice. Moreover, there is strong evidence that professional development is best when embedded in the teachers' specific subject areas (Darling-Hammond, 2020). Meanwhile, schools with strong teacher communities seem to have higher learner achievement (Horn *et al.*, 2017; Ronfeldt *et al.*, 2015).

An emerging paradigm is one that moves professional development away from the practice of attending courses and training days to the concept of lifelong or continuing learning. Middlewood *et al.* (2017), in their examination of the educational context, argue that:

- professional development is an ongoing process of reflection and review that articulates with development planning that meets corporate, departmental and individual needs; and
- learning is a process of self-development leading to personal growth as well as development of skills and knowledge that facilitates the education of young people.

The use of the term “development” rather than “learning” seems to depend on a somewhat arbitrary attribution of a broader, more general meaning to professional development, and a more specific individual meaning to professional learning. Confusion may also arise from the use of the term “professional development” to apply both to the development of individual professional practitioners and collectively to the development of the profession as a whole, or of groups within the profession. There is an additional concern about the explicit and implicit emphasis on performativity, more evident, perhaps, in the first of the two above meanings, in that it may limit the focus of professional learning and development activities to improvements in teachers' skills as a means of bringing about improvements in standards for schools (e.g., see Zeng & Day, 2019). There are strong arguments in favour of a much broader, intrinsic and ethical purpose for teachers' professional learning and development (Sachs, 2016), and for emotional and social as well as intellectual and practical engagement in the processes of change entailed (Damianakis, 2020).

The present study examines existing models of professional learning and development (Harris & Jones, 2019), and attempts to develop a clearer understanding of these concepts and found that teachers who continue to develop their classroom practices do better as teachers. It is, therefore, important to try to clarify the distinction between the two concepts. With this in mind, it is suggested that teachers' professional learning can be taken to represent the processes that, whether intuitive or deliberate, individual or social, result in specific changes in the professional knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs or actions of teachers.

Teachers' professional development, is taken to refer to the broader changes that may take place over a longer period of time, resulting in qualitative shifts in aspects of teachers' professionalism (Bergmark, 2023; Sancar *et al.*, 2021; Smith & Gillepsie, 2023). In-service teacher learning is often referred to as CPD, and is considered a crucial factor for increasing teacher quality and improving schools and learner learning (Day, 2017; Dulo, 2022; Iqbal & Ali, 2024; Njenga, 2023; Rio & Newman, 2022). Continuous professional development was shown to be a process where teachers continuously improve their knowledge, skills and attitude (Zulu & Bertram, 2019). In order to promote the culture of continuing education in schools, teachers are required to participate in various platforms that expose them to share ideas and develop their career. This study supports the idea of TLCs to become implemented as studies have shown that it promotes effective schooling.

Desimone and Garet (2015, p.254) shows that CPD of teachers "increases their content knowledge and developing their teaching practices." In this study, this can imply ways that Consumer Studies teachers develop themselves through self-directed learning or learning through TLCs. Sachs (2016, p.3) states that continuing professional development is about "good qualifications, being highly motivated, knowledgeable and skillful", and includes various forms of learning. TLCs provide an opportunity for teachers to study and think together as professionals and to decide how they can become better in ways that can guide learners to achieve more (Çarkıt, 2020). McFadden (2022) states that TLCs provide the space where professionals engage in order to enhance their knowledge and skills. This shows that Consumer Studies teachers need to continually develop their knowledge besides what is offered by books so that they may perform adequately.

According to Pan and Cheng (2023), teachers can use three behaviours to model the way of promoting TLCs. Firstly, teachers who model what the departmental head expects from others are most likely to guide the school to be a strong learning community. Secondly, teachers who reach general agreement on a common set of values have a big chance to lead strong learning

communities. Thirdly, teachers who develop a cooperative relationship with colleagues are most likely to guide schools that will operate as a strong learning community.

Many researchers have agreed on the view that teachers' professional learning not only benefits a school, but also learner learning and achievement (Battersby & Verdi, 2015; Brown *et al.*, 2018; Whitworth & Chiu, 2015). According to Çoban *et al.* (2023), creating commitment, promoting school values, ensuring systematic collaboration, encouraging experimentation and promoting self-efficacy by teachers result in well nurtured and developed teachers. Fullan and Quinn (2015) believe that it is the duty of the DBE to construct a teacher collaboration plan that is clearly focused and appropriate for the school culture. Gali and Schechter (2019) posit that the department can create institutionalised arrangements for collaborative learning by allocating time, space and resources. The department needs to assist teachers in understanding how collaborative teams can and should function as a TLC (Montiel-Overall, 2017).

Teachers can support TLCs by supporting the establishment and sustainability of study groups (Coryell, 2016). Study groups are a proven way for supporting important elements of the school, and they work as the cornerstone of the TLCs. These study groups can have a positive impact in improving the professional development of teachers, adopting research-based strategies, improving teacher learning, and building a community and a vision which aligns with the school's and the district's goals (Davis *et al.*, 2015; van Aalderen-Smeets *et al.*, 2015).

This study focuses on teachers' formal learning, which takes place in learning communities in the form of clusters. This is regarded as formal learning because it does not occur spontaneously; proper planning and organisation need to take place for learning to be successful. Kyndt *et al.* (2016) argue that informal learning will never be successful in isolation, which means that formal learning is paramount in teacher learning. In the next section, I present literature on TLCs nurturing the development of teacher knowledge.

2.6.1.1 TLCs nurture the development of teacher knowledge

According to Bantwini (2019), teacher learning and collaboration in a school is a fundamental continuous professional development approach for teachers as it takes into account both contextual issues and the teachers' needs (content and pedagogical knowledge, practical solution to classroom challenges, and more) in respect of classroom practice. A shared issue among developing and developed countries is recruiting and retaining good teachers for challenging schools. In the USA, literature on the distribution of teachers within the system consistently finds that children from disadvantaged backgrounds have less access to the teachers with the most education, skills and experience to teach (Darling-Hammond, 2015; Cochran-Smith & Keefe,

2022). Policymakers are thus prioritising the need to understand (1) the lack of attraction to the profession, and (2) how to retain good quality new teachers once they enter the sector. Many assume that to attract and retain the best candidates, the profession needs to be held in the same esteem as other professions like medicine, law, and business (Fullan, 2015). In Rwanda a scholar argues that teaching should be considered a knowledge profession, and as such teachers should be knowledgeable, continuously developing and innovating their own knowledge and skills, and sharing that knowledge back into the profession (Nkundabankura, 2024).

Hollingsworth and Clarke (2017, p.967) elaborate a model of teachers' professional growth that attempts to elucidate the complex "change environment" and the "continuing process of learning" through which teachers grow professionally. The concept of "growth" invoked here closely resembles the way in which the term "development" is conventionally used in psychology. According to Hollingsworth and Clarke (2017, p.951), the key change processes in the professional context are "enactment" and "reflection". The term "enactment" is preferred here to "action", since it refers to the translation of the teacher's knowledge or beliefs into action rather than simply the professional action itself. Therefore, it could be argued that professional change is best understood as coming about through a process of learning that can be described in terms of transactions between teachers' knowledge, experience and beliefs on the one hand, and their professional actions on the other.

Carpenter (2015) explores how knowledge can be built and shared in TLCs. The study creates two portraits of learning communities in action and contrasts them. Because teachers need to be knowledgeable in ever-changing contexts, ongoing professional learning simply must be part-and-parcel of their work (Tuli & Bekele, 2020). But how teacher learning is conceived and practiced constructs the relationship between teachers and knowledge (Fischer *et al.*, 2022). The study suggests that TLCs offer the opportunity to recapture a Deweyan approach to teacher professionalism, one that involves systematic observations, analyses classrooms and learner work as well as ongoing collegial dialogue (Beck, 2022, Gaire, 2023; Shaw, 2023). At the heart of the study's argument is a vision of teachers not only as users of pedagogical knowledge, but also as creators, disseminators, and preservers of it. When learning and teachers' knowledge occur in practice, it is assumed that knowledge is built tacitly (Johannessen, 2022). This is the most important knowledge source for the profession. To improve teaching and enable teachers to professionally develop such a pragmatic perspective, it is necessary to work in communities with other teachers (Bergmark, 2023). It is assumed that teachers learn when they reflect on good teaching practices, that is, choose strategies, organise classroom routines, make decisions, create

structure learning situations, and reflect upon their own achievements (Hammerness & Kennedy, 2019). The next section discusses how teacher learning in TLCs improve the learning outcomes.

2.6.1.2 Improvement in teachers' professional practice and learning outcomes

Niemi (2015) explains that teacher development is a continuous process for teachers to develop professionally. Through the professional development process, teachers can grow and respond to the changing environment. When teachers are actively engaged with practice materials, if learning activities are school-based and integrated into their everyday work, and when teachers learn in ways that reflect how they should teach learners, teacher professional learning is most effective (Admiraal *et al.*, 2021; Bergmark, 2023, 2015; Kennedy, 2016). According to Smith (2021), there are schools that claim to have formed TLCs but do not completely implement the practices that true TLCs should employ. He adds that true TLCs must adhere to five principles as follows: First, teachers collaborate as teams rather than individually, and they share responsibility for learning. Second, they collaborate to develop a curriculum that matches the needs of learners' step by step, taking into account their abilities. Third, teachers produce appropriate evaluations as a group that are based on a practical curriculum. Fourth, they use the analysis of results of formative assessment to identify learners who require additional time and support with learning. Fifth, they provide a mechanism in which learners who require more assistance can receive it without missing class.

Kelly and Cherkowski (2015) state that in order to ensure that all teachers learn, teachers should work with each other in TLCs to examine and develop their classroom practices. Zulu and Bertram (2019) propose the notion of sharing knowledge as a solution to initiating TLCs. Demir (2015) believe that when teachers participate in TLCs, they will positively influence their learners' learning, and eventually make a contribution towards school development. Teachers who participate in TLCs learn from one another, plan their lesson jointly and solve the problems they face in the profession (Pan & Cheng, 2023).

According to Louis and Leithwood (2021), TLCs encourage an environment of open discussion where questions are asked, and issues of uncertainty are valued and supported. Scholars find that it is the teachers' belief that collaboration yields their growth, and also benefits the future of the education profession (Hargreaves, 2021; Sancar *et al.*, 2021). According to Fairman and Mackenzie (2015), the creation of a safe environment through collaboration and TLCs can only be achieved when educational practices and policies are reviewed. The next section presents literature on TLCs in promoting curriculum reforms.

2.6.1.3 TLCs promote curricular reforms

According to Haug and Mork (2021), curriculum reforms are defined as changes to the subjects and subject content to be learned. Changes in pedagogy and assessment procedures are part of these reforms. Williams (2023) mentions that her school was better equipped to adopt a Teacher Learning Community by following five protocols developed by the non-profit School Reform Initiative. To begin, everyone is given a voice and an opportunity to speak. Secondly, the pace is lowered to allow everyone time to think properly about their issues. Many teachers require time to write or reflect them on their ideas. Third reflection is essential, time to set out for each participant to reflect before responding. This allows teachers to think more deeply about the subject at hand and comprehend what their colleagues are saying more thoroughly. Fourthly, structure is provided because it helps with time management and organisation, which helps to keep everyone on track. The proper process helps teachers manage their time effectively and reach a meaningful conclusion. Fifth, hierarchies are becoming flatter. For example, the role of facilitator is swapped throughout the process, providing everyone an opportunity to lead.

In a study conducted in Thailand, the success of the reform depends on how well education is provided, particularly by the teachers and other educational staff (Hrusa *et al.*, 2020). According to Taiwanese researchers, Chen and Wang (2015), and Iranian researchers, Tavakkoli and Rashidi (2020), in order to develop teachers' capacity in a sustainable manner, educational institutions must integrate motivation, positive learning skills, and resources. In Korea and China, there has been change in its entire curriculum in order to combat the exam-driven learning culture that is an ongoing national issue to actively respond to a changing twenty-first century learning ecology (Hwang, 2023; Tan, 2020).

According to Ho (2023), all schools in Taiwan have been undergoing a significant curriculum change due to the implementation of the new curriculum guidelines in August 2019. With this change, the independence of teachers in creating curriculum is emphasised. The National Institution for Compilation and Translation (NICT) under the ministry of Education (MOE) of Taiwan has long been the source of teachers' reliance on textbooks (Weng, 2021). Teachers in Taiwan were urged to collaborate in order to develop and broaden their collection of teaching resources in order to adapt to the change. Some teachers failed to see the necessity for change (Chen, 2020). Because they were accustomed to teaching from textbooks and had little expertise in creating their own curriculum, those who lived in rural areas felt particularly worried about how to deal with the learning trend (Michaels, 2022).

A study conducted in Nigeria revealed that the junior secondary curriculum must include a significant amount of science, technology, and vocational subjects in order to help learners

develop the skills necessary for self-sufficiency (Adeyemi, 2015 & Peter *et al.*, 2020). The new curriculum is well-received by teachers, according to a descriptive survey research conducted by Chimakonam and Ogbonnaya (2021) on 200 elementary and secondary teachers combined in Calabar, Cross River State. Their conclusions differ, though, since Igbokwe (2015) notes that the implementation of the Curriculum 2007 was hampered by poor teacher quality, a lack of teacher development, and a lack of teacher support resources.

A significant emphasis on practical subjects rather than traditional academic subjects is part of Kenya's education system, which was adopted in 1985 and consists of an eight-year primary school, a four-year secondary school, and a four-year higher education (Kaviti, 2018). Progress was slowed by negative views toward vocational education, a lack of infrastructure and resources, and a teacher shortage. The delivery of the curriculum and pedagogy were both impacted by these unfavourable experiences that teachers had in their roles as curriculum leaders.

The study's review of Singapore's curriculum reforms is crucial since, like South Africa, Singapore's curriculum content is excessive and exam-focused (Bhangi, 2021). He adds that there are issues with overloaded content, time constraints, a heavy teacher workload from frequent content changes, pedagogical and assessment changes, teacher lack of subject-matter expertise, unfamiliarity with the recently introduced inquiry-based approach to teaching and learning, and the lack of regular professional development opportunities. According to Hairon *et al.* (2018), Singapore is one of the few countries in the world to have a national TLC model that uses the term and concept of the TLC process in an easy-to-understand way. TLCs, which are viewed as a form of professional development in Singapore, were made compulsory because the Ministry of Education increased funding and added a weekly time slot for teachers to engage in their professional growth (Klayklung, 2022). TLCs have assisted teachers in the current context to change or enhance their roles, particularly in regards to enhancing teachers' pedagogical practices. It is capable of ongoing analysis and understanding of how to enhance teaching and learning as a collective and solitary phenomenon (Feldman, 2020). The following section presents literature on TLCs development in sustainability education.

2.6.1.4 TLCs develop sustainability in education

According to Anyolo *et al.* (2018), sustainability is the most crucial element in the teacher development model. It has to do with the school's materiality, its ties to the community, its collaborations with other organisations, and its creative process. A sustainable approach to teacher professional development must include opportunities for self-improvement; otherwise, teachers will not be able to deliver instruction of the highest quality (Mardapi & Herawan, 2019;

Meesuk *et al.*, 2020). The value of integrating education for sustainability and transformative learning is that it promotes community involvement and the capacity to deal with unpredictability and difficulty (Alam, 2022). A sustainable school is one in which sustainability incorporated into strategic decisions, the community participates with the school and the school strives to improve the quality of life for the community through problem-solving, and the use of resources is minimised while the outcomes are maximised (Lafuente-Lechuga *et al.*, 2024). According to Nousheen *et al.* (2020), a sustainable school ought to be an example of how to uphold social justice and the environment.

Even though there are opportunities for environmental education throughout the National Curriculum for primary and secondary schools and the natural environment is a major topic of conversation in society (Yadav *et al.*, 2022). Hermann and Bossle (2020) suggest that in order to start a conversation about how entrepreneurship affects the environment, it is crucial to explain to teachers what sustainability is and how economic, social and environmental factors are interconnected when given understanding of the concept.

The initial discussions of sustainability centered on fostering critical thinking based on the continually changing balance between the economic, social, and environmental spheres in order to build a better future (Hariram *et al.*, 2023; Kumar & Dwivedy, 2023). According to Howlett *et al.* (2016) and Taimur and Sattar (2020), they stress the value of critical thinking for sustainable development. Teachers' personal values in schools have an impact on the subject matter, educational goals, and pedagogy employed in the classroom. The way the teacher responds to suggestions for teaching for sustainable development and how their areas of expertise develop is strongly influenced by their values (Timm & Barth, 2021).

According to Rahman (2023), activities that enhance teachers' professional growth must be sustained and intensive rather than brief, teachers require time to explore, absorb, discuss, and apply new knowledge. This suggests that activities require a large number of contact hours spread out over a long period of time. It also has consequences for the types of activities in which teachers should participate: One-time workshops and conferences have a lower likelihood of resulting in teacher change (Bush & Grotjohann, 2020; Lang, 2021; Smith & Gallespie, 2023). According to Stoll *et al.* (2017), there are four key TLCs for promoting and sustaining an effective TLC: optimising resources and structures, promoting individual and collective learning, specifically promoting and sustaining the TLCs, and leadership and management. These scholars also indicate that the creation and development of TLCs depends on numerous processes originating from the internal and external environments. These are described by Stoll (2015) under five headings, namely: focusing on learning processes, leading TLCs, making the best of human and social

resources, managing structural resources, and interacting with and drawing on external agents. The five areas of creating and developing TLCs are briefly discussed below.

(a) Focusing on learning processes

A TLC cannot be established through only one method, which is professional development of staff. There are many opportunities of adult learning in a school: it can be formal workshops or courses, or it can be offered informally through daily work with learners and colleagues, for example, planning together, or group work, and working as the entire school (Admiraal *et al.*, 2021; Brodie, 2021).

(b) Leading TLCs

A TLC will never develop in a school without the active support of leadership at all levels. Leading TLCs can be facilitated by creating a learning culture, ensuring learning at all levels, showing the human side of leadership, and managing and coordinating professional learning. The commitment of the principal and shared leadership is an important resource for leadership in a TLC (Yuet, 2017).

(c) Developing other social resources

Establishing, coordinating and sustaining TLCs is a human enterprise, and making use of human and community resources is an important dimension. Trust and good working relationships are important in TLCs. Collins (2016) have identified four dimensions of relational trust: respect, competence, personal regard for others and integrity. Group dynamics can be formed where belief, values and norms are shared to achieve effective teaching and learning.

(d) Managing structural resources

Teacher discussions and sharing of ideas is an important indicator of a TLC. It can be managed by allocating time and space for teachers to collaborate. The schools need to schedule time for staff members to periodically engage in discussions. If a school creates a space for teachers to collaborate, it is unlikely to inhibit school-wide collegiality (Handezalts *et al.*, 2019).

(e) Interacting and drawing on external agents

Inviting external support, forming partnership and networking with other schools is a key factor in developing and promoting TLCs (Harris *et al.*, 2017; McIntyre & Hobson, 2016). In TLCs external support tends to come in the form of district support and other external agents. Schools

have built productive partnerships with various stakeholders such as parents, governing bodies, local community members, social services and businesses.

Schools have also engaged in many partnerships with tertiary institutions for ongoing teacher development activities. Networking is a way of promoting learning inside and between schools to share and transfer practices through collaborative inquiry on sharing and transferring practice, developing more understanding, and developing new knowledge about effective teaching and learning. It is also about teachers changing their practices, and how they learn (Howard & Mozejko, 2015). The next section discusses some of the challenges faced in promoting TLCs. The next section presents literature on teacher leadership and capacity building encouragement.

2.6.1.5 Encouragement of teacher leadership and capacity building

School leadership can create a learning environment that is knowledge-centred at schools by helping teachers to identify their development needs, encouraging experimentation, finding and allocating resources to support teachers' learning, and enhancing the implementation of new learning (Hilton *et al.*, 2015; Vanblaere & Devos, 2016). Adult learning also requires that we make acknowledging teachers as the heart of decision making around change a key principle in understanding, engaging, and developing ownership in adult learning (Knowles *et al.*, 2020). According to Qureshi *et al.* (2023), a positive teacher learning culture depends on the presence and alignment of three components: structures, values and relationships. In addition, leaders must take on the role of ensuring that proper learning conditions are in place at the school in order to create a culture of learning. Here, "culture" refers to the various ways that group of people act and the beliefs that they connect to these actions (Lave, 2021). Derakhshan *et al.* (2023) assert that there must be interplay between structure and culture if teachers are to learn together.

A study by Postholm (2018) established that teachers can be development leaders in their own schools. For instance, Brauckmann *et al.* (2023) demonstrate that teacher leadership can facilitate broader professional development within school communities. Sharratt and Fullan (2022) present five principles for teacher leaders in their work: First, they should focus on the learning of everyone in the school. Second, they should create and sustain conditions that favour learning. Third, they should engage in explicit, transparent, and inquiry-based dialogue. Fourth, they should allow everyone to influence school operations; and fifth, they should maintain internal and external accountability in order to examine how the results align with their school's goals and principles. Of course, there are also some conditions that allow teacher leadership to flourish, including professional trust (Tayag & Ayuyao, 2020), perceived autonomy (Kara & Bozkurt,

2022), supportive administrators, and time and resources, such as structural and organisational assets, along with space and time (Bush, 2020).

According to Fairman and Mackenzie (2015), the Subject Advisor should demonstrate how people work as a team. The Subject Advisor should promote a TLC culture by motivating, encouraging, supporting and building the capacity of the staff members that contributes to the way members interact professionally through TLCs. Subject advisors must encourage teachers to share their opinions (Schechter, 2019). Thessin (2021) emphasise that teachers in leadership positions must have the skill to share authority with teachers and facilitate teachers' work, and the aptitude to participate in learning communities without dictating.

Darling-Hammond (2017) argues that it is the Subject Advisor who should prioritise the professional development of teachers, and ensure that they receive opportunities of developing and expanding their knowledge and instructional performance. The Subject Advisor should manage resources and provide support, direction and encouragement to achieve goals and mediate group work (Kruse *et al.*, 2020; Tampubolon & Sibuea, 2023). Chow (2016) argues that the Subject Advisor must devise strategies to delegate certain instructional and managerial authority to the TLC members. Subject advisors must plan teachers' meetings, provide support in the form of material and human resources, and afford teachers time to meet in study groups and attend personal development and empowerment seminars (Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2017). They can ensure that teachers have access to current and relevant information on subject matter, instructional methods, effective practice and subject matter expertise (Howard & Milner, 2021). Teachers' learning roles such as mentoring, coaching and training can be supported by using resources. A review of related literature also points to a significant gap in research on teachers' role in the support of TLCs (Eckert *et al.*, 2023). While the discussion above focuses on the roles that the Subject Advisor can play in supporting TLCs, there are challenges that the Subject Advisor faces when playing these roles.

Salleh (2016) found a challenge in developing common goals for teacher leaders in three groups of professional learning teams of mathematics teachers in Singapore primary schools. The teacher leaders of these three teams also had difficulties leading learning in their respective teams. The researcher concluded that the teacher leaders' lack of familiarity with strategies to build a sense of collective purpose and learning had hindered the transfer of group learning to classroom teaching practice. She adds that important factors for learning in teacher teams include building the community and working on collegiality, bonding, and trust; however, the teacher leaders gave little attention to these factors.

According to Meyer *et al.* (2022), subject advisors can create guidelines which encourage members of a group to work collaboratively. They can also supervise their school's activities and implementation of various policies, help analyse learner information, identify areas of teachers' learning and learners' needs, schedule time for uninterrupted meetings, and allocate resources to support teachers' opinions (Noor & Sofyaningrum, 2020). The following section presents TLCs in promotion of job satisfaction and confidence.

2.6.1.6 TLCs promote job satisfaction and confidence in teachers

Job satisfaction is defined as “the pleasurable emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job as achieving or facilitating one’s job values” (Zhang *et al.*, 2022, p.316). According to studies, teachers’ dedication to learning can be positively impacted by their job satisfaction, while their job stress and exhaustion can be negatively impacted (Dreer, 2024; Skaalvik Skaalvik, 2020). Numerous factors have been linked to teachers’ job satisfaction in previous studies. First, factors affecting teachers’ job satisfaction include one’s gender, experience as a teacher, profession status and school factors like level and type of institution (Pazim, 2021; Toropova *et al.*, 2021). The job satisfaction of teachers is also positively correlated with a number of leadership principles, including democratic leadership, teaching and learning leadership, servant leadership and leadership that leads to transformation (Gipson, 2020; Lors, 2020). Thirdly, other school factors, including school atmosphere, workplace conditions, school’s support, and teacher trust, independence, and efficacy, further impact teachers’ job satisfaction (Sahito & Vaisanen, 2020; Toropova *et al.*, 2021; Wula *et al.*, 2020). The transformational leadership of departmental heads has a positive effect on teachers’ job satisfaction (Hussain & Khayat, 2021; Khoso *et al.*, 2021; Maheshwari, 2022). Although numerous factors that affect teachers’ job satisfaction have been confirmed, there are few studies on the relationship between TLCs and teachers’ job satisfaction (Zhang *et al.*, 2022; Zhang *et al.*, 2023). Scholars asserted that teachers are more fulfilled when participating in TLCs, and research demonstrated that TLCs provided an ideal setting for teachers’ mutual exchange of knowledge, thereby enhancing their satisfaction (Khasawneh *et al.*, 2023; Tahir & Musah, 2020; Zhang *et al.*, 2022). Some studies discovered that teachers’ collaboration, shared purpose and accountability can positively and significantly impact teachers’ job satisfaction (Bui, 2022; Chen, 2020; Deng *et al.*, 2021). However, other studies found that only a few TLC components, namely shared sense of purpose and reflective dialogue, had a positive impact on teacher satisfaction (Alzayed & Alabdulkareem, 2021; Prenger *et al.*, 2021).

More empirical research is required to determine the connections between TLC components and teachers’ job satisfaction in light of the inconsistent results (Liu & Watson, 2023; Toropova *et*

al., 2021). Transformational leadership was also found to have a significant and positive impact on teachers' job satisfaction (Ahmad Saifuddin, 2020; Purwanto *et al.*, 2021). This suggests that when a transformational leader establishes goals for teachers (such as helping them set goals, outlining justification for implementing reform initiatives, and setting and setting high targets), works to develop people (e.g., providing teachers with individualised support, motivating them to explore new things, and demonstrating a high level of professional practice), and improves the school (e.g., promoting teachers' collaborative work and creating conditions for it), they will be able to make a significant difference in the school's success (Effendi, 2022; Kılınç *et al.*, 2024). According to Epstein (2018), teachers who are happy in their jobs perform better in the classroom, and the standard of teaching keeps rising over time. They develop their creativity and demonstrate stronger sense of dedication to improving as teachers (Derakhshan *et al.*, 2023; Rais & Rubini, 2022). As a result, school leaders are very concerned about teacher job satisfaction (Lopes & Oliveira, 2020; Wang *et al.*, 2020). Research provides strong evidence that the learning experience for teachers is positively impacted when teachers are satisfied with the work they are doing and with their working environment (Dicke *et al.*, 2020; Toropova *et al.*, 2021). The TLC increases teachers' sense of self-worth (Hargreaves & Elhawary, 2019). When teachers work in their teams, they have more access to innovative ideas, resources, teaching methods and skills (Little, 2020). The next section presents literature on teacher learning strategies in TLCs.

2.6.1.7 TLCs promote collaborative learning

Veldman and Kostons (2019) argue that collaboration has the potential to provide teachers with opportunities for professional growth within a school environment, thereby ultimately increasing their confidence in their teaching abilities. Teacher collaboration is identified by Hargreaves (2021) as an element that promotes teacher learning; and Thessin (2015) and Prenger *et al.* (2021) assert that it is the essential ingredient of learning communities for teacher development and school improvement. Collaborative learning communities are an idea that is promoted by both teacher researchers and scholars of teacher inquiry (Liu *et al.*, 2020; Lock & Redmond, 2021). According to Qureshi *et al.* (2023), collaborative learning has been viewed as a professional development instrument, and also as a tool for improving teacher performance. A culture of collaborative learning amongst teachers in schools has been implemented through TLCs (Panenka *et al.*, 2023).

Collaboration in developing knowledge is viewed as essential for effective learning, and as an indispensable investment for teachers (Lipscombe *et al.*, 2020). Hali *et al.* (2021) and Tam (2015) identified different types of collaborative teacher learning activities among teachers. These

include peer observation of practice, analysis of learners works and learners' data, and study groups. According to Alwafi *et al.* (2020), collaborative teacher research in communities of pre-service teachers, experienced teachers, can serve this need, because such partnerships can improve the quality of pre-service teachers' preparation, and create opportunities for experienced teachers to enhance their professional growth, and for inexperienced teachers to deepen their understanding of (pre-service) teacher learning. Collaboration is important, creating space and time for generative dialogue and peer observation of teaching (Guise *et al.*, 2017; Pleschová *et al.*, 2021). A survey study including 234 teachers in six middle schools in Portugal showed that teachers had the highest interest in collaboration when they perceived professional development support and encouragement from their leaders (Castro Silva *et al.*, 2017).

Hargreaves (2021) assert that in collaborative cultures group members make regular visits to each other's' classrooms to observe other members teach or present the lesson. They further state that after the lesson, as a community they come together to discuss critically how and why the lesson did or did not achieve the desired learning objectives, provide feedback and assistance, and change or modify the pedagogical strategy used. Discussions are characterised by the notion of distributed knowledge and professional growth through thinking, exchange, critique, exploration and formulation of new ideas. Through study groups, they help each other to make meaning of new strategies and concepts, and support each other to enact and transform their practice through reading and discussions.

According to Nguyen and Ng (2020), existing forms of teacher collaboration in education mainly focus on conversation and exchange of ideas among teachers. The authors suggest that future forms of teacher collaboration should concentrate on teachers' joint work and collective sense of responsibility in order to improve their teaching practice. The qualitative case study by Zulu and Bertram (2019) examines the nature of collaborative activities and the kinds of teacher knowledge learnt in a community of high school mathematics teachers. Data were collected through observations of professional development workshops, questionnaires, and interviews with teachers and document analysis. The findings established that collegial collaboration and the focus on specialised content knowledge in this learning community enabled teachers to approach their teaching more effectively.

Many presume that teacher collaboration contributes to professional development and instructional improvement (Postholm, 2018). According to Lefstein *et al.* (2020), participation and discourse practices can enhance teacher learning by supporting professional critique, reflection and collaboration. However, research also shows that many schools and teachers struggle to foster constructive interactions (Dobie & Anderson, 2015). Research emphasises that

openness in expressing disagreement is important for constructive dialogue and learning in teacher collaboration (De Jong *et al.*, 2022; Dobie & Anderson, 2015;).

One widely used collaborative model for teachers is the lesson study (LS) method. A LS cycle starts with teachers working with an established common goal, along with a series of lesson planning sessions culminating in the enactment and observation of the research lessons (Goh & Fang, 2017). The different phases of LS serve as a key part of the practice architecture (Kemmis, 2022), or the preconditions affecting how LS has been enacted in classrooms and schools. There is an important caveat to be addressed: despite the increasing popularity of collaborative models, the associated changes in teaching are often subtle, and dramatic changes are rare (Ermeling & Yarbo, 2016). One reason for this nuance is that teachers construct visions of classroom practice based on deeply rooted cultural routines and preconceived notions of effective and ineffective teaching (Evans *et al.*, 2020).

In Peel's (2021) view, teacher collaboration is presumed to include a powerful learning environment for teachers' professional development and can provide guidance and support in dealing with learner behaviour. Buchanan *et al.* (2023) argue that in ongoing collegial work the teachers have the opportunity to learn, test and reflect upon new practices within their specific context, while at the same time sharing their individual knowledge and expertise. The collaboration model assists schools in building a climate of trust by developing positive interdependence among teachers (Kolleck *et al.*, 2021) and also enhances self-efficacy in their ability to modify their classroom practices (Hidajat *et al.*, 2023). It helps to break down the barriers of teacher isolation and promote an environment where face-to-face interactions thrive (Saddique & Raja, 2022). A further benefit is that collaboration provides the social support vital in managing stress and burnout among teachers (Chou & Teherani, 2017), and it fills the void left by traditional professional development as it provides teachers with professional learning that has a profound impact on instructional practice (Gore & Rosser, 2022).

In developed countries, teacher collaboration and the practices of TLCs appear to have received considerable attention (Caplan & Farling, 2017; Deschaine & Whale, 2017), and are viewed as a normal practice with clear benefits (Bravenboer, 2018; Frye, 2022). Attesting to this, Chen and Wang (2015) indicate that the models and practices of TLCs have gained increasing attention from schools, education systems and governments as a promising vehicle to secure improvements in teaching quality. What is further enlightening in the literature from the developed countries is that, despite the unanimous support for TLCs and teacher collaboration, there are some limitations (Zahedi *et al.*, 2021).

Collaboration between teachers produces a number of benefits with significant impacts on their professional lives, thus playing an important role in professional teacher development strategy (Vangrieken *et al.*, 2015). For example, the International Survey on Teaching and Learning for 2013 found that teachers using collaborative practices are more innovative in the classroom, have higher job satisfaction, and hold stronger self-efficacy beliefs (Kasalak & Dagyar, 2020). Nsibande and Mbokazi (2023) accentuate the fact that while the use of such collaborative structures for teachers' professional learning is well established in many developed countries, very little is known about how teachers experience these non-traditional structures in South Africa.

Ballangrud and Nilsen (2021), and Darling-Hammond (2017) indicate that though CPD teacher development programmes are offered as a means of bringing teachers together to collaborate about their practice, they use little of what is presented in the workshops to improve their classroom instruction. Nonetheless, among the collaborative structures for teachers' professional learning are teacher clusters identified as an alternative approach to teacher CPD (Admiraal *et al.*, 2021; Choi & Kang, 2019; Gore & Rosser, 2022). Also, slowly emerging from the literature is information on the benefits of TLCs and the role of school leadership (Hallam *et al.*, 2015; Imants & Van der Wal, 2020; Steyn, 2015). Nevertheless, in their synthesis study, Imants and Van der Wal (2020) conclude that more research regarding conditions and support strategies that influence or constrain professional learning in different contexts is needed. Bantwini (2019) contends that in South Africa the lack of research in areas of communities of practice as teacher professional development poses a number of challenges. Teacher collaboration in a school as a CPD model presents a better opportunity for individual growth, and for the enhancement of both teaching practice and learners' achievement (Alemayehu, 2021; Nooruddin & Bhamani, 2019). Teodoro (2020) states that teachers' learning and synergy to achieve the common goals are considered by scholars to be the central element of major school reform efforts. In their study on the situation in South Africa, Chen *et al.* (2021) indicate that the teachers expressed a need for collaboration as demonstrated by synergy as a team. This need, they noted, reflects the value placed on trusted relationships, and on the need for belonging and affiliation. The implication is that collaboration possesses the potential to increase teachers' professional capacity, and provide opportunities for professional development within a school environment, ultimately increasing their satisfaction and confidence in their abilities (De Simone, 2020; Flushman *et al.*, 2021; Leifler, 2020).

In a qualitative study of six primary school teachers in Australia, Ambler (2016) found that schools provide teachers with opportunities for learning. The study shows that teachers need to

be able to talk and thus put words to their daily work; in short, they need to work with others during school days to learn from their everyday practices. In practice, however, this goal proves difficult. For instance, Horn *et al.* (2017) conducted a qualitative study of 77 meetings of teacher teams in middle schools in the USA, and found that teachers rarely accomplished collective interpretations for future work. Rather, most communication focused on logistics and pace as well as topics to be taught.

Mohan *et al.* (2017) conducted a qualitative study in two Fijian secondary schools with 30 teachers. Their study shows that professional development situated in school is necessary to change teaching practices. Furthermore, the findings highlight that professional development needs differ slightly in rural and urban teachers, mostly because of the teachers' needs. Their major finding was that the opportunity for teachers to collaborate to share ideas forms a strong foundation for professional development. A qualitative case study conducted by Cheng and Wu (2016) in a secondary school in Shanghai focused on three particular English teachers. This study demonstrated that collaboration, including observation and discussions, enhanced the teachers' learning when it came to basic lesson plan elements and steps in classroom activities.

In a primary school in Zambia, Hennessy *et al.* (2016) conducted a qualitative study on twelve teachers using videos as a tool to develop their practice. The teachers met with each other for an hour every week. Recorded by the researchers, who were teachers, the videos showed real lessons taught. Guided by the researchers' questions, the teachers discussed the videos and worked on new lessons planned on the basis of these discussions. Finally, they discussed their own observed lessons afterwards. The researchers found that this activity helped the teachers to develop their teaching from lecturing monologues to more active learning for the pupils over the duration of the year. However, the researchers also pointed out discrepancies in progress among the teachers, who also noted that they needed more time to integrate this activity into their busy working lives. The next section presents literature on learning in practice through personal experience, reflection and thinking.

2.6.1.8 Learning in practice through personal experience, reflection and thinking

According to Farrell (2020), teachers learn by experience through the process of reflection, because experience informs through reflection. Orakcı (2021) refers to teachers as reflective practitioners, reflecting on their teaching actions before the teaching process to plan their lessons, adjusting their teaching strategies during the teaching process, and after teaching, reconstructing the events that happened in the lesson process. Rose (2020) elucidates this, teachers go into professional development as self-directed teachers with experience, clear goals for what they

want to learn, and a willingness to work with other teachers. In the process of learning, teachers are developing their beliefs and ideas, and are developing their classroom practice by attending to their beliefs associated with changing (Sansom, 2020).

In a survey including 2 310 Finnish comprehensive teachers, Soini *et al.* (2016) found that learning and wellbeing at work require two elements: teachers must be self-reflective and connected to their own teaching in the classroom, as well as co-regulated for learning. In brief, teachers must work and reflect together. Similarly, in a qualitative study conducted in Norway in three lower secondary schools including all teachers and leaders, Postholm and Wæge (2016) found that the learning culture, the teachers' collaboration, and co-regulated learning at work all make a difference to the teachers' job satisfaction and wellbeing.

According to Beach *et al.* (2022), teachers should be self-directed and display a willingness to learn when they perceive the need, or when they desire the immediate application of new skills and knowledge. The research tradition on self-directed learning has been derived from theories on adult learning emphasising adults' sense of personal autonomy in their learning (Loeng, 2020; Merriam, 2018). This means that teachers take control of the goals and purposes of learning and assume ownership of it (Lee & Hannafin, 2016; Khiat, 2015). It also means that adults would like to be seen and treated by others as being capable of self-direction (Luken, 2020). I assume that if teachers are treated as responsible individuals in control of their own learning, they are more likely to be engaged in learning (cf. "autonomy" as a basic psychological need for motivated learning (Compare *et al.*, 2024; Ryan & Deci, 2020). Viewing teachers as capable of self-direction also means that teachers are treated as professionals, which would solve the central mismatch experienced in professional if a programme neglects teachers as active participants in designing their own professional learning (Louws *et al.*, 2017). Shameda (2020) asserts that self-directed learning stems from motivation and interest, which are both the entry and sustaining points of the process resulting from a personal attraction to particular learning goals, and from the belief that the desired outcome can be achieved. He further states that it depends on the personal needs and preferences of an individual, and involves personal characteristics such as skills, ability and knowledge, and contextual characteristics of the teacher, such as availability of resources and socio-economic constraints.

Merriam and Baumgartner (2020) argue that self-directed teachers are more independent, and as such, they engage in independent projects, teacher-directed discussions and discovery learning. Furthermore, as Voskamp *et al.* (2022) state, self-directed teachers are reflective, critical thinkers, and self-regulated. They possess a deep understanding of self-knowledge; that is, they know their own needs, wants and interests. Self-knowledge determines the autonomy to maintain intention

and strive for the desired outcomes, to become lifelong learners, and to develop the ability for further educational growth (Wu *et al.*, 2023).

In self-directed learning processes of different phases can be distinguished (Louws *et al.*, 2017; Phillips *et al.*, 2015). These phases generally include a needs assessment, planning, engaging in learning, and evaluation. A learning need can be explained as a discrepancy or gap between the desired competencies and the teachers' current level of ability (Scott, 2020). Furthermore, comparing desired with current competencies suggests a deficiency perspective on learning by focusing on skills or knowledge a teacher has not mastered yet. We assume that learning needs not only relate to feelings of competence (i.e., sense of self-efficacy), but could also derive from professional growth, which means an inevitable and continuous process of learning (Louws *et al.*, 2017). The next section presents literature on factors that necessitate TLC programmes.

2.7 FACTORS THAT NECESSITATE TLC PROGRAMMES

According to Chow (2016), one of the factors that necessitate TLCs is school improvement and curriculum reforms. In the Singapore model, school leadership is supposed to support the process, and the teachers are expected to work in learning circles, including lesson study or action research (Ho *et al.*, 2020). In Shanghai, the teachers take part in teaching-research groups or lesson planning groups, formed specifically to plan lessons together, observe and critique one another's lessons, and share teaching resources (Postholm, 2018). The researchers found that the teachers in Shanghai were more positive about their collective working method because of their more collectivist orientation and lighter workload (Day *et al.*, 2023). Cheng and Wu (2016) assert that there is also an appraisal system that rewards group effort, thus valuing TLCs highly. The authors conclude that social norms and values influence how TLCs are valued in different educational contexts.

Previous research has shown that motivation to learn can differ for academic subjects and goals: therefore, the content does matter (Kulakow, 2020). Hence, we assume that teachers can have different reasons to learn about different domains (Louws *et al.*, 2017). Teachers' motivations for professional development have generally been founded on altruistic (e.g., to help learners) and intrinsic grounds (e.g., because they enjoy it), although external motivators (e.g., administrative support, qualifications) can be influential as well (Thomson & Turner, 2015). There are various studies on teachers' motivations for their careers (Ponnock *et al.*, 2018; Watt *et al.*, 2017), on whether teachers are willing to learn in a context of educational innovation (Beltman & Mansfield, 2018; Looi & Teh, 2015), and on different levels of engagement in organised professional development activities (Boylan, 2018). However, these studies rarely address

teachers' motivations for learning in their everyday work environment (Kyndt *et al.*, 2016). In a recent study on teachers' motivations for engaging in learning activities it was found that teachers with an extremely autonomous motivation profile engaged more often in professional learning activities than teachers with externally regulated motivation profiles (Bae *et al.*, 2020). The next section discusses the challenges in promoting TLCs.

2.8 CHALLENGES IN PROMOTING TLCs

According to Wickham and Mullen (2020), teachers who oversee TLCs may face numerous challenges when they have uncooperative staff members in the form of groups with different opinions. In a development of leadership capacity, it is difficult for teachers to promote TLCs (Botha, 2015). Botha says that allowing teachers to collaborate without the purpose of working together can result in meetings that are a waste of time. If teachers are promoted to leadership positions without the requisite training in the roles and responsibilities of good leadership, they will lack knowledge of how to promote TLCs (DuFour, *et al.*, 2016).

A study conducted in Taiwan reveals that TLCs have come across many challenges because of lack of time, finances, motivation and qualified leaders (Chuang & Ting, 2021; Wu *et al.*, 2021). First, giving teachers access to shared time is essential for the start of TLCs (Eshchar -Netz & Vedder-Weiss, 2021). It is difficult to find a shared time for teacher meetings in secondary schools because the majority of teachers serve as homeroom teachers or administrators (Darling-Hammond & Hyler, 2020; Walker *et al.*, 2021). Second, teachers' motivation is important in promoting TLCs because many teachers are currently undergoing emotional and physical strain in order to handle everyday responsibilities, and TLCs that require regular practice sharing could result in an additional burden for the teachers, lowering their interest to participate (Hamilton & VanderJagt, 2022). Third, TLC finances are primarily funded by municipalities through projects or parental clubs and those limited funds may not be able to sustainably support the TLCs (Mdodana-Zide & Mokhele-Makgalwa, 2021). Lastly, insufficient or unqualified TLC coaches or leaders can have a negative impact on TLC practice (Goldstein, 2020; Johnson, 2023). Teachers who join sessions of the TLC may receive insufficient feedback if appropriate TLC leaders are not present, potentially failing in achieving the standards for teachers' professional learning goals (Buchanan *et al.*, 2023).

Some teachers will continue to work in isolation instead of working collaboratively and interdependently with other teachers (DuFour *et al.*, 2016). Teachers may find the existence of competing tensions as an uncomfortable part of TLCs (Westheimer, 2019). Other leaders can become suspicious and intimidated by teachers' leadership qualities (Botha, 2015). Another

challenge can be to the harmonious execution of duties: staff's individual commitments and needs can interfere with the group tasks and mission, and this poses a challenge for the departmental head (Sallee, 2023). These authors attest to the fact that when there is a need, teachers can quickly help make sure that other teachers use their time effectively, and are aware that they are responsible for their decisions.

The lack of resources is a major problem that can hinder the establishment and sustenance of a learning community. Another challenge is that of individual initiatives and attitudes of the teachers (Chua *et al.*, 2020). Teachers' ability to dedicate extra time to participate in TLC activities and family commitments can become a challenge (Suprayogi & Valcke, 2016). According to Nurjaman (2023) human-resource challenges include low teacher pedagogic subject expertise. Without adequate training, teacher leadership in curriculum matters is nearly impossible (Hargreaves, 2021). Such teachers will lack the confidence to take risks, as well as the skill to improvise and be innovative (Tan, 2021). According to Du Plessis (2023), teachers' responsibilities as curriculum leaders will be confined to reading and explaining textbook material. Teacher scarcity (Wiggin *et al.*, 2021) causes overcrowded classes (Taole, 2022), increased teacher burden (Botha *et al.*, 2023), which is exacerbated by having to teach subjects in which they are not trained (Mankgele, 2023).

Fairman and Mackenzie (2015) concur with Cheng and Wu (2016) that some teachers do not see engaging in a TLC as an important factor, and are not willing to go an extra mile if it includes their own time. According to Kouzes and Posner (2018), if the staff do not have the drive and enthusiasm to express their personal opinions, and get excited about changes and new ways of doing things, the situation can be a challenge. Fillingham (2020) states that some school teachers do not commit to attend departmental group sessions organised at their schools owing to double booking, that can become a challenge. Even if they attend, many teachers, who may not participate, but just sit there and not contribute anything in a group, may be seen as visitors or intruders. Attendance at all professional learning sessions, if not done consistently by all, may present a challenge and can divide the group (Binmohsen & Abrahams, 2022). Some staff members see the TLC as an imposition rather than a development (Ndebele, 2022). Given these challenges, it is important to note that for departmental heads and teachers to deal with them, there are certain skills which they need to acquire to promote the establishment of TLCs.

The problem with TLCs in South African school context is that many teachers are appointed into leadership positions based mainly on their good behaviour and commitment, or their teaching experience, without being trained or developed in the roles and responsibilities of good leadership to train other teachers (DuFour *et al.*, 2016). Such a practice tends to result in leaders who lack

knowledge of how to create supportive professional structures to improve teaching and learning. The following section presents literature on Consumer Studies in the South African context.

2.9 RETHINKING CONSUMER STUDIES IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

Research has shown that Consumer Studies as a subject can contribute to the development of fundamental entrepreneurial skills and knowledge by engaging learners with entrepreneurial activities in schools (Du Toit, 2021, 2023; Ngwenya & Shange, 2019; Umalusi, 2014). Consumer Studies was phased in the curriculum to replace Home Economics as a subject in the FET Phase in South African secondary schools in 2006 (Du Toit & Booyse, 2015). This change was intended to better align the Consumer Studies curriculum with international curricula and the changing needs of individuals in contemporary times. The focus of the subject shifted from the needs and wants of the family to the needs and wants of the consumer in the 21st century (DBE, 2011). The consumer and entrepreneurship are regarded as the predominant principles in the Consumer Studies curriculum (Du Toit, 2016, Mbhenyane, 2019). These principles are viewed as vital in the inclusion of the curriculum since South Africa is faced with challenges of insufficient trained teachers and resources and an increased level of unemployment (Mlambo & Adetiba, 2020). Although Consumer Studies is aimed at supporting entrepreneurship development, the teaching and learning of the subject is plagued with challenges (Ngwenya & Shange, 2019). The efficiency of Consumer Studies in developing an entrepreneurial mind-set among youth will be compromised if the problems that affect the learning of the subject in schools are not acknowledged and addressed (Biney, 2023). TLCs provided the platform to train and support teachers to carry out their duties effectively (Chow, 2016).

The issue of continuing professional development is scarce among Consumer Studies teachers owing to the evolution of Consumer Studies in the South African school context (Billore & Anisimova, 2021). According to Ovenden-Hope and Passy (2023), in order to support the potential positive impacts, the subject might have, a number of elements need to be in position. Such elements include, amongst other things, well-trained and qualified teachers, access to resources, transferability of learned content, and curriculum which effectively supports teaching and learning in the subject.

DBE (2011) assert that Consumer Studies focuses on the development of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes in learners to become responsible and informed consumers of food, clothing, housing, furnishings and household equipment. Du Toit and Booyse (2015) identify various learning outcomes of Consumer Studies among learners, including management of the consumer's role, adequate knowledge of consumer choice, responsible use of resources, and

production and marketing. Since “the consumer” and “entrepreneurship” are intertwined in all the topics in the subject, the competencies underpinning Consumer Studies are that learners need to have practical ability as well as the entrepreneurial knowledge and skills needed to become informed and responsible consumers of goods and services. The important aspects of the subject include entrepreneurship and the production and marketing of quality products (DBE, 2011). The subject keeps learners abreast of current consumer issues, which include food and nutrition, and modification of products in order to suit consumer needs (Ronto *et al.*, 2017).

“In the practical component of the subject learners have opportunities to produce and market different products” (DBE, 2011, p. 8). This description shows that Consumer Studies is a complex subject, slanted (as has been noted above) towards consumer issues rather than the family, and aimed at developing and marketing products. The inclusion of a significant section on entrepreneurship education (that was not at all part of the Home Economics curriculum), and the potential value of entrepreneurship for individuals and societies reflect the intent of Consumer Studies to align to the needs of South Africa and its citizens.

Learning in the Consumer Studies curriculum consists of two broad sections: theory content and practical skills development. Approximately 62.5% of the total time allocated to teaching Consumer Studies focuses on teaching theory, and the balance of 37.5% is spent on developing skills and knowledge as part of the practical production section (Umalusi, 2014). The theory content in Consumer Studies is grouped into seven topics, namely: “The consumer”; “Food and nutrition”; “Entrepreneurship”; “Design elements and principles”; “Fibres and fabrics”; “Clothing”; and “Housing” (DBE, 2011, p. 8). Curriculum analysis (Umalusi, 2014) indicates that the time allocated to each of the seven main topics differs considerably.

The consumer and consumer behaviour are the common thread linking all these diverse topics, as is also evident from the subject description in the curriculum document. The emphasis on the topic “The consumer” is justified by the focus and description of Consumer Studies, clearly accentuating the new direction the subject is taking to address the needs of society. Nevertheless, each topic can stand alone in terms of content (Umalusi, 2014). As mentioned above, just more than a third (about 37.5%) of the total time allocated to Consumer Studies is spent on practicals, including practical tasks (skills development), as well as the theory of the practical work for the option selected by the school (Umalusi, 2014). Consumer Studies offers five practical options (the Production of Food, Clothing, Soft Furnishings, Knitting and Crocheting, or Patchwork Quilting by Hand), whereas Home Economics only had two options (Cooking or Needlework) (DBE, 2011; 2013). The two options “Knitting and Crocheting” and “Patchwork Quilting by Hand” were included in the curriculum to allow schools with limited resources (materials,

equipment, access to electricity, and so on) to offer Consumer Studies, thereby including schools in poorer communities, and clearly addressing the needs of the society. Nonetheless, a lack of resources still hampers the learning (and potential entrepreneurial learning) of learners in disadvantaged schools (Du Toit, 2023). The next section, I present literature on pedagogical guidance for Consumer Studies teachers.

2.9.1 Pedagogical guidance for Consumer Studies teachers

Owing to the subject's complexity and wide variety of diverse topics, together with practical skills required for the production section of the subject (Umalusi, 2014), literature on studies conducted in South Africa in Consumer Studies suggests that the subject requires the implementation of a comprehensive and integrated approach to teaching and learning (Du Toit, 2018). Nonetheless, the Consumer Studies CAPS curriculum does not provide clear pedagogical instructions to assist teachers in effectively implementing it. In another study, Du Toit (2016) notes that the former Department of Education provided appropriate learning and teaching support material (LTSM) to all schools during content workshops, with the aim of ensuring the effective implementation of the CAPS.

Consumer Studies teachers need clear, unambiguous and detailed pedagogical guidance to facilitate its effective teaching (Du Toit, 2021). Pedagogy relates to how teaching and learning should be constructed in a subject, or how teaching and learning is intended to happen in the classroom (Umalusi, 2014). The dearth of pedagogical guidance available to South African Consumer Studies teachers has been pointed out in a number of studies (Du Toit & Kempen, 2020, Du Toit & Booyse, 2015; Umalusi, 2014). These studies all report that the CAPS for Consumer Studies does not include general or subject-specific pedagogical guidance.

This means that Consumer Studies teachers will probably not be knowledgeable about the optimal teacher-learning strategies for the subject, and how to implement such strategies effectively (Du Toit *et al.*, 2023). Teacher “training manuals” were developed to use in teachers’ orientation to the CAPS curriculum (DBE, 2015), but on closer inspection, these documents were content-based, and included practical no pedagogical guidance or principles that would support teachers in how to teach (rather than what to teach). Severe criticism of the proliferation of “curriculum documents” in the previous South African school (RNCS) curriculum led to the recommendation that only one CAPS document should be developed for each subject (by phase), which should provide “the introduction of yet a third document, subject assessment guidelines compounded the confusion, since teachers had to refer to three documents which, in many cases, did not speak to

one another.” (Swart *et al.*, 2014, p. 22). They further mentioned that a “single, coherent document” per subject should be developed in the CAPS (Swart *et al.*, 2014, p.22). Subject-specific pedagogical guidance and teaching methods are core components of a curriculum (Vitikka *et al.*, 2016), and should form part of the intended curriculum as that would provide insight into how the implementation thereof is supposed to be approached.

The lack of guidance in the curriculum document is especially problematic when teachers with no Consumer Studies training must teach the subject (Du Toit & Kempen, 2020). The same is true for Home Economics-trained teachers that teach Consumer Studies. Although some of the content is similar, the approach to and focus of the two subjects are divergent, including a large section of entrepreneurship education in Consumer Studies that was not included in the Home Economics syllabus, and for which Home Economics teachers were not trained. The following section is the concluding remarks.

2.10 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter has discussed the literature that has been reviewed on the topic. The intention of reviewing literature was to gain an understanding of how teachers engage in continuing professional learning through TLCs in their schools and district. The chapter has referred to both national and international literature on the study focus, and has concluded by discussing the relevance of Consumer Studies teachers in TLCs. The next chapter provides the theoretical framework that underpins the study.

CHAPTER THREE

CONSUMER STUDIES TEACHER LEARNING IN TLCs: TOWARDS A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter provided a detailed review of literature on how various authors have made contributions to the understanding of Consumer Studies teachers' collaborative engagements or TLCs. In doing so, the review focused, among other things, on the distinction between professional learning communities and TLCs, the components, forms and roles of TLCs, challenges in promoting TLCs and factors that necessitate TLC programmes. In this chapter, I present the theoretical framework that informs the study. This chapter presents background information on the theories that underpin this study. The chapter explains the meaning of theoretical framework, gives an overview of it, and the justification for using it, the limitations of the theory, and finally a summary of the chapter.

Academic research can analyse the topic at hand and gain a deeper understanding of it using theory which offers a framework for doing so. Theory in academic research provides an avenue for solving real-world problems (Gray, 2021). Varpio *et al.* (2020) admit that a theoretical framework in academic research is used to bridge the gap between independent and dependent variables in scholarly research.

The relevant literature indicates that there is no single universal definition for the term “theoretical framework” (Owolabi, 2016). Varpio *et al.* (2020) indicate that before “theoretical framework” can be defined it is necessary to define “theory”. According to Denzin (2017), examination of various definitions of the concept of theory reveals that some definitions given to theory are narrow and specific, while others are too broad and general. Picciano (2017, p.166) defines theory as something that “describes, explains, and predicts phenomena.” This implies that theory allows for better insight into the real meaning of a social phenomenon through the provision of illuminating interpretations, and by guiding researchers about the issue under investigation. Repko and Szostak (2020) maintain that theory in academic research is a systematic abstraction of a reality that serves some purpose in achieving research objectives. Kivunja (2018) states that a theory provides a better avenue for understanding a phenomenon that can be investigated through academic research. From all these, a theory in academic research can be described as a concept that is interrelated, that proposes and explains the relationship among variables in research. In another sense, theory can be seen as an assumption or research hypothesis that has the intention to explain a phenomenon (Sandberg & Alvesson, 2021). It is concluded above that

there is a strong relationship between theory and academic research. In academic research, theory is the foundation on which research is built (Ondry & Alivisatos, 2021). This is because the inclusion of theory in academic research enhances the significance of that research (Ozili, 2020). It suggests that theory and research are interdependent.

Le Roux and Pupion (2022) identify certain characteristics that must feature in any given definitions of theoretical framework. These include the need to relate to the research questions or research hypothesis. The definition must be relevant to the theoretical model, it must be in line with research literature and study methodology. Barrow *et al.* (2022) indicate that a theoretical framework in academic research provides relevant assumptions and explanations in research. Nelson (2017) argues that the use of theory in academic research provides clarity and makes study more significant. A theoretical framework provides a better guideline for research design and effective interpretation of data (Tracy, 2019). In this regard, the scholars argue that the theoretical framework of a study connects the researcher to existing literature, and as a result, provides a structure that can hold or support a research study.

The following section discusses the theory of Community of Practice (CoP).

3.2 THE THEORY OF COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE (COP)

This section outlines the theory that framed the study. The discussion will ultimately demonstrate the applicability of this theory to the study.

This study is located in a theory of the CoP. The theory of CoP was the original work of Etienne Wenger and Jean Lave which challenged the age-old notions about the learning process as solely resting with the individual (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

3.2.1 Theory of CoP by Wenger

Before defining CoPs, it is important to examine the meaning of community and practice. Rus and Orel (2015) maintain that human beings function as a community because people relate with one another through amicable relationships which are based on mutual engagement that binds them together into a social group or entity. These groups of people interact on a regular basis, and at the same time engage in joint activities that they build on trust.

The concept of CoP came into existence in 1991 through Lave and Wenger (1991). It notes that for effective learning to take place among teachers, there is a need to move from psychological and cognitive explanations of learning to a more social and situated learning that will focus on

the individual. Wenger (2010) notes that many professionals have adopted CoP in their professional development. The essential reasons for their joining the community is genuinely to care about their professional development, and a desire to learn through social interaction.

According to Wenger (1998, p. 5), the term “community” is a way of talking about a social configuration in which our enterprises are defined as worth pursuing and our participation is recognised as competence. Wenger and Snyder (2000, p.4) opine that a CoP is “a network of people who share a common interest in a specific area of knowledge or competence, and are willing to work and learn together over a period of time to develop and share that knowledge.” CoPs are groups of people that have a particular interest or link who have worked for a period of time together and are ready to share. This suggests that through CoPs, individuals on the same platform are able to share historical and social resources, frameworks and perspectives that can sustain mutual engagement in action.

Wenger built CoP theory on situated learning theory in his book. The concept of CoP is borrowed from various disciplines that include education, sociology and social theory, and focuses on socialisation and learning, and at the same time on individual identity development (Duff, 2019). CoPs became associated with knowledge management as professionals began to see them as a way of developing social capital, acquiring new knowledge and stimulating innovation, or a way of sharing tacit knowledge in the school environment.

Wenger (1998) indicates that, either formally or informally, teachers, who include Consumer Studies teachers, need to increase knowledge, and engage in various professional developments that will make them more effective in the teaching and learning process. CoP theory is one medium in which teachers can develop themselves professionally. Wenger *et al.* (2002, p. 5) describe CoPs as “a group of people who share a concern for subject matters and exchange ideas about a particular matter”. In 1998, however, Wenger extended the concept beyond the novice-expert relationship by examining the interaction between individuals and the participation of those who are engaged in creating channels for sharing and disseminating knowledge (Snyder, 2023).

There are various definitions of CoP, but they all have similar interpretations and features (Vangrieken *et al.*, 2017). Venkatraman and Venkatraman (2018) state that CoPs are people that organise themselves as a group with the intention to share ideas, interest in a problem, and practice. White (2019, p.255) definition of a CoP will be more useful for this study. He describes it as “a group of professionals informally bound to one another through exposure to a common class of problems, common pursuit of solutions, and thereby themselves embodying a store of

knowledge”. This definition will be adopted for this research because it looks at CoPs as groups of professionals that relate through their vocations. The definition is relevant to the study because Consumer Studies teachers who are professionals will be used for the research. These teachers may have similar issues and challenges, which need similar attention and solutions.

CoPs have been adopted in a variety of contexts to bring like-minded individuals together to share knowledge and develop expertise (Darwin, 2017). The essence of the process is to promote good practice through knowledge creation in a particular area (Nansubuga *et al.*, 2019). Teachers usually want to have better understanding of their professional practice, but they may not be in an enabling environment to encourage this. However, professional development can be achieved through CoP, particularly among teachers.

According to Strang (2016), there are examples of CoPs in various establishments which have been called by different names, such as learning communities (by the Hewlett-Packard Company), and family groups (Xerox Corporation). At the World Bank they are called peer groups, and at British Petroleum a CoP is called a knowledge network (Bond, 2020). In brief, the main objective of CoP is to bring groups of people working in the same profession to share knowledge and promote innovation. Milara *et al.* (2020) maintain that when a CoP is established in a school environment, it normally leads to a situation where teachers and school management are satisfied with the arrangement, because it always brings a better result from learners. In addition, the CoP members enjoy the pleasure of working and doing something with a desired outcome to bring about better results.

Wenger’s work (1998, p.4) is based on four premises:

- A central aspect of learning is that people are social beings.
- Knowledge is about competence with respect to “valued enterprises”.
- Knowing is about active engagement in the world.
- Meaning is ultimately what learning produces.

A CoP, according to Wenger (1998), provides opportunity for CoPs to provide resolutions to institutionally generated conflicts. In addition, Wenger (1998) supports a communal memory that allows individuals to do their work without needing to know everything.

3.2.2 Theories upon which the research project was constructed

The theoretical framework of the study is based on Wenger’s (1998) theory of CoP. He developed the theory from the rudiments of social learning theory developed by Bandura in 1997.

Wenger (1998) notes that active participation in social learning is very important for individual members of communities and organisations. He states the importance of social learning in communities as follows:

- In communities, it shows that learning is an issue of improving their practice and ensuring new generations and members.
- In regard to organisations, it indicates that it is related to the issue of sustaining the interconnected CoPs in which organisations know what they need to know, and this will make them effective and valuable organisations.

3.2.3 Social capital

The social capital theory is related to CoP. The literature indicates that social capital is described as accumulated wealth of experience that an individual is having and ready to relate it with his or her professional colleagues (Burt, 2019). Social capital involves trust, openness, and a willingness to share information, ideas and opportunities in a particular field (Burton & Vu, 2021; Lefebvre *et al.*, 2016). Pisani and Micheletti (2020) maintain that social capital can be divided into five, which include informal channels, social norms identity, obligations, expectations and moral infrastructure. Rayamajhee and Bohara (2021) note that social capital allows people to resolve collective problems that relate to subject matter in particular disciplines. This implies that social capital theory helps in preserving social norms in various communities and in reducing delinquent and selfish behaviour.

The next section presents the elements of CoP as a theory of learning.

3.2.4 The elements of the CoP as a theory of learning

The four main interrelated dimensions that seek to elucidate the learning process include “Practice, Community, Meaning and Identity” (Wenger, 1998). Consequently, in understanding the learning process through the lens of the CoP theory, the above-mentioned interrelated dimensions or components have been depicted in the diagram below, and are subsequently discussed. The diagram is illustrated below.

The components of the CoP as a theory of learning.

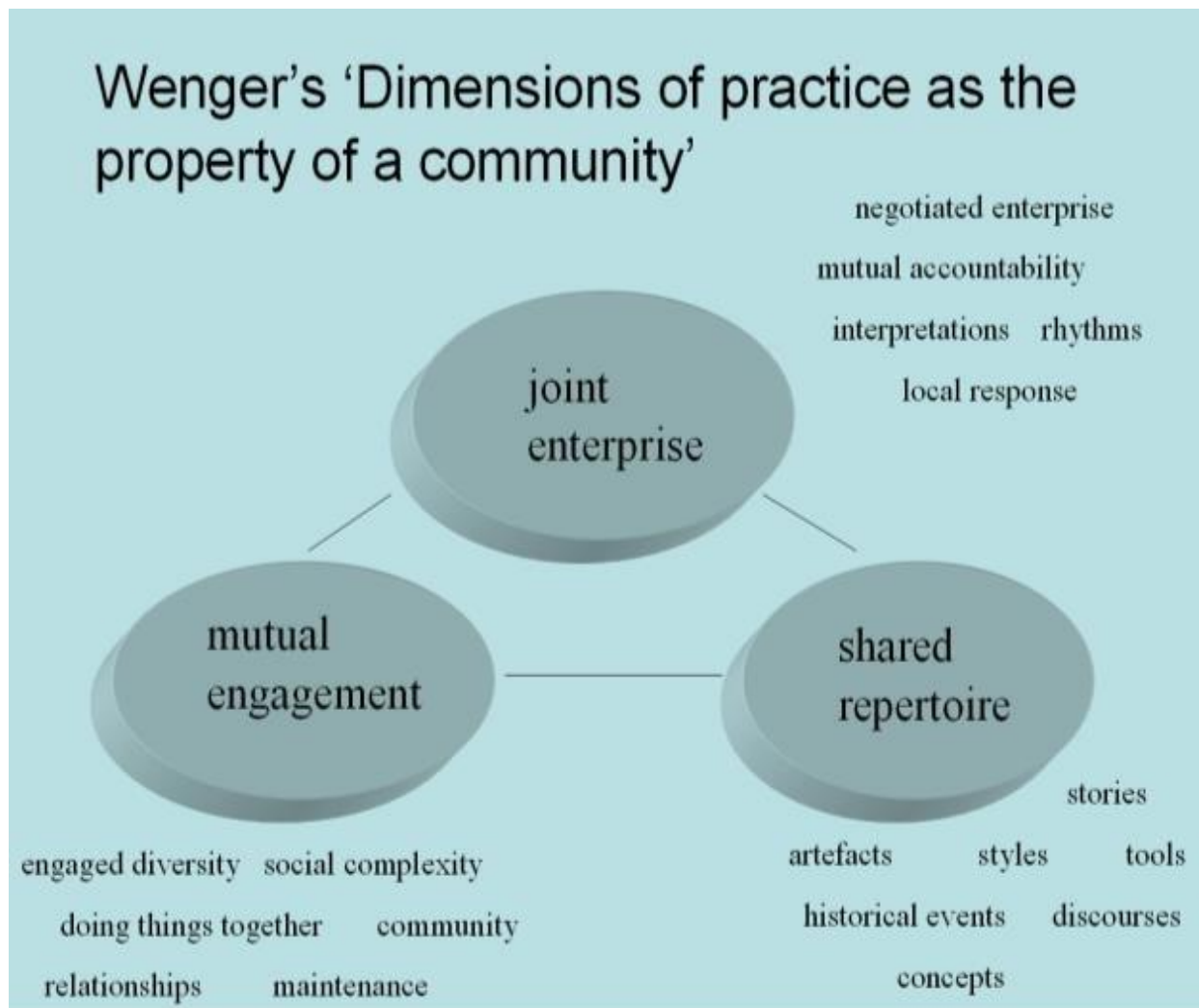


Fig. 3.1: Property of CoP (Wenger, 1998)

3.2.5 Dimensions of practice as the property of a community adopted from Wenger's CoP theory.

According to Wenger (1998), the creation, maintenance and sustainability of CoPs depend on three important components: mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire. It entails the participation of CoP members in an activity that has been widely agreed upon. Since the emphasis is on activity, practice is seen as the outcome of people engaging in activities that they negotiate with one another, rather than as an abstract thing.

However, the quality of learning for Consumer Studies teachers in a CoP depends largely on participants choosing to contribute actively to the development of community. In addition, there is a need for members to make creative use of their respective repertoires (Wenger, 1998).

The next section discusses the first dimension, which is mutual engagement.

3.2.5.1 Mutual engagement

Mutual engagement refers to the active participation, collaboration and interaction among community members in a CoP (Akinyemi *et al.*, 2019). It involves the collective efforts and shared commitment of teachers in the CoP to collaborate, exchange knowledge, and contribute to the collective learning and development of the community, which can be applied to Consumer Studies' classroom teaching and learning.

3.2.5.2 Key aspects of mutual engagement in a CoP

Active participation in mutual engagement in a CoP requires active participation from all members (Mohammed Alrubian, 2022). This involves contributing ideas, sharing experiences, and offering insights related to the community's domain of interest among Consumer Studies teachers. Active participation creates a sense of involvement, ownership and shared responsibility within the CoP. Members engage in knowledge exchange and sharing to facilitate the exchange and sharing of knowledge among community members (Nicolini *et al.*, 2022). It involves discussions, dialogue and the sharing of resources, best practices, and lessons learned among the teachers. Knowledge exchange enhances the collective expertise and promotes the development and dissemination of knowledge within the CoP. Collaboration and co-creation are encouraged to collaborate and co-create knowledge and practices (Thomson *et al.*, 2022). Community members come together to work on joint projects, develop shared resources, or solve common problems. Collaborative efforts leverage the diverse perspectives, skills and expertise in the CoP to achieve collective goals.

Networking and relationship building are for mutual engagement, which fosters networking and relationship building among community members (Luhanga *et al.*, 2022). It provides opportunities for individuals to establish connections, build trust, and develop professional relationships within the CoP. These relationships contribute to a sense of belonging and facilitate ongoing interactions and knowledge sharing. The CoP allows mentoring and support which involves mentoring and providing support to fellow community members (Mercieca, 2017). Experienced practitioners in the CoP may guide and mentor newcomers or less experienced individuals. Mentoring fosters the transfer of knowledge, skill development, and the growth of new practitioners within the community. There is constructive feedback and reflection to provide members with constructive feedback and engagement in reflective practices (Orakcı, 2021). Consumer Studies teachers can offer feedback on ideas, practices and work in progress, contributing to continuous improvement and learning in the CoP. Reflection helps individuals

critically examine their own practices, and encourages self-directed learning. Hence there is active learning and development in a CoP to create an environment of professional development (Tangney, 2018). Through interactions and engagement, Consumer Studies teacher learning community members acquire new knowledge, skills and insights. Active learning occurs through observing, asking questions, experimenting and reflecting on experiences within the community. Mutual engagement is a key element that underpins the functioning and effectiveness of a CoP, which can significantly impact on Consumer Studies teachers' professional needs. It promotes in them a sense of shared ownership, collaboration and continuous learning among community members. Through mutual engagement, the CoP becomes a vibrant and dynamic space for knowledge exchange, collective problem-solving, and the advancement of professional practices. Thus, CoP through the lens of mutual engagement not only looks at the aggregate of people of a particular social category, or who talks with whom in a network of interpersonal relations, but focus on a collective engagement which requires interactions around what the members of the community intend doing. The first feature of CoP among Consumer Studies teachers is that there must be mutual engagement. Pennington *et al.* (2020) indicate that mutual engagement is primarily about the need for Consumer Studies teachers to negotiate with one another through effective sharing of knowledge and experience. This is to sustain relations of engagement organised around the purpose for creating the community (Wenger, 1998). For effective mutual agreement to take place among Consumer Studies teachers, it is necessary for them to have active participants on the platform, otherwise the passive members may be formally or informally left out of CoP (Pennington *et al.*, 2020). Mutual engagement is the process by which members of a society create rules and work together to form cooperative relationships. These connections serve as the social glue that holds the community's members together (Wenger, 1998).

Relationships needed for the CoP's operation are based on reciprocal participation. It entails the participation of CoP members in an activity that has been widely agreed upon. Since the emphasis is on activity, practice is seen as the outcome of people's actions rather than an abstract concept, and participation in discussions with one another about their activities.

The next section discusses joint enterprise as the second dimension.

3.2.5.3 Joint enterprise

According to Wenger (1998), joint enterprise is the process that maintains and sustains the existence of CoPs. It involves negotiation and accountability – a conscious concern of members about their engagement in CoPs. They negotiate ways of working towards communally agreed

enterprise for the benefit of their CoP (Wenger, 1998). Through joint interaction the community shares knowledge of what unites them via their contacts; this is referred to as the joint enterprise. The cooperative enterprise is sometimes referred to as the "domain" of the community and is (re)negotiated by its members.

Johannesson (2022) asserts that the concept of joint enterprise refers to the shared goals, purposes and projects that bring community members together. It represents the collective endeavour that binds individuals within the CoP, and drives their collaborative efforts towards a common outcome. The joint enterprise is a fundamental element of a CoP as it provides a sense of direction, fosters mutual engagement, and promotes collective learning and action.

3.2.5.3.1 Key aspects of joint enterprise in a CoP

Shared Purpose and Goals

A CoP is formed around a shared purpose or common domain of interest (Mthembu, 2020). The joint enterprise reflects the overarching goals and objectives that community members seek to achieve collectively. This shared purpose provides a unifying focus and a sense of meaning and relevance to the activities and interactions in the CoP.

Mutual Engagement and Collaboration

The joint enterprise encourages mutual engagement and collaboration among community members (Jemielniak & Przegalinska, 2020). It motivates individuals to actively participate, contribute their expertise, and work together towards the shared goals. The joint enterprise creates a sense of belonging and collective responsibility, fostering a culture of cooperation and knowledge sharing in the CoP.

Co-creation of Knowledge and Practices

The joint enterprise in a CoP drives the co-creation of knowledge and the development of shared practices (Bickle *et al.*, 2021). Community members come together to explore, exchange ideas, and collectively develop innovative solutions or approaches related to the shared domain. Through collaborative efforts, the CoP creates new knowledge and refines existing practices that contribute to the advancement of the joint enterprise.

Collective Learning and Problem-solving

The joint enterprise provides a context for collective learning and problem solving in the CoP (Mavri *et al.*, 2021). Community members actively engage in dialogue, share experiences, and seek solutions to common challenges relating to their shared goals. Through the joint enterprise, the CoP becomes a dynamic learning environment where members can access diverse perspectives, expertise and resources to address complex problems and drive continuous improvement.

Boundary Spanning and Interconnectedness

The joint enterprise can extend beyond the boundaries of the CoP, fostering connections and collaborations with external stakeholders (Mthembu, 2020). Community members may engage in activities that involve partnering with other communities, organisations or individuals to achieve shared objectives. This boundary spanning promotes knowledge exchange, innovation and the cross-pollination of ideas and practices.

Evolution and Adaptation

The joint enterprise in a CoP is not fixed, but evolves over time. As the community progresses and responds to changing contexts and needs, the joint enterprise may undergo adaptations and refinements (Bickle *et al.*, 2021). Community members actively contribute to shaping the joint enterprise, ensuring its continued relevance and alignment with their collective aspirations.

The joint enterprise in a CoP serves as a driving force that mobilises community members towards common goals and fosters collaborative learning and action (Jemielniak & Przegalinska, 2020). It provides a sense of purpose, shared identity, and a framework for the co-creation and application of knowledge in the CoP. The joint enterprise promotes engagement, commitment and the development of a collective identity among community members, enhancing the overall effectiveness and impact of the CoP.

Annala and Mäkinen (2017) list basic features of joint enterprise to include negotiated goals. Sometimes this joint enterprise entails elements that are not exactly what management intends. The group develops a conception of their joint goals through mutual engagement. In part the goals of the group are determined by the larger structure in which they are embedded. But the group itself creates its own identity, goals, enterprise and mutual accountability. This points to the fact that people are responsible to each other for sharing information and making each other's lives easier, and they enforce this themselves when it really is a CoP. In a community of people or teachers, in the context of the CoPs theory, it is what Wenger (1998) describes as the negotiation

of a joint enterprise. According to Penninngton *et al.* (2020), effective joint enterprise is very necessary for realisation of the objective of being a member of a CoP. They say that joint enterprise among Consumer Studies teachers means the manner in which they are engaged and working toward achieving common objectives among the members of the CoP. In the realisation of these, specific and consistent coordination of sustained effort is necessary in promoting joint enterprise among Consumer Studies teachers. Wenger (1998) notes that there must be fruitful and sustained interpersonal engagement among Consumer Studies teachers that will prevent conflict with and tension on CoP platforms. For effective joint enterprise among Consumer Studies teachers there must be mutual engagement which will reflect in their sharing repertoires. Joint enterprise permits Consumer Studies teachers to be self-developed by learning from experienced teachers.

In the next section, I present a last dimension: shared repertoire.

3.2.6. Shared repertoire

The concept of shared repertoire refers to the collection of resources, tools, practices and knowledge that is collectively developed and shared among the community members (Fracchiolla *et al.*, 2020). It represents the shared pool of resources that contributes to the community's identity, learning and problem-solving capabilities. The shared repertoire is a critical aspect of a CoP as it facilitates collaboration, supports learning, and promotes the development of a collective body of knowledge (Xue *et al.*, 2021).

3.2.6.1 Key aspects of shared repertoire in a CoP

Common language and Symbols

A shared repertoire includes a common language and symbols that are specific to the CoP (Mercier & Roche, 2022). This shared vocabulary allows community members to communicate effectively, convey complex ideas, and express nuanced concepts. The use of a common language and common symbols enhances understanding and fosters a sense of belonging and cohesion in the community.

Artifacts and Tools

CoPs develop and share artifacts and tools that support their practices and activities (Wang & Wang, 2021). These can include physical tools, digital platforms, templates, guidelines, checklists, manuals, or any other resources that facilitate the community's work. Shared artifacts

and tools provide practical support, promote consistency, and enable the transfer of knowledge and practices among members.

Shared Practices and Ritual

CoPs develop shared practices and rituals that reflect their ways of working, problem-solving and collaborating (Mohajan, 2017). These practices can include regular meetings, knowledge-sharing sessions, mentoring programmes, story-telling sessions, or other activities that reinforce the community's values and promote learning and interaction among members.

Tacit Knowledge and Expertise

CoPs often possess valuable tacit knowledge, which is knowledge that is difficult to articulate or codify, but is essential for effective practice (Stanca *et al.*, 2022). The shared repertoire includes the tacit knowledge and expertise that community members possess, and can collectively access and leverage. This tacit knowledge is transferred through observation, apprenticeship and active participation in the community's activities.

Case Studies and Stories

CoPs frequently share case studies, success stories, and narratives that illustrate best practices, lessons learned, and examples of effective problem solving (Nicolini *et al.*, 2022). These stories serve as valuable learning resources, providing practical insights and guidance to community members. They also contribute to the collective memory and shared understanding of the CoP.

Collaborative Projects and Outputs

CoPs often engage in collaborative projects or produce shared outputs that contribute to their shared repertoire (Fracchiolla *et al.*, 2020). These can include joint publications, research findings, guidelines, toolkits or other outputs that document and disseminate the community's knowledge and achievements. Collaborative projects foster cooperation, creativity and the co-creation of knowledge in the CoP.

The shared repertoire in a CoP evolves and grows over time as Consumer Studies teachers engage in ongoing interactions, learning, and collaborative activities. It serves as a valuable resource for both new and existing teachers, enabling them to draw upon the collective wisdom and experience of the community, which can be applied to their classroom practices. The shared repertoire strengthens the identity, cohesion and learning capabilities of the CoP, fostering a sense of collective ownership and collaboration among its members. Furthermore, the concept of shared

repertoire has been described as the common resources and jargon that members of a community draw on to negotiate or transfer meaning (Wenger, 1998). Pennington *et al.* (2020) assert that sharing repertoires is how Consumer Studies teachers in the community accomplish their goals. These include their tools, common professional language and their routines in the exercise of mutual engagement. This points to the fact that a shared repertoire is a collection of materials created by the community as part of its practice. It is used to further their joint endeavour, and can have both literal and symbolic connotations. Three aspects of shared repertoire are worth noting, according to Cho (2016). They include shared history, richness and ambiguity.

Lave and Wenger (1991) assert that the functions of leaders, champions and facilitators must be anchored in the community for the administration of CoPs to be effective. A leader must be someone that is very reliable and resourceful within the organisation. He or she will be responsible for passing information to the group members, recruiting for the group and providing necessary resources for the group when occasion demands. A senior teacher who is experienced in teaching and learning Consumer Studies needs to occupy the post. Wenger *et al.* (2011) maintain that members of a CoP must join the group on their own volition; they must not be forced. They clearly state that professionals in the same profession automatically belong to the same CoP. This implies that a CoP is a homogenous community that consists of members from a particular discipline. Cundill *et al.* (2015) argue that in a CoP the constructs of individuals are always integrated with constructs of the group, and effective learning is characterised as a process of active participation and engagement in shared activities. These are about the acquisition and ultimately the transformation of both the organising conceptual theories and the patterns of discourse of the particular group that are willing to learn together. Smith *et al.* (2017) maintain that in promoting CoPs among professionals there is a need for internet services that will facilitate effective communication among members, effective interaction in which the geographical limitation will not be a barrier in communication. Linking CoP with education is a way of promoting global knowledge-intensiveness in the educational environment.

There are many characteristics of CoPs. Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) note that people that belong to CoPs have a sense of connection. CoPs can take place within or across enterprises or organisations, and through geographical boundaries (Nistor *et al.*, 2015; Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). The literature indicates that some CoPs are in similar professions - Consumer Studies teachers, other academic staff - and some are heterogeneous: they have people with different professional backgrounds, such as lecturers, medical doctors and lawyers (Wenger *et al.*, 2002). CoPs are always self-sufficient: they can stand on their own

without organisational support (Wenger, 1998). Wenger states that CoPs that have access to external bodies' support may get assistance in terms of facilities and infrastructure. CoPs are voluntary, and their success depends on their ability to generate enough excitement among themselves. Relevance and ability to attract and engage members and management support are two of the factors that can make CoPs successful (Barnard *et al.*, 2022). Many CoPs are small, with few specialists, while others may have hundreds of people (Wenger *et al.*, 2011). According to Wenger (1998), there are three structural elements of a CoP: mutual engagement (what people do together as part of practice), joint enterprise (a set of problems and topics that they care about), and shared repertoire (the concepts and artifacts that they create).

The next section presents the concept of meaning through the lens of CoP theory.

3.2.7 The concept of “meaning” through the lens of the CoP theory

Pun (2022) argues that in the context of the concept of a CoP, meaning refers to the shared understanding and interpretation of knowledge, practices and experiences within the community. This implies that the Consumer Studies teachers need to understand and interpret appropriate knowledge, practices and experiences within the community of professionals they belong to, which can enhance their classroom practices. Similarly, Petropoulou and Paschou (2022) posit that meaning is co-constructed through social interactions and dialogue among members, and it plays a crucial role in shaping the identity and purpose of the community. Hence the key aspects of meaning are critical to CoP in understanding and applying knowledge and skills to Consumer Studies teachers' classroom practices.

3.2.7.1 Key aspects of meaning in a CoP: shared language and technology

CoPs develop their own specialised language and terminology that reflect the unique knowledge and practices of the community (Cho, 2016). This shared language facilitates effective communication and understanding among members, enabling them to express complex ideas and concepts more precisely.

Interpretation of Practices

CoPs engage in ongoing discussions and interactions to interpret and make sense of their practices. Members collectively interpret the meaning, significance and relevance of particular practices, tools and approaches (Adler *et al.*, 2024). This interpretation process contributes to the refinement and evolution of shared practices within the Consumer Studies TLC.

Sense-making and Learning

Meaning-making in a CoP involves sense-making, which refers to the process of creating meaning out of new experiences or information (Xue *et al.*, 2021). Through collective sense making, Consumer Studies teachers can make sense of new knowledge, experiences and challenges, integrating them into their existing knowledge base and practice repertoire. Meaning is not fixed or static. It is continuously negotiated through discussions, debates and interactions among members (Park & Schallert, 2020). Various perspectives and viewpoints can be explored by Consumer Studies teachers, leading to the negotiation and construction of shared meanings. This negotiation process contributes to the development of a collective understanding and the resolution of disagreements or conflicts within the community.

Contextualised and Situated Knowledge

The meaning in a CoP is context-specific and situated within the community's particular domain, practice and social context (Xue *et al.*, 2021). Since the shared understanding and meaning which emerges from the specific experiences, cultural norms and social dynamics of the community that are related to Consumer Studies; the context provides a framework for interpreting and applying knowledge within the teachers' classroom activities and interactions.

Identity and Membership

Meaning in a CoP also relates to the collective identity and shared membership of the community (Noprival *et al.*, 2022). Members develop a sense of belonging and shared purpose, aligning their individual identities with the community's values, goals and ways of knowing. This shared meaning reinforces a sense of community and can encourage active participation and engagement among Consumer Studies teachers.

In overall, the concept of meaning in a CoP highlights the dynamic and social nature of knowledge creation, interpretation and application that Consumer Studies teachers can benefit from. It emphasises the importance of shared understanding, interpretation and negotiation among members as they engage in collaborative learning, sense-making and practice development within the community.

In the next section, I discuss the concept of identity through the lens of CoP theory.

3.2.8 The concept of “Identity” through the lens of CoP theory

Abbott and Lee (2022) argue that in the context of CoP theory, the concept of identity refers to how individuals define themselves and are defined by others in the community. Identity is shaped by the shared practices, values, beliefs and relationships that exist within the CoP. Hence it plays a central role in fostering a sense of belonging, influencing individual behaviours and shaping the social dynamics of the community.

3.2.8.1 Key aspects of identity in a CoP

Participatory Identity

In a CoP, individuals develop a sense of identity through active participation and engagement in the community's activities (Kumar *et al.*, 2023). Through their involvement, members establish themselves as practitioners, and are recognised by others as legitimate participants in the community. Thus the Consumer Studies teachers' participatory identity is constructed through interactions, contributions and the sharing of their expertise and knowledge with their community.

Community Membership

Identity within a CoP is closely tied to membership in and affiliation to the community (Cho, 2016). Individuals develop a sense of belonging and identify themselves as members of the CoP, adopting its values, practices and norms. Membership provides a social identity that connects individuals to a larger collective, and fosters a sense of commitment and responsibility towards the community and its goals.

Mutual Engagement

Identity in a CoP is reinforced through mutual engagement and interaction with other members (Tran, 2022). Through ongoing interactions, individual teachers develop relationships, establish reputations, and build social connections that contribute to their identity formation. The recognition and validation received from peers further shape and affirm their identities within the community.

Negotiation of Identity

Identity in a CoP is not static or fixed. It is subject to negotiation and transformation through interactions and exchanges with other members (van den Scott, 2023). Individuals may negotiate and redefine their identities as they acquire new knowledge, skills and experiences within the

community. This negotiation process allows for the adaptation and evolution of identities in response to changing contexts and community dynamics.

Identity as a Learning Process

Identity development in a CoP is intertwined with learning (Xue *et al.*, 2021). As individuals engage in the community's practices and interact with other members, they acquire new knowledge, skills and perspectives. This learning process contributes to the construction of their identities as they incorporate the community's values and ways of knowing into their sense of self.

Identity and Boundary Crossing

Identity within a CoP can extend beyond the boundaries of the community itself (Zhu & Dawson, 2023). Individual teachers may simultaneously belong to multiple communities and navigate multiple identities based on their participation in various CoPs. Boundary crossing between communities allows for the transfer and integration of knowledge and practices, enriching individual identities and fostering interconnectivity between different CoPs.

Understanding identity in the CoP theory helps to explain how individual Consumer Studies teachers in a community define themselves in relation to the community, and how their participation and interactions shape their sense of self. Identity serves as a powerful motivator for engagement and learning in the CoP, and influences the collective dynamics, trust and collaboration among Consumer Studies teachers.

The next section presents forms of CoP in Consumer Studies TLCs.

3.3 CoP PRACTICE IN TEACHER LEARNING OF CONSUMER STUDIES

3.3.1 Forms of CoP in Consumer Studies teacher learning

According to Shaw (2022), when Consumer Studies teachers work together, they will habitually form informal networks of relationships that go beyond formal organisational arrangements. The literature indicates that people working in organisations such as schools develop informal networks based on personal attraction and common relationship among their members (Manca & Ranieri, 2017). CoPs among Consumer Studies teachers encourage them to share a common interest, and in a short time they may expand to formal groups (Bernard *et al.*, 2018). In other words, a community of Consumer Studies teachers may start in little ways through sharing their experiences with others, or venting unrelated issues, but in time, they will focus their discussions on Consumer Studies-related issues. Clarke (2021) notes that there are two types of CoP related

to the learning of Consumer Studies teachers. These are self-organising CoPs and sponsored CoPs, and they are discussed in the next section.

3.3.1.1 Self-organising CoPs

Self-organising CoPs for teacher learning in Consumer Studies simply mean that when the group members share something that is of interest to the teachers, these CoPs add value to Consumer Studies teachers by sharing experience so that they can learn from one another (Clarke, 2021). Clarke indicates that in self-organising for teacher learning among Consumer Studies teachers, there is a need to consider that the formation's voluntary and informal nature is extremely resilient.

3.3.1.2 Sponsored CoPs

These forms of CoP for Consumer Studies teachers, on the other hand, are initiated, chartered and sponsored by the schools' managements and the DBE. The expected outcome is to produce measurable results that will be for the development of the schools, teachers and Consumer Studies in general (Clarke, 2021). They get needed resources that will promote self-development for Consumer Studies teachers.

In the next section, I discuss platforms for Consumer Studies TLCs.

3.3.2 Platforms for Consumer Studies TLCs

According to the literature, there are two primary ways in which CoPs can occur in Consumer Studies teacher learning. These are face-to-face and online interaction (Arasaratnam-Smith and Northcote, 2017; Xue *et al.*, 2021). Kegan (2018) indicates that Consumer Studies teachers living in the same area may have the opportunity to have meetings on developing themselves in the subject. Gamawa *et al.* (2020) reveal that Consumer Studies teachers in Lagos meet regularly for self-development. In advanced countries they meet online in CoP meetings for TLCs in Consumer Studies, and they share information through the use of various ICT resources (Loo, 2023). Wenger and Snyder (2000) indicate that Consumer Studies groups can use ICT tools to communicate, such as telephones, emails, online discussion groups, video-conferencing and other social media resources. Ghavifekr and Rosdy (2015) note that Consumer Studies teachers make use of ICT resources in advanced countries to communicate because they give access to quick information, and an opportunity to hear what other people are saying.

The next section presents stages of development of CoP in teaching and learning Consumer Studies.

3.3.3 Stages of development of CoP in learning of Consumer Studies teachers

There are various stages of CoP, particularly in relationship with learning in Consumer Studies. Wenger *et al.* (2002, p.4) describe five stages that represent the lifecycle of the community in relation to learning in Consumer Studies: “The potential stage, the coalescing (joining) stage, the maturing stage, the stewardship stage and the transformation stage.”

3.3.3.1 The potential and coalescing stages

The potential and coalescing stages, which are also called the formation stage, is the stage in which an initial network of Consumer Studies teachers wants to join the network for their professional development. This stage is also called the discovering stage.

3.3.3.2 The maturing and stewarding stages

The maturing and stewarding stages are about the integration part of Consumer Studies teachers. This stage focuses on various and relevant subject matter in Consumer Studies teachers that needs to be discussed, and the admission process of new members. Likewise, channels of communication and tools (methods) need to be developed for the community. Transformation stage welcomes new ideas, particularly those that will make the community unique.

The following section discusses application of a theory of CoP in Consumer Studies.

3.3.4 Application of a theory of Consumer Studies TLCs

Lave and Wenger (1991) note that effective learning occurs through social relations in a working environment. CoPs are a form of informal learning organisation which have been popular in education for almost twenty years (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2020). The main goals of CoP are self-development and self-efficacy (Oluk, 2023). CoP is referred to as a tool that can be used to improve an organisation’s capacity, and at the same time promote effective knowledge sharing. CoP is not in line with the traditional method in which a teacher sees him or herself as all-knowing. Dei and van der Walt (2020) and Kelley *et al.* (2020) state that CoP provides a better opportunity for teachers to learn through social interaction, and promotes effective knowledge sharing among teachers.

Various institutions have established a number of CoPs for teacher learning. South Dakota State University established them to promote effective teaching and learning among teachers and faculty members in which Consumer Studies was included (Graves & Turgeson, 2022); and East Stroudsburg University established CoPs for newly appointed teachers of teaching and learning (Azukas & Gaudelli, 2020). In addition to promoting effective teaching and learning in Saudi Arabian universities, the University Continuing Education Association grouped various professions into various CoPs in order to allow for knowledge sharing (Alrubaian, 2018).

In South Africa, a project has been introduced called Critical Research and Development. The project involves the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT), the Western Cape Education Development (WCED), the University of Cape Town (UCT), and a number of schools in the Cape Town area (Maake-Malatji & Cox, 2024). The essence of the project is to allow teachers, curriculum developers, school management and researchers to form a CoP that will provide necessary skills and insight that will increase the professional development of teachers, who include the Consumer Studies teachers (Mertler, 2021). In addition, academics at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in the School of Sociology and Social Studies formed a CoP which is called the Writing Initiative to Support Academics (WISA) (Eyaufe, 2018). It was designed as a CoP to support one another despite the fact that it is an informal CoP. Epstein (2018) indicates that Consumer Studies teachers in New York engage in CoPs that discuss various topics in their subjects, and ways in which teachers can teach their learners. These communities provide a great opportunity for collaboration and effective assessment of Consumer Studies curriculum. The researchers add that the various advantages of a CoP for Consumer Studies teachers include the ability to make them self-dependent and able to contribute positively to Consumer Studies curriculum development. Costanza-Chock (2020) points out that CoPs were designed as a way of persuading Consumer Studies teachers to adopt the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) in teaching and learning. Nyavor (2023) maintains that Consumer Studies teachers who are members of a CoP will enjoy effective collaboration among their colleagues, and are also introduced to various innovations that will improve their teaching methodologies.

Mdodana-Zide and Mokhele-Makgalwa (2021) studied South African teachers with the cluster approach to the professional development of teachers. The study reveals that teachers of Consumer Studies who were members of a CoP were able to make substantial gains in subject knowledge delivery, class management and pedagogical content knowledge by collaborating in clusters (Lachner *et al.*, 2021). Trust and Horrocks (2017) also conducted a study among

Consumer Studies teachers who were members of a CoP. The findings revealed that most teachers worked in isolation, but those that joined a CoP had the opportunity to collaborate and share knowledge with their professional colleagues. Akinyemi (2020), in a study on Consumer Studies and CoPs in Nigeria, discovered that participation in CoPs provided opportunities for positive relationships with other participants in the network of learning communities, as well as social capital that enabled Consumer Studies teachers to collaborate. This implies that an effective relationship among Consumer Studies teachers, coupled with trust, will enable them to develop professionally.

Consumer Studies teachers that work in isolation are sacrificing their opportunities for professional development (Akinyemi & Nkonki, 2021). Eshchar-Netz and Vedder-Weiss (2021) argue that Consumer Studies teachers who participate in CoP activities will surely develop their content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. Ayaya *et al.* (2020) in a study among secondary school teachers and CoPs in South Africa, reveal that many Consumer Studies teachers admitted worked in isolation, but that if they joined a CoP it would enhance their collaboration, and they would be able to share their knowledge and challenges with their professional colleagues. Collaboration in learning activities is most necessary for developing CoPs in order to improve teachers' professional development. CoP theory in education, particularly among Consumer Studies teachers, is a means of improving their organisational performance, and at the same time enabling self-development that will achieve better results (Mabuza., 2018).

Kandakatla and Palla (2021) argue that for Consumer Studies teachers, joining a CoP is a way of sharing tacit knowledge, sparking innovation, and reducing the learning curve for newly employed teachers. It creates social capital and adds to their educational value. Wenger (1998) notes that for effective teaching and learning to occur through CoPs as TLCs, the following must be put into practice: there must be mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire; there is a need for effective interaction among these key elements which will permit Consumer Studies teachers to learn from their professional colleagues. This will assist in making what is abstract more concrete, provide value, and promote better understanding, which will allow for clarity of subject matter (Pennington *et al.*, 2020). However, for effective CoP to take place in teaching and learning Consumer Studies, there must be effective adoption of CoP among Consumer Studies teachers, the quality of learning must be standard, and active contribution is necessary for teaching and learning Consumer Studies (Wenger, 1998). This implies that CoP can encourage teachers of Consumer Studies to improve their knowledge of the subject matter, increase their ability to teach it, and promote knowledge sharing. With this, CoP can be seen to

be a form of learning for professional development of teachers. Adopting a CoP model in teacher learning of Consumer Studies provides opportunities for discussion with their professional colleagues and allows for mentoring opportunities by observing how teachers experience and apply the knowledge for young teachers to emulate (Asaoka, 2021).

The next section presents justifications for using the CoP theory.

3.4 JUSTIFICATIONS FOR USING THE CoP THEORY

The literature indicates that CoPs have been regarded as being relevant for improving the professional development of Consumer Studies teachers (Bergmark, 2023; Kelley *et al.*, 2020). According to Delgado *et al.* (2021), CoPs offer valuable organisational assets that Consumer Studies teachers can develop at no cost.

Wenger *et al.* (2002) state that the benefits of CoPs increase the collective knowledge, skills and reciprocity of various professionals, including Consumer Studies teachers. With CoP, teachers will be more knowledgeable in teaching the subject, which will improve learners' performance. Moreover, the theory provides Consumer Studies teachers with a sense of collective identification (Eleftheriadou & Vlachou, 2020). The theory is of benefit for Consumer Studies teachers for developing themselves professionally and for effective teaching. Mercieca *et al.* (2021) identify three primary reasons why CoP theory should be used in Consumer Studies teaching and learning. It is pertinent for educational development, for teachers, and specifically for the community of Consumer Studies teachers. CoP theory was considered valuable in allowing examination of potential solutions to the issue that related to teaching and learning which will bring about better performance of learners, making teachers more knowledgeable in subject matter.

Trust and Horrocks (2017) affirmed that adoption of CoP among teachers in high schools will help them, and at the same time shape their experience in order for them to be more resourceful. They also studied boundary conflicts within academic practice and examined the way in which new teachers learn to judge learner performance. This finding is based on the fact that existing CoPs in the academic department shaped the experience of the new teachers. Lave and Wenger (1991) indicate that CoP focuses more on the relationship between teachers and the social situation. This may be due to the fact that teachers that are involved in CoP will surely acquire necessary skills that will assist them in teaching and learning processes. The novices will also have the opportunity to learn from their senior colleagues. CoPs should be able to give teachers the chance to increase their level of knowledge and competence.

Nkambule and Tang (2024) assert that CoP assists Consumer Studies teachers to be more focused as regards their teaching and learning, ability to share experience and practice, and expanding the domain of knowledge which they identified as the three essential CoP ingredients. One justification for supporting teacher communities is that they generate collaboration that goes beyond casual interactions amongst teachers. CoPs make teacher cooperation anticipated, inclusive, real and continuing (Kelly & Cherkowski, 2015) by integrating it into the school's culture (Heba & El Nagdi, 2023). This is demonstrated by research by Patton and Parker (2017), which found that instructors in communities of practice reported working more collaboratively.

The CoP perspective offers chances to clearly pinpoint a teacher team's practice culture (Wenger, 1998). In the beginning, CoPs were seen as social institutions that assisted learners in co-creating knowledge (Benians & Terry, 2020). CoPs are associated with efforts to improve performance, whereby group collaboration is used to optimise potential and encourage the development of expertise (O'Donoghue, 2023).

The next section discusses the relevance of the theory for Consumer Studies teachers.

3.4.1 Relevance of the theory for Consumer Studies teachers

The DBE (2011) and Darling-Hammond *et al.* (2020) have this to say about the relevance of the theory for educational development, particularly in Consumer Studies. It provides opportunity for quick solutions to difficult areas that Consumer Studies teachers find hard to understand, and it helps in knowledge sharing among Consumer Studies teachers and capacity building among Consumer Studies teachers. It also improves the knowledge competency of Consumer Studies teachers, and allows for diffuse practice for the effective teaching and learning of Consumer Studies. The theory helps Consumer Studies teachers to develop common language, teaching methodology and relevant methods that will assist them to understand Consumer Studies more, which enables Consumer Studies teachers to develop effective skills, knowledge and learning to be permanent, and bring about change in behaviour. It increases access to expertise in the subject matter, and it increases teachers' job performance. It provides a sense of belonging that makes teachers relate to other professional colleagues for better mastering of Consumer Studies, and focus its learning on Consumer Studies teachers that will give them a sense of membership or identity. It helps Consumer Studies teachers develop necessary skills and competencies to know more about the subject and teach it effectively, and helps Consumer Studies teachers to be more current, and stay connected. Furthermore, it allows Consumer Studies teachers to express their minds by contributing to various discussions on the platform.

In the next section, I present the role of CoP in Consumer Studies.

3.5 THE ROLE OF CoP IN CONSUMER STUDIES TEACHERS

According to Ellis *et al.* (2020), there are various reasons why various professionals participate in Consumer Studies learning communities. These are grouped into three issues: their psychological reasons, their personal views of the organisation, and their personal judgments based on their knowledge of management practices. Inel Ekici (2018) argues that self-belief is part of the psychological issues that are very important for Consumer Studies teachers' role in the development of the community. If Consumer Studies teachers do not believe in CoP, joining one may be meaningless. Consumer Studies teachers need to be psychologically balanced and rational before joining a CoP for Consumer Studies.

Mercieca *et al.* (2021) also maintain that before Consumer Studies teachers can join, they must be ready to adapt to necessary change, which includes the ability to respect the views of other people in the community. In addition, they need to see the importance of knowledge-sharing in the community. Stanca *et al.* (2022) argue that individual Consumer Studies teachers need to be positive and support a knowledge-sharing environment in the community. Rincón-Gallardo (2020) and Fullan (2020) argue that a positive mindset is another characteristic that Consumer Studies teachers need to have for an effective community. This means having respect for every member of the community.

Rolando *et al.* (2021) comment on the research findings in Brazil among Consumer Studies teachers involved in a virtual CoP. They reveal that many teachers of Consumer Studies are very reluctant to actively participate in a virtual CoP owing to its complexity, and poor self-esteem that prevents them from being active on the platform.

In the next section, challenges facing the CoP among teachers are discussed.

3.6 CHALLENGES FACING THE CoPs' TEACHER LEARNING AMONG CONSUMER STUDIES TEACHERS

According to Wenger (1998), there are various challenges facing CoP adoption for various organisations and professionals. They include the attitude of management (in this case it may be school management or the DBE), the motivational system, work processes, educational culture, and educational policy. Mak and Pun (2015) classify the hindrances to the adoption of CoP by teachers into three. These are people, process and technology. Manuti *et al.* (2017) maintain that the manner in which an individual Consumer Studies teacher sees CoP as a medium for professional development will be a determinant for the success of the programme. They say there

are many reasons that can make Consumer Studies teachers not share knowledge, including no benefit in joining, and not believing in knowledge shared by other Consumer Studies teachers. Another human factor that can serve as a hindrance to CoP is that many teachers, including Consumer Studies teachers, see knowledge as power, and they are not ready to share it (Duy & Trang, 2022). This suggests that if a teacher of Consumer Studies is more knowledgeable than other teachers, he or she may feel more important than they are. Alvesson and Sveningsson (2015) note that organisational culture is another challenge facing CoP among Consumer Studies teachers. This indicates that many school managements and the DBE may not support Consumer Studies teachers using the platform for self-development. Oertle *et al.* (2021) maintain that organisational support, performance evaluation, motivational incentive, policies and effective communication are some of the necessary tools for the development of Consumer Studies teachers using CoP. Process issues include the integration of knowledge creation and usage into the educational process, and ways to link knowledge development to the benefit of the subject (Agrifoglio, 2015).

Technology is very important in the effective adoption of CoP for teacher learning among Consumer Studies teachers. Al-Habsi *et al.* (2022) note that CoP may not be successful in promoting teacher learning among Consumer Studies teachers because the technological tools that would facilitate effective communication are not available. They say that some of the Consumer Studies teachers use technology as the driver, not the enabler, of the process. The next section presents factors promoting CoP for Consumer Studies teachers.

3.7 FACTORS THAT PROMOTE CoPs FOR TEACHER LEARNING AMONG CONSUMER STUDIES TEACHERS

A CoP is a natural part of educational development or organisational life. It is in support of this that Wenger *et al.* (2002, p.12) note that every organisation, including schools, should cultivate and develop CoPs for the development and benefit of the members of the community. Mak and Pun (2022) note that the idea of CoP needs to develop among various professionals to include Consumer Studies teachers. They maintain that CoP can be developed among those teachers in both formal and informal ways. It can be done by asking every member of the group to provide feedback on what he or she has gained ever since joining the group. Wenger (1998) lists five necessary elements that can foster CoPs among Consumer Studies teachers: legitimising participation, negotiating strategic context, being attuned to real practice, fine-tuning the organisation, and an effective support system.

3.7.1 Legitimising participation

In this case the organisation needs to provide support for CoPs by recognising their contribution to their professionals. This can be done by allocating times to take part in the activities of the CoP. Abdulaziz Alfayez *et al.* (2021) note that school principals in Lagos, Nigeria allow Consumer Studies teachers to use their holiday period solely for CoP activities. Wenger (1998) argues that communities can be asked to share with other Consumer Studies teachers what they gain when they meet. This will add value to their meetings and organisation.

3.7.2 Negotiating their strategic context

Consumer Studies teachers need to work in teams. Wenger (1998) notes that they need to use the knowledge and expertise that they have gained in communities for the development of schools, and to improve learners' performance.

3.7.3 Being attuned to real practice

Wenger (1998) notes that professionals learn from one another while on the job. This means that Consumer Studies teachers need to learn from each other on the job. Using CoP for the teacher learning among Consumer Studies teachers saves school management funds, and increases teachers' knowledge and competence (Wenger, 1998).

3.7.4 Fine-tuning the organisation

Wenger (1998) notes that organisational elements such as management interest, motivation technique and educational policy can promote, but also inhibit, the development of CoP. These elements may prevent Consumer Studies teachers from developing more interest in community services if, for instance, they are not given enough time and encouragement to take part in group discussions.

3.7.5 Effective support system

CoPs for Consumer Studies teachers need support from various bodies such as the DBE, school management and members of the groups (Wenger, 1998). Wenger argues that many CoP members do not have necessary support, and that reduces their effective participation in group discussions. Bergmark (2023) lists various support that Consumer Studies teachers should get to

make them benefit effectively from CoP for teaching and learning. This includes professional views, travelling support for meetings, and ICT tools for effective communication.

3.8 THE RELEVANCE OF CoPs IN PROMOTING LEARNING AND FACILITATING KNOWLEDGE SHARING IN CONSUMER STUDIES

There is no single universal definition for the concept of learning. Sweller (2020) describes learning as a process in which learners acquire new knowledge, and in which there is a change in behaviour, and it must be permanent. Illeris (2018) notes that there are various types of learning processes for different situations. He explains that there are two major kinds of learning related to organisations such as schools: the learning for newcomers and the learning for the professionals such as Consumer Studies teachers. This implies that learning takes place in CoPs. Newcomers to the community need to understand that joining the platform will give them a great opportunity to learn from those that know better. Lipowsky and Rzejak (2015) maintain that there are four basic characteristics of learning for teachers, including Consumer Studies teachers, which are opportunities for learning new skills; attitudes and relevant values that bring about change in behaviour; learning can become the right and property of some collective unit; learning must be permanent within the organisation, even when an individual leaves it. Consumer Studies teachers need to bring to the system their prior education, experiences, necessary skills and knowledge during the interactions with their colleagues in order to gain new experiences that will help them to develop new skills and knowledge about teaching and learning Consumer Studies. Acquiring knowledge through the platform provides collective knowledge for the institution. This will encourage the individual to draw on experience, and to grow and learn more.

O'Dowd and Dooly (2022) argue that knowledge sharing among Consumer Studies teachers with their colleagues provides benefits for them because their fellow professional colleagues may process certain knowledge that they may not have. It is becoming very important that organisational culture needs to encourage Consumer Studies teachers to share knowledge, and there is a need for an effective reward system that will do so. Hargreaves and Fullan (2015) argue that Consumer Studies teachers need to be aware of various motivational incentives that await them for sharing knowledge with their professional colleagues. Corcoran and Duane (2019) maintain that school managements needs to encourage Consumer Studies teachers to join and use CoPs. A CoP platform encourages learning, promotes collaboration, and adds value to the school's development. In the next section, I shall discuss the functions of CoP for Consumer Studies teachers.

3.9 FUNCTIONS OF CoPs AS TEACHER LEARNING FOR CONSUMER STUDIES TEACHERS

Wenger (1998) mentions various functions of CoPs in regard to knowledge creation, knowledge assets and knowledge sharing in organisations such as schools. CoPs serve as media for the exchange and interpretation of knowledge for Consumer Studies teachers through diffusing knowledge across boundaries and promoting tacit knowledge among Consumer Studies teachers. CoPs promote competencies among Consumer Studies teachers through effective development in their subject, and their need to share this knowledge through mutual engagement. CoPs in Consumer Studies create areas of concern and interest for Consumer Studies teachers. The next section discusses designing effective CoP in Consumer Studies.

3.10 DESIGNING EFFECTIVE CoPs IN CONSUMER STUDIES

According to Wenger *et al.* (2002), there are seven key principles to act on in designing CoPs for Consumer Studies: design for evolution; open a dialogue between inside and outside perspectives; invite different levels of participation; develop both public and private community spaces; focus on value; combine familiarity and excitement; and lastly, create a rhythm for the community for creating effective and self-sustaining CoPs. Effective CoPs for Consumer Studies teachers relate to active participation and involvement of the members of the communities. Ranjan (2020) argues that most CoPs in Consumer Studies have no formal design, and tend to be self-organising systems. Many have come to an end and no longer serve the need for which they were created owing to poor participation of members. Pryko *et al.* (2017) propose measures to improve the sustainability of CoPs among Consumer Studies teachers. These include design for evolution in order to ensure that the community can meet the needs of participants without killing their interest.

Goodyear and Casey (2015) maintain that for sustainability of CoPs in Consumer Studies there must be an open dialogue between less and more experienced teachers. There is a need for instruction and discussion of new viewpoints about the subject, and other discussion that will be of interest to the community. Macià and García (2016) note that there is a need to encourage different levels of participation. Both active and passive participants should be encouraged, particularly the passive members, who should always be encouraged to take part in a discussion. The literature indicates that for the better establishment of CoP in Consumer Studies an attempt

should be made explicitly to identify, through feedback and discussion, the contributions that the community will value. In designing CoP for a vocational subject like Consumer Studies, there is a need to combine familiarity and excitement in teaching (Wenger, 2000).

In addition, there is a need to create a rhythm in the community to make an itinerary of activities that bring participants together on a regular basis. For this to be implemented successfully there must be consideration of participants' time and areas of interest (Dingyloudi & Strijbos, 2015). The literature identifies a number of factors that may affect the effective participation of teachers of Consumer Studies in a CoP, including the need for individual teachers to be comfortable in engaging socially with professional colleagues and those more knowledgeable in the field. Likewise, those that are more knowledgeable must be ready to share their knowledge with other participants. Patton and Parker (2017) maintain that there must be motivational techniques for participants to share their knowledge with others. Collaboration and discussion should be encouraged among members.

3.11 CoP THEORY: A CRITIQUE

CoP theory has been emphasised by a number of authors (Arthur, 2016; Cochrane & Narayan, 2017; O'Brien & Battista, 2020; Cundill *et al.*, 2015; Hampson, 2020; Howlett *et al.*, 2016; Smith *et al.*, 2017; Zaffini, 2018). Despite the fact that CoP theories have already been applied widely, Hampson (2020) contends that a deeper look at much of this material reveals that the use of the phrase "Community of Practice" suggests haphazard use. This critique contends that many researchers claiming to deal with the CoP theory have only indirect connections to the original principles put forth by Wenger (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Wenger-Trayner (2013), however, argues that CoP thinking is a theory that is currently being developed.

The theory has received a lot of attention and has been modified for many settings. These various interpretations may have resulted from the adaptation of CoP theory within these various organisational and cultural contexts. According to Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015), the theory is a foundation for further research, and various people may develop and use it in different ways depending on their own unique circumstances. This is not necessarily a drawback of the original theory. Despite the fact that CoP theory was initially developed as a critique of orthodox assumptions about teaching and learning, Trabona *et al.* (2019) contend that it is transitioning into a generalised, formulaic instrument intended to maximise learning in

organisations. Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2022) claim that the subsequent development of CoP theory as a managerial tool is "paradoxical" in the light of this significant history.

According to Tuli and Tynjala (2015), managing CoPs is ineffective on its own. They contend that attempts to regulate CoP could change its nature and lead to its failure if the perceived organisational benefits of the CoP are its spontaneity and informality. CoP theory is frequently criticised for failing to take into consideration power disparities. Popple (2015) refers to power connections in his argument that CoP theory ignores the inclination of employees to be conservative and reluctant to change, making them less likely to engage in a critical challenge to the status quo. A remnant of the anthropological basis of the CoP theory can be observed in its portrayal of the community as being self-sufficient (Blackmore, 2020). CoP theory, according to Devis-Rozental and Clarke (2024), fails to consider the CoP's broader organisational, economic, political and general socio-cultural environment, and it is incorrect to regard the CoP as though it operates in a "vacuum". Teams with a clearly defined identity may also include members that are more guarded, exclusive and reluctant to share information with other teams who share the same identity (Noonan, 2019).

It is true that CoP theory and other situated learning theories both place a strong emphasis on the social and placed nature of learning. Newman and Newman (2022) contend that the CoP theory's emphasis on individual interaction ignores the fact that people inevitably move between various communities, that these transitions are crucial to personal development, and that they also involve a considerable amount of emotional labour. According to Wenger (1998), CoP thinking is situated in the middle of theories about situated experience, which prioritise interpersonal interactions on a personal level, and theories about social structures like culture and institutions. Wenger counters that it is incorrect to see the CoP theory as an attempt to develop a vast, all-encompassing social theory. Instead, he promotes a method that mixes related beliefs, contending that social theories form a "puzzle of interacting pieces". The perceived neglect of individual learning and capability in the CoP theory is a further criticism (Choi *et al.*, 2020).

The next section presents the conclusion of the chapter.

3.12 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter discusses the meaning of CoPs and their characteristics, the relevance of the theory to the study, and the various platforms on which CoPs can perform, particularly in relation to teacher learning of Consumer Studies. The review also explains the role of CoPs in promoting Consumer Studies teachers' professional development, and the importance of knowledge sharing in promoting teachers' knowledge of Consumer Studies. CoP is a social phenomenon, hence

physical interaction between CoP members is regarded as important for its success. CoPs provide collaborative learning environments to aid in achieving academic, professional or organisational goals. The importance of theory is based on the fact that it can help in the facilitation and realisation of achievement and the learning objectives, since knowledge is a very valuable asset that is necessary for the growth of every organisation, particularly in this highly competitive environment. Therefore, the main goal of CoP is to encourage information sharing in order to boost the schools' overall performance of teachers. In addition, CoP enhances employees' working experience, lowering the learning curve, accumulating professional talents for the schools. The study is very relevant to this because the framework emphasised the importance of knowledge sharing in order to promote effective teaching and learning. The basic theory on which the theory is based was also discussed. The next chapter focuses on research design and methodology.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter discussed the theoretical framework that guides the study. This chapter explains in detail the procedures used in this qualitative study, which explores how Consumer Studies teachers learn in TLCs in one district in KwaZulu-Natal. This chapter will discuss the study research design and methodology. It begins with an explanation of a research paradigm that was used as a lens through which I approached my research. A qualitative approach that was employed in the study is also discussed in this chapter. I continue by outlining the research strategy and demonstrating how I used qualitative methodology. The chapter then discusses the research design and the three techniques for gathering data. The sampling methods used to select the context and study participants are then discussed. The chapter also provides a detailed discussion on data analysis strategy and the process that was followed in analysing qualitative data. The latter part of the chapter highlights the issues of trustworthiness, ethical considerations and study limitations.

4.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

Norwich (2020) describe a paradigm in academic research as a worldview which is a form of general perspective on the complexities of the world. According to Crabtree and Miller (2022), a research paradigm is a broad organising framework for theory and research that contains fundamental assumptions, major issues, models of high-quality research and strategies for discovering answers. In contrast, Khatri (2020) indicates that a research paradigm is basically about epistemological, ontological and methodological research premises. It can be said that the relevance of a research paradigm is to assist the researcher to be able to interpret the research processes. A research paradigm is a philosophical assumption that guides a researcher in his/her approach to enquiry (Khatri., 2020). On the other hand, Mik-Meyer (2020) states that a research paradigm is a form of approach that investigates research problems, and at the same time employs various approaches in order to investigate and give better understanding of the research problems. Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) note that a paradigm in academic research is a form of belief that explains ways in which empirical knowledge is being created in academic research. Rehman and Alharthi (2016) suggest that, researchers should select the paradigm that is suitable for the phenomenon under investigation. This implies that the paradigm gave me a greater opportunity

to address issues and ask questions such as how Consumer Studies teachers learn in TLCs in one district in KwaZulu-Natal.

Literature indicates various points of view in which scholars categorise research paradigms, particularly in education related research (Grix, 2018; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Neuman, 2018). Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) maintain that various research paradigms have their own ontological assumptions as well as their methodological approaches. Neuman (2018) argues that research paradigms in academic research should be part of methodology in academic research. Grix (2018) argues that every academic researcher makes several philosophical assumptions which include ontological, methodological and epistemological points of view which are applicable to different types of research in education. Ontology is a patterned set of assumptions about reality, while epistemology is the knowledge of that reality (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Grix, 2018). Methodology is the particular way of knowing about that reality (Neuman, 2018). It can be deduced from the foregoing that research has three processes, which are ontology, epistemology and methodology. This implies that a research paradigm is a combination of interrelated practices and thinking that defines the nature of these three research approaches.

According to Ryan (2018), there are three commonly known philosophical research paradigms used to guide research methods and analysis. They are positivism, interpretivism and critical theory. Positivism described as the approach of the natural sciences, which advocate the application of natural science methods to study certain phenomena, which include social phenomena (Chowdhury, 2015). Maree (2018) opines that positivism is related to and associated with quantitative research, which focuses on empirical studies and establishes facts on evidence that is valid and reliable in terms of the existence of phenomena rather than generalisation.

Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) state that the critical paradigm places its study in the context of social justice issues, and aims to solve the political, social and economic problems that cause social oppression, conflict, struggle and power hierarchies at whatever levels these may occur. It is frequently referred to as the transformative paradigm since it aims to alter politics in order to address social oppression and enhance social justice. This paradigm makes several key assumptions, including a transactional epistemology (in which the researcher engages with the participants), an ontology of historical realism, particularly with regard to oppression, a dialogic technique, and an axiology that respects cultural norms. A critical paradigm is concerned with the participants' empowerment and elimination of oppressive structures. For the purpose of this research, I chose the interpretive paradigm.

4.2.1 Interpretive paradigm

I employed the interpretive paradigm as it lays more emphasis on the need for the insider's viewpoint for better understanding of social reality (Kivunja & Kuyini., 2017). Neuman (2018) maintains that the interpretive method has the belief that research knowledge is based on interpretations which do not involve any objective knowledge, and is dependent on thinking and human reasoning. This implies that the interpretive paradigm provides meaning to events, through the meaning that people give to them. Application of the interpretive paradigm in educational research puts research analysis in context. It also lays more emphasis on better understanding of the world from subjective experiences of individuals, and employs a participant observer in getting information (George, 2019). This means making sense of the situation as it emerges.

The interpretive paradigm maintains that the social world can be interpreted based on a subjective approach. This implies that the approach gives better understanding of the ways in which people experience the social world. An interpretive research paradigm is based on the principle that claims that the academic researcher performs a specific role in observing the social world (Neuman, 2016). The importance of the interpretive paradigm is based on the naturalistic approach in which the data are being collected through interviews (Mohajan, 2018). Based on this, the study employed the use of interpretivism which will be focused on individuals, Focus group interviews and reflective journals.

4.2.2 Justifications for using interpretivism

The justification for using interpretivism for the study was based on the fact that the study adopted an exploration orientation. This approach tries to learn what is going on in a particular environment, and for better understanding of the distinctive views of the people concerned in relation to this study that examines how Consumer Studies teachers learn in TLCs in one district in KwaZulu-Natal. This study's application of interpretivism allowed for a more thorough examination and comprehension of the research at hand, and the interaction of human behaviour, particularly among Consumer Studies teachers, and their participation in the TLCs. To gain a more in-depth and subjective understanding of Consumer Studies, teachers should participate in various professional development programmes, in particular the TLCs.

Leitch and Hill (2015) argue that using interpretivism in Consumer Studies research clearly provided evidence that addressed the research objectives and issues of practical relevance based on the analysis and interpretation of data. In addition, the study adopted the interpretive paradigm

because it lays more emphasis on experiences and interpretations of people's attitudes, behaviour, ideas and beliefs.

Various scholars indicate that interpretive research is in line with real-life situations which are aligned with techniques such as interviews and documents in their natural environment (Bertram & Christiansen, 2016; O'Donoghue, 2018; Thorne, 2016). Based on this, an interpretive paradigm was suitable for this study which sought to explore how Consumer Studies teachers learn through TLCs in one district in KwaZulu-Natal.

In addition, the study adopted an interpretive paradigm in order to allow for effective interpretivism and better understanding of Consumer Studies teachers learning in TLCs. Furthermore, in interpretivism, it is indicated that reality is a form of social construction (Duberley & Johnson, 2016). This indicates that it is a multilayered, interactive and shared social phenomenon which can be interpreted by an individual in order for him or her to find out how these social experiences shaped Consumer Studies teachers in engaging in CoP as a form of professional development. I decided to select the participants (Consumer Studies teachers) who were involved in TLCs.

4.2.3 Ontological, methodological and epistemological assumptions of the interpretivists

- Ontology in academic research is the study of beliefs about the nature of reality. This research is based on the ontological assumptions that describe the point of view as the social construction of social actors (Blaikie & Priest, 2019). Based on the nature of this research, the study is in line with the ontological and epistemological views that were informed through interpretivism, constructivism and subjectivism. The ontological stance that the study would agree with is the one that views reality and truth as on the researcher's point of view and experience.
- This ontological stance directs that the researcher will accept that reality is a form of social constructivism which will be constantly changing.

Hennink *et al.* (2020) opine that epistemology is a paradigm of knowledge. In this type of paradigm the researcher comes to know through various enquirers such as interpretivists, who totally relied on naturalistic methods for generating data (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). In this study, epistemology is about the relationship between the knower (researcher) and the knowable (the participants, that is, Consumer Studies teachers). This form of epistemology dictates that there

are multiple realities and multiple truths which need to be based on the researchers' construction of reality.

Cohen *et al.* (2017) list the various ways of building knowledge to include the following:

- Participant observation
- Interviews and conversations
- Documents and field notes
- Accounts
- Notes and memos

This study used telephonic semi-structured individual, WhatsApp based Focus group interviews and reflective journals to gather data in order to produce adequate and necessary dialogue for effective collaboration that would provide constructive and meaningful reality. According to epistemology, in an interpretive paradigm the paradigm notes that knowledge is subjective, and there is no objective truth. This is because the study is about human subjects. There are multiple truths because the findings are the creation of the process of the interaction between inquirer and inquired (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2023). However, in this research the interaction was between the participants and myself as a researcher.

4.3 RESEARCH APPROACH

The research approach is the manner in which academic research strategy is investigated, which is normally based on assumptions that are related to research design and data collection (Walliman, 2021). The research approaches are very necessary in the conceptualisation of research problems, particularly in academic research and for the description of subject matter under investigation. It is in line with this that Johnson and Christensen (2019) maintain that using relevant research approaches for academic research is very necessary in the sense that it acts as the pillars on which the research work is built. This implies that the nature of academic research or the thesis is a function of the relevance of the approach to be used in order to inform the research.

Neuman (2018) maintains that there are various types of research approaches relevant in studies in education and social sciences research. These include quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods approaches. Extant literature indicates that in the choice of a research approach in scholarly studies there is need for interrelationships among research problems, methods of data

collection, and the research problem and the manner of data analysis. In addition, the research approach must also be in line with the research paradigm (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Cooper *et al.*, 2019; Queirós *et al.*, 2017).

The quantitative approach deals with numerical data, testing hypotheses and theories in order to make accurate prediction based on the results from the data analysis (Creswell & Clark, 2017). Creswell and Creswell (2017) argue that the quantitative research approach is normally used for testing objectives that are related to theories, and examines the relationship among research variables. This is normally done through the use of relevant statistical tools.

Tashakkori and Teddlie (2021) note that a mixed method approach is the combination of both quantitative and qualitative data, and the integration of the two to form the data set. Maree (2018) maintains that mixed method in academic research is an empirical research approach that combines both qualitative and quantitative approaches. In addition, Skillman *et al.* (2019) argue that the basic logic of mixed method is in line with inductive and deductive initiatives.

This study used a qualitative research approach to explore Consumer Studies teacher learning through TLCs in one district in KwaZulu-Natal. This approach is critical for qualitative researchers to understand how people add up or make sense of reality, as well as their underlying assumptions that drive their behaviour (Frost, 2021). Qualitative methods focus on the qualitative aspects of meaning, experience and understanding, and these methods are used to study human experience from the viewpoint of the research participants in the context in which the actions take place.

Leedy and Ormrod (2015) list various features of qualitative research to include the following:

- Research is conducted in a real-life situation.
- The focus is more on the process and loss of the product.
- The purpose of qualitative research is in depth description and understanding of people's beliefs, actions and events in all their complexity.
- The rationale of the research is not to generalise the findings, but to understand them in context.
- The research is often inductive in nature, and as such generates more questions and hypotheses.
- In this approach it seems that the main instrument in qualitative research is subjectively involved in the research process.

This approach is tailored towards certain research designs, such as case study, ethnography, grounded theory and action research. In this approach, data are commonly collected from various sources such as people, government documents, organisations, texts, objects and events (Schoch, 2020).

4.3.1 Rationale for using a qualitative approach

The justification for using a qualitative approach in the study was based on the fact that the study relied on human understanding and perception (Searle, 2015; Williamson & Johanson, 2017). As previously stated, the study intended to understand the Consumer Studies teacher learning through TLCs in one district in KwaZulu-Natal. A qualitative approach is a multimethod form of study that emphasises the characteristics of entities, and is based on an interpretive and realistic technique for its subject matter (Neuman, 2016). This study generated data from Consumer Studies teachers in their TLCs, taking advantage of their varied settings in order to get data related to their peculiar situations, and employed multiple methods of data generation.

A qualitative approach is generally used to discover trends in thought and opinions, and usually uses a small sample size (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Hence in this study, I used ten Consumer Studies teachers. Furthermore, the approach is commonly used to study occurrences in the environment in which they naturally occur, and supports social meaning from various people who are subjected to the occurrences (Denzin, 2017). This study explored more deeply how Consumer Studies teachers learned in one district of KwaZulu-Natal through the in-depth individual interviews, Focus group interviews and reflective journals' elicitation as data generation methods (Cheng & Clark, 2017). In addition, the adoption of a qualitative approach, particularly in this research, was based on the fact that it has the ability to highlight the underlying human interactions, meanings and relationships among variables in the experiences (Shufutinsky, 2020). This implies that it allowed an opportunity to provide very robust actions about Consumer Studies teachers' occurrences in a real-life situation based on their experiences, and how they interpreted them.

4.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design is a general strategy that a researcher selects appropriately and methodically to carry out research work (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Creswell and Creswell (2017) describe a research design as a road map that defines the most appropriate route to take when carrying out a study. According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), a research design also specifies when, how

and by whom data are generated. This research study used a case study research design in one district of KwaZulu-Natal.

4.4.1 The case study research design

The study employed the case study as a qualitative design to explore Consumer Studies teacher learning in TLCs in one district of KwaZulu-Natal. Harrison *et al.* (2017) argue that a case study can be applied in various disciplines such as healthcare, law, education, social science and the humanities. According to Hancock *et al.* (2021), case studies are usually described in terms of their operation in the context of a particular topic.

Yin (2018) maintains that a case study is an investigation that looks at current situations or phenomena in the context of actual life that are not immediately obvious, and uses a variety of sources of evidence. Kumar (2018) notes that a case study may be said to exist when researching an area in which little is known, or when you wish to have a comprehensive understanding of the circumstance, occurrence, episode, site, organisation or community. Using case study in academic research allows for better understanding of social phenomena by providing insight into their complexity and social context (Harrison *et al.*, 2017). Schoch (2020) states that the importance of case study research is normally influenced by contextual factors to facilitate the ability to convey experience from the case. This suggests that a case study enhances researchers' and readers' experiences with cases through narrative and situational reports.

The dynamism of a case study in academic research is based on the need to shape a case through the peculiarity of the context and the social, historical, political and organisational contexts which are often interdependent and reciprocal (Burke *et al.*, 2015). A case study in academic research provides the reader with necessary experience with the case through narrative and situational descriptions that are in line with the investigation and related to the method of obtaining data, the nature of the study population and the way of analysing the data.

There are different views that make up a case. Extant literature indicates that a case study in academic research can focus on a single person or groups of people (George, 2019; Mohajan, 2018; Yin, 2018). It may also focus on the societal issues generally. In addition, the interest of the researcher can be a determining factor in conducting research on a case study (Hancock *et al.*, 2021). Bartlett and Vavrus (2016) identify three types of case study in academic research. These comprise the intrinsic case study, instrumental case study, and collective case study.

However, this study used an intrinsic case study because of the nature of research questions which are very small in nature, and at the same time exploratory and not used for building theory or generalising research findings (Harris, 2020). The choice of a case method for this research is based on the evaluation that a case study is very appropriate for the study's research objectives, and the contextual nature of the research. The application of a case study method to this study helps in providing a better insight into Consumer Studies teachers through the adoption of a community of practices framework provided by Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998) as a yardstick for teachers learning in TLCs. In addition, the study used a case study method in order to enable adequate exploratory description and effective explanation of each of the research questions to achieve more accurate research findings (Maree, 2018).

A case study research design primarily focuses on investigating a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context (Schoch, 2020). My conviction as a researcher was that a comprehensive understanding of this contemporary phenomenon needed to take into consideration the real-world context of the district where the participants experience the phenomenon. The real-world context, otherwise known as a naturalistic setting, according to Yin (2018), simply refers to the context or place in which the study participants live and experience the phenomenon on a daily basis. Case study research essentially focuses on a phenomenon such as a particular event, programme or activity. For example, in the case of this study, the programme or phenomenon under investigation was Consumer Studies teacher learning through TLCs in one district of KwaZulu-Natal. Another attribute present is that the phenomenon under investigation is explored in its natural context, bounded by space and time. Taking the above characteristic into consideration, the investigation of Consumer Studies teacher learning through TLCs was grounded in their district during a period of time.

The strong point of the case study is the depth of analysis it offers; hence it is regarded as being rich in description as it draws on deep and varied sources of information or evidence. The narratives in case studies offer rich, detailed descriptions of situations and their contexts (Ahmad *et al.*, 2019). For example, in this study, I relied on telephonic individual interviews and WhatsApp-based Focus group interviews to generate rich evidence to understand the phenomenon under investigation. From both the individual and group interviews, I was able to generate data from the various quotes and narratives in relation to the context of Consumer Studies teachers learning through TLCs.

The use of case study research design becomes appropriate in research studies that are characterised by “how” and “why” questions as part of their main research questions. According to Yin (2018), in such studies, the use of the case study research enables researchers to make use

of probing or follow-up questions that yield an in-depth description of the phenomenon under investigation. The choice of the case study in this study was consequently informed by the above conditions. For example, my critical research questions of what, how and why are appropriate in the domain of the qualitative case methodology.

4.5.THE STUDY POPULATION AND SAMPLING PROCESS

This section provides information on the study population, which includes the general, target and accessible population. The study population further includes the profiling of the context within which the study population was located. The aim was to give readers a comprehensive understanding of the context of the study population. After discussing the study population and its context, the discussion was shifted to the process of sampling. The participants will also be discussed in this section to provide information on who was included in the data-generation process of the study.

4.5.1 The study population

A study population evolves from what is known as the general population. Crossman (2018) describes the general population as the overall group of potential participants of a qualitative inquiry. Other scholars describe the concept of general population as an entire group of people from whom information or data can be sourced to provide answers to key research questions that drive a study (Creswell, 2021; Levitt, 2021; Ruslin *et al.*, 2022). Therefore, participants found in the general population must share common characteristics or attributes that meet the criteria described by the researcher to be included in empirical inquiry (Casteel & Bridier, 2021; Creswell, 2021). It is argued that the procedure for identifying the members of the general population of the study drawn from the primary characteristic is implied by the topic of the study and its focus (Levitt, 2021). In this study, for example, the focus was on exploring Consumer Studies teacher learning through TLCs in one district in KwaZulu-Natal. Therefore, the general population who qualified to be members of the study population were the Consumer Studies teachers from one district in KwaZulu-Natal. These teachers qualified to be included in the general study population on the premise that they possessed at least some homogeneous attributes as Consumer Studies teachers.

The target population of the study was chosen from the pool of the general population of the study. In the context of this study, although the entire Consumer Studies teacher population in the selected district initially constituted the general study population, not all of them became part of

the target population. The target population for the study, according to Pandey and Pandey (2021), is described as a group of individuals or participants from the general population who possess specific attributes. In the context of this study, even though the study focused on the Consumer Studies teachers in the selected district and no other subjects, not all the Consumer Studies teachers from one district became part of the study as participants. This was because the study primarily focused on the ten Consumer Studies teachers in one district in KwaZulu-Natal. Owing to the large size and the qualitative nature of the study, I drew a sample of the target population that could be accessible using general qualitative sampling methods to get the study participants (Ruslin *et al.*, 2022). The following section discusses the details of the qualitative sampling process that was used to reach the accessible population of the study.

4.5.2 Selection of the participants

The study used both purposive and convenience sampling to select participants. Purposive sampling, which is also known as judgmental or selective sampling, is a form of non-probability sampling technique (Sharma, 2017). It allowed the researcher to select sampling based on her personal judgments. Based on this, I used purposive sampling to select the Consumer Studies teachers. This was because the research intended to find out how Consumer Studies teachers' engagement in CoP as a way of engaging in TLCs was related to the subject matter of the research. Convenience sampling refers to the collection of information from members of the population who are conveniently available (Obilor, 2023). Etikan *et al.* (2016) argue that academic researchers use convenience sampling particularly when the people meet certain criteria, which include accessibility, geographical location, and a host of others. The main objective of convenience sampling is basically to collect information from the people or participants that are readily available and accessible to the researchers. Obilor (2023) highlight various advantages of convenience sampling to include: The sample is affordable, readily available and accessible.

- It saves the cost to and time of researchers.
- The convenience sample permits the researcher to gather useful data and information that will assist him or her in the research.

The study used convenience sampling to pick one district because it was closer to me, and it saved the time of research and cost (Sharma *et al.*, 2022). The total number of the study participants comprised ten Consumer Studies teachers in one district in KwaZulu-Natal. Since there are few schools that offer Consumer Studies in the FET phase (Grades 10, 11 and 12), twelve teachers

volunteered to take part in the study. However, due to some commitments, only ten Consumer Studies teachers participated in the study. In case study research, the quality of the analysis is the primary goal rather than the number of participants (Hancock *et al.*, 2021). This is supported by Malterud *et al.* (2016), who state that when a limited sample size is anticipated before the study begins, case study can be a good research technique in seeking meaning and comprehension. Biographical details of participants from Consumer Studies (pseudonyms used for the participants' and school names)

Participants	The no. of years teaching Consumer Studies	Qualifications	Grades taught	Name of school
Phume	22	STD (Home Economics), ACE, Hon	10 to 12	Hleziphi
Tuks	5	BSC Consumer Science, PGCE	10 to 12	Gibile
Sbo	18	STD (Home Economics)	10 to 12	Thangthini
Aphiwe	2	BSC Consumer Science, PGCE	10 to 12	Gundile
Nelly	10	BSC Consumer Science, PGCE	10 to 12	Senzile
Thando	1	NDip Marketing, PGCE	10 to 12	Thembeni
Sphe	9	BSC Consumer Science, PGCE	10 to 12	Tshingiwe
Linds	24	STD (Home Economics), ACE	10 to 12	Zamcolo
Tomby	2	BSC Consumer Science, PGCE	10 to 12	Mbukeli
Toko	15	STD (Home Economics), ACE	10 to 12	Dukile

Table 4.1: Biographical details of interview participants from Consumer Studies

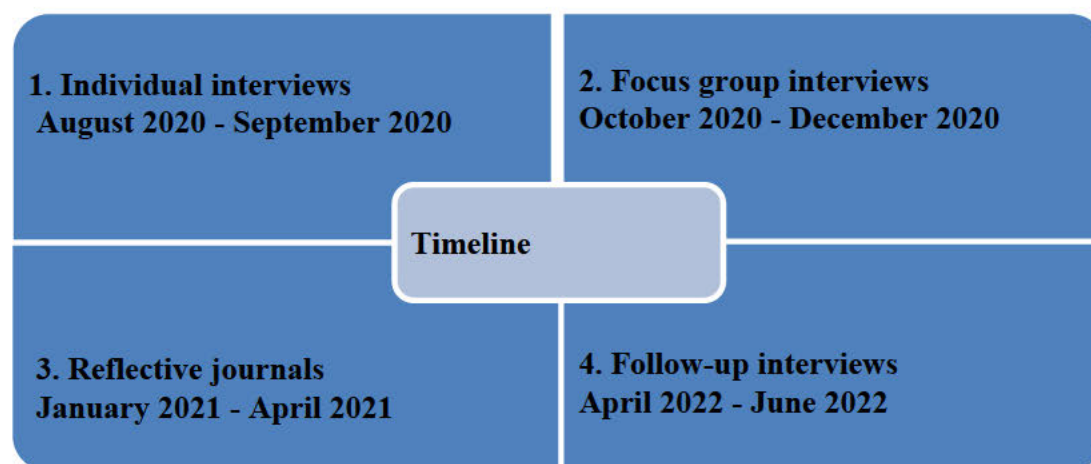
4.5.3 Research site

The district name was given a pseudonym. Gezile is a district in KwaZulu-Natal's North Coast region that was chosen for this study. The district lies between the boundaries of four districts in the province. As mentioned previously, I wanted to work with teachers teaching Consumer Studies in the FET phase. Hence this qualitative interpretive research examined how teachers learned through TLCs in one district in KwaZulu-Natal.

4.6 DATA GENERATION METHODS

Qualitative research does not rely on a single data source. Based on this, the researcher used multiple methods of data generation (Roulston & Choi, 2018). Schoch (2020) argues that qualitative research provides inquiry in which researchers make an interpretation of what participants see, hear and understand. This study used semi-structured telephonic individual interviews, WhatsApp based Focus group interviews and reflective journals to generate data. Figure 4.1 below shows the timeline for data generation.

Figure 4.1: Data generation timeline



4.6.1 Interviews

According to Monday (2020), an interview is a survey that is commonly administered verbally, and may be used for an individual or a group of people. An interview is a tool that academic researchers often use to gather data. It is a method of data collection in which an interviewer obtains responses from a participant in a face-to-face encounter (Mann & Mann, 2016). It can also be done through a telephone call or by electronic means (Farooq, 2015; Saarijarvi & Bratt, 2021). The scholars go further to say that interviews are frequently used in exploratory and descriptive research and also in a case study. It can be said that the interview is the most direct method of obtaining facts from the participants. Interviews are most appropriate particularly when straightforward and factual information is desired (Galvin, 2015; Portigal, 2023). There are various advantages to an interview: it enables the researcher to know if the interviewee understood the question, and helps to clarify the ambiguity in the question. In addition, it allows researchers to do a follow-up and explain unclear responses from the participants (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Roberts, 2020).

The instrument commonly used here is called the interview schedule. The interview schedule is an instrument with closed-ended or fixed alternative questions and indications of how the participants should answer the questions (Jain, 2021). Portigal (2023) notes that an interview schedule needs to be presented to each participant in precisely the same way. This is done in order to minimise the role and influence of the interviewer and enable a more objective comparison of results. It can also be helpful in ascertaining values, preferences, interests, tasks, attitudes, beliefs and experiences. In this study, interviews were conducted through WhatsApp telephonic calls as I could not meet the participants during the COVID-19 pandemic. Low (2019) categorises qualitative interviews into structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews.

Structured interviews are formalised for all participants to access the same questions in the same manner (Wilson *et al.*, 2016). According to Young *et al.* (2018), a structured interview has the advantages of being time efficient, limiting researcher bias, and allowing the researcher to control the interview format, making it easier to code, compare and analyse data.

A semi-structured interview is a type of interview in which the interviewer needs to ask a certain number of specific questions, which can also pose additional questions. A semi-structured interview always includes closed-ended and open-ended questions (Ahlin, 2019). This study used semi-structured interviews guided by the interview schedule (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). Furthermore, semi-structured interviews and the interview processes for the study were purposefully arranged to allow interviewees to have a deep discussion. Regarding Consumer Studies of TLCs, the study sought to determine the participants' awareness of the concept and identify whether TLCs promote professional development for them. The essence of this is to allow the researcher to delve into related researched issues about the subject matter at hand and to have relevant and rich data which can be generated. Brown and Danaher (2019) and Husband (2020) argue that a semi-structured interview in academic research allows the researcher to communicate directly with the participants. Based on this, the study used semi-structured interviews for the ten Consumer Studies teachers from one district, as clusters in the wards were impossible since few schools offered the subject in their areas. Various questions were asked to get answers to the various research questions from the participants.

In addition, the study required in-depth information about the professional development of Consumer Studies teachers, so a semi-structured interview put the researcher in a better position to obtain relevant information from Consumer Studies teachers in their natural environment (Crocker *et al.*, 2014). The researcher would use various signs such as nodding, smiling and appropriate gestures in order to encourage the participants to give more and better information, as suggested by Ekman *et al.* (2022). In addition, the study employed semi-structured interviews owing to their flexibility and ability to elicit more relevant information that would be relevant to the research (Ruslin *et al.*, 2022).

The unstructured interview is more free-flowing; it is usually informal, like a normal conversation (Chauhan, 2022; Villanueva, 2019). It is commonly used for exploratory or qualitative research studies in which the researcher does not have adequate knowledge about the topic. Based on this, unstructured interviews usually produce more in-depth information on the participants' beliefs and attitudes that can be obtained through any other data-gathering procedure.

4.6.1.1 Individual interviews

An individual interview is the appropriate method of data gathering on phenomena that are not readily observable (Lareau, 2021). In this study, interviews were an appropriate way of understanding the attitudes, perceptions, opinions and experiences of Consumer Studies teachers; in other words, their perspectives on their professional learning. These interviews occurred during times each participant was willing to partake, such as during tea breaks, free periods, or after school. I conducted ten individual interviews, each consisting of one session per participant. The interviews took place using WhatsApp telephonic calls, and questions were asked based on the study's objectives. The essence of an individual interview is to allow the interviewer to talk with an individual for specific minutes or hours (Gudkova, 2018). Follow-up interviews were conducted after data analysis. Their purpose was to follow up on issues that emerged from data. Transcripts of interviews were returned to participants for further clarity. The interviews were recorded with an audio tape and lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. I also took notes during the interviews.

4.6.1.2. Focus group interviews

Focus group interviews are interviews with groups of about five to fifteen people whose opinions and experiences are requested for the study under investigation (Robinson., 2020). In addition, a Focus group interview is a form of interview in academic research designed to collect and analyse data to promote effective interactions among group members (Colom, 2022; Halliday *et al.*, 2021). This implies that a Focus group interview is a form of qualitative research method in which groups of people rather than one person are informally interviewed in a group discussion environment. The essence of Focus group interviews is to allow the participants to share their thoughts. In this way, they generate new ideas and, at the same time, consider a range of views before answering the research questions. Using focus group interviews in academic research allows the participants to participate in its planning and implementation, where the topic is a practical community concern.

Focus group interviews were conducted with ten Consumer Studies teachers using WhatsApp-based Focus group interviewing, as I collected data during a strict lockdown of COVID-19. The teachers were a group of five for each interview, meaning I had two Focus group interviews. Each group had four sessions of interviews, which meant in total I held eight Focus group interviews with the participants. Splitting them in half prevented chaos during our meetings; therefore, it was easier to work with a smaller group (Romm, 2015). Using the method permitted virtual social interaction and served as an avenue for participants to express themselves freely. Fortunately, all

the participants had smartphone access, and I sent them mobile data. Open-ended questions were posed to allow the Consumer Studies teachers to express their ideas in their ways. Interviews were recorded with the approval of the participants. The Focus groups interviews duration ranged between 30 to 60 minutes, and all were recorded and then transcribed. Notes were jotted down during the interviews.

4.6.2. Reflective journals

After each teacher engagement, the Consumer Studies teachers were requested to reflect on open-ended questions by unpacking what transpired from their meetings. The reflective journals were used and sent through the WhatsApp platform since data were collected during COVID-19. The use of WhatsApp was vital as it permitted me to clarify any confusing responses quickly.

A reflective journal is a form of data that provides access to relevant, concrete, documented information useful for the research. Gray and Malins (2016) and Walsh and Mann (2015) argue that reflective journal usage in academic research can help researchers elicit valuable information that will transform the educational experience of Consumer Studies teachers into best practices. For this research, the use of reflective journals permitted Consumer Studies teachers to explain their professional development through their engagement in various learning spaces. As a result, a reflective journal was used for triangulation purposes.

Casanave (2020) used a reflective journal to investigate her learners' educational experiences. In this study, I used reflective journals to capture Consumer Studies teachers' experiences as they engaged in various forms of learning in TLCs and to gain a deeper understanding of their learning. The benefit of using a reflective journal is that it facilitates active learning and reflection on that learning (Howell, 2021; Vicary *et al.*, 2017). Hence, in this study, I examined how Consumer Studies teachers learned through TLCs in one district in KwaZulu-Natal.

Reflective journals were particularly beneficial for providing potential insights into phenomena that were not clear or predicted when the research journey began (Nind *et al.*, 2020). In this study, the reflective journal assisted Consumer Studies teachers in capturing each TLC's unique setting. Information such as how the Consumer Studies teachers interacted with one another in TLCs provided further insight that aided in interpreting their answers to the study's objectives.

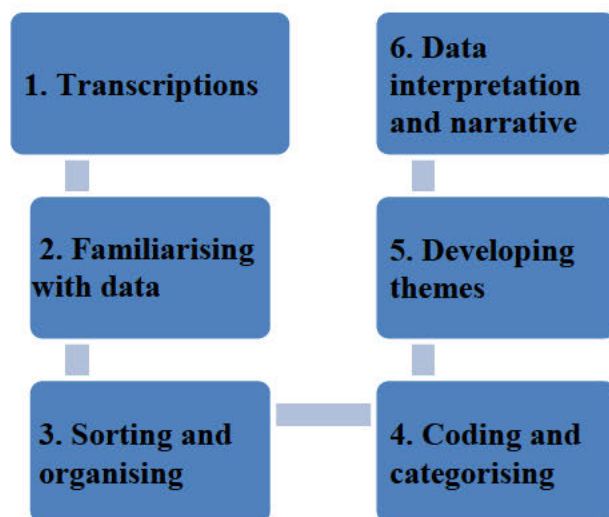
4.7. DATA ANALYSIS

This section presents the process that was followed to analyse data. For data to speak to the reader, it must be analysed and interpreted by the researcher (Mahama & Khalifa, 2017). Data analysis

entails breaking data down into its elements and building them up again through processes of categorisation and coding (Mahama & Khalifa, 2017). In this study, I used thematic analysis. Both inductive and deductive methods were used to analyse the data. According to Bertram and Christiansen (2016), deductive analysis occurs when the researcher begins the process with a set of categories already created by a model or theory, whereas the inductive approach allows the data to be analysed using categories that emerge from the data. According to Braun *et al.* (2022), thematic analysis phases consist of six sequential steps, which are transcriptions, familiarising with data; sorting and organising data; coding and categorising; developing themes; and interpretation and developing a narrative.

Figure 4.2 below illustrates the data analysis process.

Figure 4.2: Data analysis process



First step: Transcriptions - It provides a written account of spoken words (McMullin, 2023). This procedure enabled the movement from raw interviews (WhatsApp Focus group interviews and individual telephonic interviews) on audio tapes to written text. As I was transcribing, I began to interpret the information. This step is followed by familiarising oneself with data.

Second step: Familiarising oneself with data - I familiarised myself with the data by listening to the recordings several times and referring to the notes jotted down during interviews. This process permitted me to fully comprehend the messages conveyed during discussions. According to Sutton and Austin (2015), familiarising oneself with participants' stories permits the researcher to understand the participants' experiences of the study under investigation. I began to understand more about the participants' perspectives. After transcribing and typing interviews, I started reading through the data to familiarize myself with them. Lastly, I double-checked the transcripts

against the audiotape recordings as I read them to make sure the responses were accurate and representative of what the participants said. This assisted me as it allowed me to better understand ideas without being biased. The following step is sorting and organising.

Third step: Sorting and organising - Chowdhury (2015, p.122) defines sorting and organising qualitative data as “the placing of similar objects or entities together to facilitate easier analysis and assessment of the data.” Sorting and organising the data required me to fully understand it so that I could decide which data addressed which question and sort them accordingly. I used various coloured pens (brown, red and orange) to identify participants’ responses to the three research questions as I sorted the data in transcriptions. After this, data were transformed, and descriptive data were given meaning through coding and categorising.

Fourth step: Coding and categorising - According to Moser and Korstjens (2018), coding is organising huge quantities of data into smaller parts that may be conveniently retrieved when needed. Viruru and Rios (2021) refer to coding as the process of meticulously reading line by line through the transcription of the data and breaking it down into understandable pieces. This required reviewing and revising the interview transcripts repeatedly. Open coding was used to analyse the data and identify each code that emerged from the data. For this procedure, concepts are found, their attributes and dimensions are found in the data, and this is done analytically (Mezmir, 2020). Hence, in this study, I used line-by-line analysis. The data were divided into units of meaning by line-by-line analysis of each passage of text from the transcripts.

Manual coding was carried out while attempting to find key words or phrases in understanding how Consumer Studies teachers learned in TLCs in one district in KwaZulu-Natal. As a result, each interview transcript was read through and coded by hand. After reading transcripts numerous times, open coding was done using various colours to code the data. Thereafter, transcripts were highlighted to indicate units of meaning (Jackson *et al.*, 2018) that reflected Consumer Studies teachers learning in TLCs. I chose and assigned the codes to the units of meaning based on my interpretation of the data. Once all data had been transcribed, data segments were coded. Coding occurred at the level of words, sentences and paragraphs in the reflective journals. The purpose was to find common themes among the categories in each data collection. The next step discusses developing themes.

Fifth Step: Developing themes - The inductive process of organising data into categories and discovering patterns among the categories constitutes qualitative data analysis (Azungah, 2018). Throughout this procedure, units of meaning or codes discovered to be connected in meaning

were grouped together as themes within each data element. The themes developed from the interviews were used to analyse reflective journals.

Data analysis also included the application of deductive reasoning. The theory of TLCs was used to guide the coding procedure, which divided the data into groups and themes. Lave and Wenger's (1991) and Wenger's (1998) theoretical framework outlined in Chapter Three was used to gain deeper insight into how Consumer Studies teachers learned through TLCs in one district in KwaZulu-Natal. This was accomplished by re-reading the complete data set and applying the theoretical framework to find themes. The research questions and theoretical framework were thematised in respect to the meaning units. Ideas that appeared to be related to the themes were grouped together under the themes. This was done to discover any data that may have been missing during the process of inductive coding. This procedure led to the emergence of both new and established themes.

The dominant themes across three data sets were determined by examining the themes that arose from various data sources. Specific themes from three data sets were renamed, while others were compressed into subthemes since they could not stand alone as dominant themes. Thereafter themes were checked. If there was no recurrence, the themes were condensed into seven dominating themes. These broad themes were further subdivided into three main research findings. The process of selecting and labelling the broad themes was influenced by Lave and Wenger's theory of CoP.

Three broad themes were identified for this study. The first one was learning platforms that Consumer Studies teachers used to learn in TLCs. The second was learning spaces and various forms of Consumer Studies teachers' engagements in TLCs. The third was the kind of learning in the Consumer Studies TLCs. To facilitate a clear understanding of these broad themes, they were broken down into subthemes, which in some cases were further broken down and then logically presented in the two data presentation chapters (Chapters Five and Six).

Chapter Five comprised two themes: The first broad theme, which was learning platforms Consumer Studies teachers used to learn in TLCs, was subdivided into face-to-face teacher engagement in Consumer Studies learning communities and virtual teacher engagement in learning communities. The second broad theme was learning spaces of Consumer Studies teachers' engagements in TLCs. It had one dominating theme and various forms, which were learning spaces in the school. The dominating theme was subdivided into departmental meetings, which are learning from the departmental head, learning from master teachers, and peer observation from other teachers. The second dominating theme was learning spaces outside the

school. It comprised of developmental workshops, teacher learning through orientation workshops, teacher learning through assessment workshops, teacher learning through content-based workshops, practical assessment task (PAT) mediation workshop, learning through SBA moderation conducted at cluster and district level, learning through PAT moderation, and teacher learning through subject committees and conferences.

The third broad theme presented in Chapter Six of this study was the kind of learning that occurred in the Consumer Studies TLCs. The broad theme was subdivided into three dominating themes as follows. The first dominating theme was managing reforms in the Consumer Studies curriculum subdivided into two sections: developing sustainability in Consumer Studies and developing personal entrepreneurial skills. The second dominating theme was TLCs' enhancement of Consumer Studies teachers' pedagogical content knowledge. It was broken down into two sections; namely, TLCs enrich subject matter knowledge (CAPS), and TLCs improve instructional strategies. The last dominating theme was managing and nurturing personal growth. It comprised the following two sections: TLCs encourage capacity building, and TLCs promote confidence and job satisfaction.

The last step, discussed below, is data interpretation and narrative.

Sixth step: Data interpretation and narrative - Interpretation of data was an ongoing activity involving going back and forth, reviewing the data for clarity and identifying existing patterns in them. This assisted me in concluding whether the analysis could be put together into a narrative that depicted a clear impression of the professional learning of Consumer Studies teachers, what they learned and how their learning influenced their teaching practice as shown in the literature. The following section discusses trustworthiness in research.

4.8. ENSURING TRUSTWORTHINESS

Trustworthiness is using multiple strategies to ensure the accuracy of research findings (Kyngäs *et al.*, 2020). Shufutinsky (2020) argues that trustworthiness is very necessary, and there is a need to pay special attention to it in academic research. They go further to say that trustworthiness points out whether the academic research data and findings are worth paying attention to. This indicates if the research data is transferable, credible, dependable and confirmable.

Trustworthiness in qualitative research needs enough evidence to prove the authenticity of the results that emanate from the research. Chowdhury (2015) notes that there are four fundamental issues that need to be considered to guarantee the trustworthiness of any academic research. As

indicated above, these include credibility, dependability, conformability and transferability. Each of these criteria is based on epistemological standards.

4.8.1 Credibility

According to Bertram and Christiansen (2016), credible research must reflect the participants' reality. For this study, the research was done in such a way that the findings demonstrated a high level of credibility; in other words, the reader of the research work will believe in the outcome of the study. This research took the following precautions: repeated study, compelling reading and re-reading of text. In addition, other methods recommended by Liao and Hitchcock (2018) included the following: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing and member checks.

I used audio tape to record the interviews to enhance the credibility of the data. The data were transcribed from the audio tape. The documents and field notes were kept in a ring file for verification. For this study, I ensured the validation of results from individual interviews, Focus group interviews and reflective journal reports. The essence of all this was to validate the research results to allow for the credibility of the research results for Consumer Studies teacher learning through TLCs in one district in KwaZulu-Natal.

4.8.2 Dependability

Nyirenda *et al.* (2020) note that dependability is the provision of evidence such that if it were to be repeated with the same participants, the findings would be consistent. This implies that dependability is the stability of the data over time. Extant literature maintains that stability when dependability is absent cannot be achieved (Casale *et al.*, 2021; Cohen *et al.*, 2017; Cypress, 2017). The following techniques were used to ensure dependability in the study. They include stepwise replication in which all the steps in gathering data were replicated by two or more items. The dependability of this study ensured that results were consistent during data collection, analysis and interpretation. My peer teachers who had a PhD qualification determined through auditing whether the processes and procedures I conducted were acceptable. They did so by looking to see if I was careless or made minor mistakes in conceptualising the study, collecting the data, interpreting the findings and writing a report.

I strengthened the evidence in my case study by using various data collection methods such as semi-structured telephonic individual interviews, WhatsApp-based Focus group interviews and reflective journals. I also used the theoretical framework of Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998) to analyse the data. I used thematic analysis, and data were analysed qualitatively.

4.8.3 Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the potential for congruency of data in terms of accuracy and relevance of meaning (CohenMiller, 2022). According to Haven and van Grootel (2019), confirmability is concerned with establishing whether the data represents the information provided by the participants and that the researcher's biases or perceptions do not fuel the interpretations of the data. There are various techniques to ensure confirmability in academic research. They include audit, reflexivity and triangulation (Henry, 2015). This study used triangulation. The study did not rely on only one method for generating data; interviews and reflective journals were used, strengthening confirmability. Confirmability was also used by referring to audio-tape recordings when findings were reviewed. In addition, my supervisor read the chapters to confirm whether the research procedures were adhered to.

4.8.4 Transferability

According to Kyngäs *et al.* (2020), transferability is the ability of research to apply the findings in the contexts or to other participants. There are various strategies to enhance transferability of academic research. These include thick descriptions, purposive sampling and data saturation (Stalmeijer *et al.*, 2024). The researcher used the thick description approach, which entailed collecting and providing sufficient detailed descriptions of data in the given context and reporting on them. For this study, the data supported the findings, conclusion and recommendations, and there was internal agreement between the researcher's interpretation and the actual evidence. This was achieved by safely storing raw data from interview tapes, transcripts and field notes.

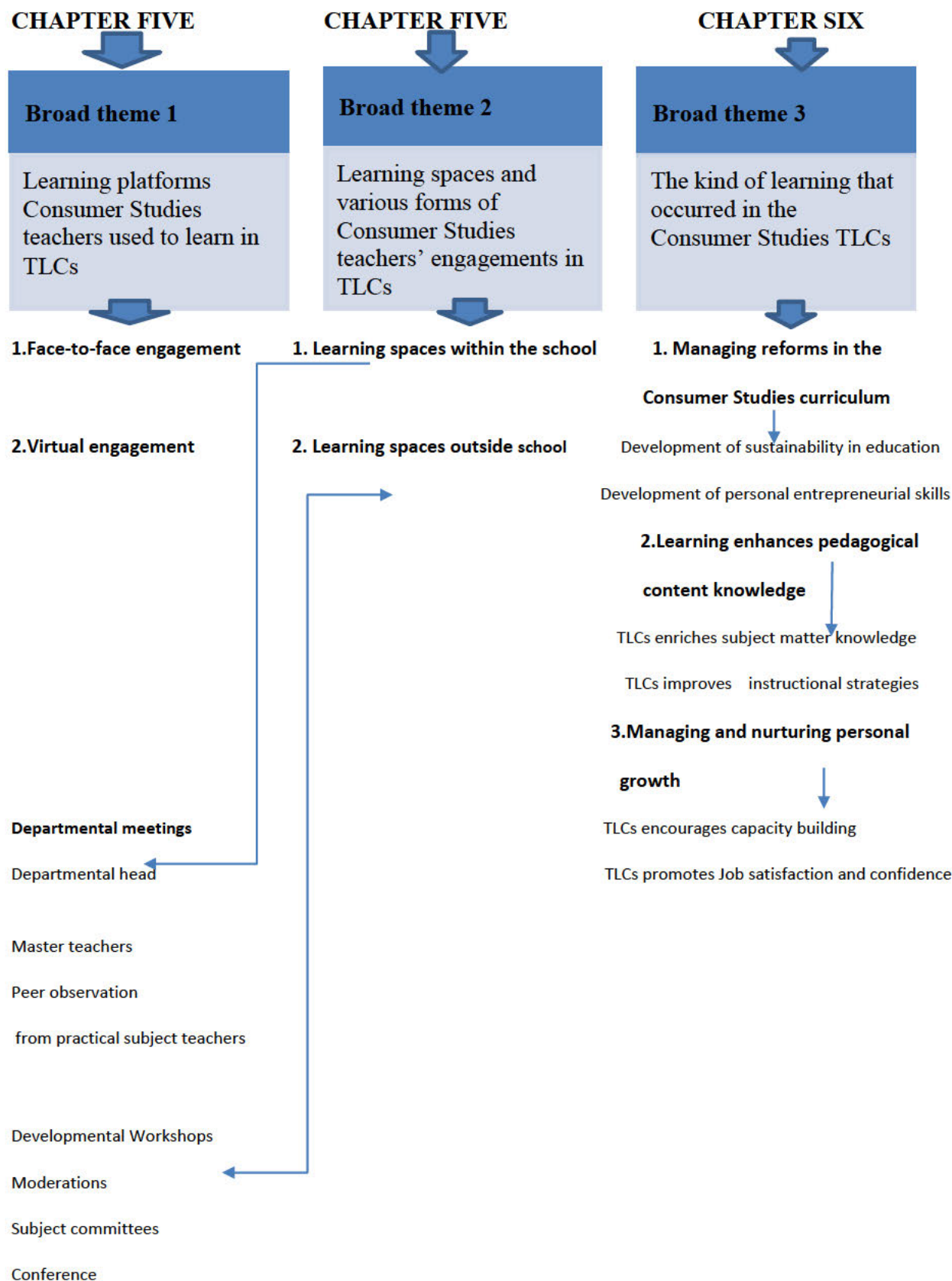
Also, I recorded all responses during the interviews rather than jotting down notes. I ensured that the individual and Focus group interviewees were comfortable when the interviews were conducted. During the interviews, I ensured that responses to the questions were as accurate and reliable as possible. In this study, the interview transcripts were read carefully and transcribed to make meaning. This ensured that relevant data supported the conclusions drawn. The audio-tape recordings from the focus group interviews and individual interviews were transcribed and consolidated with the field notes. The primary purpose of the reflective journal, individual and focus group interviews, was to validate the participants' data and probe into issues that might arise from the teachers' responses. The analysis was drawn from these sources to further understand Consumer Studies teacher learning in various TLC engagements. For these reasons the analysis of the reflective journals drew upon the findings from the Focus Group and individual interviews.

4.8.5 Triangulation

The study used triangulation to validate data from different sources. Triangulation is the use of various sources to draw research conclusions, particularly about what is the truth about a single phenomenon, and to bring clarity to and understanding of that (Farquhar., *et al.*, 2020). This implies that triangulation in academic research allows researchers to collect data from various sources, and at the same time, in order to validate the results. The essence of using triangulation in academic research is to prevent the bias that may have occurred when data were collected from a single source. Neuman (2018) lists various reasons for using triangulation in academic research. These include the need for additional data sources in order to give more information about the study at hand. Also, it allows for more comprehensive data results, and prevents inconsistencies in data sets, which are more easily detected. Natow (2020) notes that triangulation provides opportunity for researchers to validate their research results. In this study, I used reflective journals to verify data against the interviews for Consumer Studies teacher learning through TLCs in one district in KwaZulu-Natal.

Figure 4.3 below illustrates the data analysis presentation chapters.

Figure 4.3: Illustration for data analysis chapters



4.9. ETHICAL ISSUES

May and Perry (2022) maintain that ethics is a process, method or way of looking at things while determining what to do and how to approach problems and issues. This research involved human beings, so ethics is very important.

4.9.1 Permission

The research proposal was submitted to the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Research and Ethics Committee before data collection. Thereafter I needed access to schools, for which I needed a gate keeper. A gate keeper is someone who regulates entry to a building or institution, such as a school principal or managing director (Singh & Wassenaar, 2016). I requested permission from the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education (see Appendix B) and principals of the schools to collect data in their schools (see Appendix C). After being awarded the right to conduct my study in Consumer Studies teacher learning through TLCs in one district in KwaZulu-Natal, I forwarded the said approval to the University of KwaZulu-Natal Ethics Committee which granted me with ethical clearance (see Appendix A).

4.9.2 Informed consent

Holloway and Galvin (2016) indicate that the consent of participants is essential, and all participants must be given a clear understanding of the researcher's expectations. Consumer Studies teachers were informed telephonically about what the study entailed. Participants' approval to take part in the study was obtained through written and signed informed consent (see Appendix D). The participants' right to voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity and the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time was ensured. An information sheet explaining the purpose of the study was attached to the consent form.

4.9.3 Confidentiality

To achieve the principle of secrecy, the researcher must have particular personal and professional characteristics such as honesty and respect for the study participants (Petrova *et al.*, 2016). The data that were obtained from this study were only accessed by me, and were only to be used for the purpose of this research project. I ensured that my transcripts and tape recordings were accessed only by me. I saved all typed work on my memory stick, and secured it with a password. Once my data were gathered, the tapes used to record the interviews were destroyed, and the transcripts of my interviews were shredded.

4.9.4 Anonymity

According to Kang, (2023), anonymity refers to data collection without getting any personal, identifiable information. The researcher cannot identify a specific participant in an anonymous study by looking up the data. Participants may be asked to provide demographic information, which can then be used by the researcher to describe the participants' traits as a whole. For this study, anonymity was maintained as I used pseudonyms for the district's and participants' names. The next section discusses the limitations of the study.

4.10 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study's limitations are defined as potential problems that are beyond the control of the researcher, problems that are linked to financial constraints, research design or other relevant issues (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018).

This study had several limitations. Since the data were collected during COVID-19, when face-to-face meetings with participants were restricted, I ultimately resorted to using a social media virtual platform, namely WhatsApp, to obtain data. Because interviews were conducted online, several participants experienced network coverage issues in their areas, especially those teaching in rural areas, necessitating rescheduling with those participants. Interviews were brief because they were conducted mostly through WhatsApp, so I attempted to be as quick as possible so that participants would not run out of data bundles. Lengthier interviews would have allowed for additional probing and data collection. There was a delay in returning reflective journals because they were to be given to me through WhatsApp after completion, so I had to remind the teachers to submit them constantly. The study focused only on one district in KwaZulu-Natal, so I could not provide a valid basis for comparison with other districts in the province.

4.11. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter discussed paradigms and their assumptions: epistemology, ontology and methodology. I employed the interpretive paradigm since I believed that reality is a social construction. I used a qualitative approach to be consistent with various data collection methods, including interviews and reflective journals. The research design used was a case study to determine the meaning of various subject matter. The chapter demonstrated how the CoP theoretical framework was used to interpret the data. In addition, the study employed triangulation, which simply means using multiple sources to collect and analyse data. Data

analysis was in line with thematic analysis, which is commonly used in qualitative research. I have shown how I established the quality and trustworthiness of the study. The last section explained the limitations of this study. The following two chapters present the findings of the study.

CHAPTER FIVE

LEARNING PLATFORMS AND SPACES THAT FACILITATE CONSUMER STUDIES TEACHERS' ENGAGEMENT IN TLCs

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous four chapters presented the study orientation, reviewed empirical knowledge or existing literature that informs the study and discussed theoretically the framework and the research methodology for the research conducted for the study. The current chapter thematically presents data to answer the following research question:

- How do Consumer Studies teachers learn through TLCs in one district in KwaZulu-Natal?

Two themes emerged from the data and will be presented in this chapter. The first theme focuses on the learning platforms that Consumer Studies teachers use to learn. It answers the following question:

- What learning platforms do Consumer Studies teachers use to learn in TLCs?

The second theme presents data on learning spaces and various forms of Consumer Studies teachers' engagements in TLCs to answer the subquestion:

- What learning spaces and forms do Consumer Studies teachers use to engage in TLCs?

5.2 LEARNING PLATFORMS CONSUMER STUDIES TEACHERS USED TO LEARN IN TLCs

This section presents data on the platforms Consumer Studies teachers use to engage in TLCs. The findings shed light on how Consumer Studies teachers learned before and during the COVID-19 lockdown as they had to adapt to online learning to share their challenges and solutions and acquire more subject knowledge. Owing to COVID-19 restrictions, face-to-face engagements became less common. It was evident from the findings that because of the nature of the subject, there were exceptional cases that compelled teachers to meet face-to-face. However, they had to adhere to strict health protocols. Teachers highlighted advantages and disadvantages when they compared the learning platforms they used.

Findings revealed that Consumer Studies teachers learned through face-to-face and virtual learning engagements.

5.2.1 Face-to-face teacher engagement in Consumer Studies learning communities

According to the participants, face-to-face engagements took diverse forms where teachers could meet in person in various settings for developmental purposes. During interviews, the participants articulated several views to demonstrate that their meetings had traditionally been through physical engagement. The teachers' experiences on the various modes through which such face-to-face learning community activities took place are detailed below.

Sbo indicated that face-to-face Consumer Studies teacher engagements adopted the forming of subject committee meetings and twinning schools to develop subject knowledge and discuss common challenges hindering the effective delivery of the curriculum. She presented the following:

I had an opportunity to partner with other schools in subject committees to acquire knowledge and discuss mutual problems encountered during the teaching and learning of the subject (Sbo).

Because Consumer Studies is not offered in many neighbouring schools, Consumer Studies teachers could not meet as a cluster. They normally meet in subject committees outside their schools. While other subject committees were formed at the school or cluster level, Consumer Studies committees were formed at the district level owing to the low number of schools offering the subject in the clusters. Toko indicated they had to travel long distances to meet face-to-face as a subject committee because this committee was formed at a district level. This is what she said:

I would wake up in the earliest hours so that I could catch a taxi to meet my peers in our district subject committee meeting. It took me three to four hours to reach the venue as my school is in a deep rural area. Sometimes I would get to the venue when the meeting was about to finish since I use public transport. I checked the weather forecast in advance and if it predicted that it would be raining on the day, I would go a day in advance and find accommodation next to where the meeting would be held. There was no transport during rainy days owing to muddy roads (Toko).

Another participant concurred with the previous statement in that she also used to get to the subject committee meetings late as they took place far from where she works. She mentioned that whenever she arrived at the venue, she was physically drained and sometimes could not focus on or contribute effectively to discussions:

I always drive to the meeting venue two hours late as I work in a remote area. I got to the venue, already exhausted from the long drive. It normally takes me time to be settled, but thereafter I can participate fully throughout the district subject committee meeting (Sphe).

Teachers were distressed that because subject committee meetings were not held regularly, they had to wait till the next meeting before their queries or concerns were attended to. Focus Group 1 members felt that their development as Consumer Studies teachers was limited because they could not meet regularly at the cluster level. Other teachers could meet anytime with neighbouring schools, but Consumer Studies teachers had to travel a long distance to a central venue to meet face-to-face with other teachers at subject committee meetings. This is reflected in what a participant said during the Focus group interviews:

We sometimes didn't get immediate responses to our queries as we had to wait for the scheduled dates for the subject committee meetings to be specified. Our subject was disadvantaged somehow as there was no meeting at a cluster level (Member of Focus Group 1).

The participants revealed that they also met physically during workshops. They indicated that development and methodology workshops were organised by the Consumer Studies Subject Advisor. During these, Consumer Studies teachers had the opportunity of meeting and communicating with other teachers. Such engagements assisted in developing aspects of content that they were uncertain of or had questions about. A Focus Group 2 member asserted:

We liked the fact that we were called for content workshops by our Subject Advisor. This permitted us to share and exchange knowledge. If there was any clarity that a teacher was seeking on a certain aspect, he or she asked with ease, and there were immediate responses provided (Member of Focus Group 2).

Although teachers were not allowed to meet in person because of the COVID-19 lockdown, the participants indicated that there were times when they were obliged to meet physically. The findings indicated that teachers also met face-to-face during moderation. They explained that they used to come together in one venue to ensure that assessments aligned with the subject policy document. During moderation, they also checked whether the standards were fair and whether the marking was consistent based on learners' evidence of work. The Subject Advisor did validation and verification of marks face-to-face during school visits and district moderation. During 2020 and 2021, moderation for school-based assessment (SBA) and PAT was limited to Grade 12 since it was an exit grade.

Participants indicated that when they attended moderation, they were expected to adhere to the health protocols specified by the Department of Health who liaised with the DBE. A participant had this to say:

The Subject Advisor conducted a district moderation for SBA and a school visit for PAT. She used to multitask while the learners were doing the practical exam, verifying marksheets to see whether all learners had been awarded marks and all marks had been captured correctly. We had to take precautionary measures by protecting ourselves with masks to reduce the spread of the pandemic (Tuks).

Consumer Studies teachers also met physically during departmental meetings after the strict lockdown level of COVID-19, which required compliance with the relevant Department of Health regulations. Participants indicated that they met with Science or Commerce Department teachers because no standalone Consumer Studies Department existed. Aphiwe added that the teachers who attended this meeting were able to catch up on their learning:

We learned in a Sciences Departmental meeting. The departmental head sent the invitation in advance and we had to sign to acknowledge receipt. It was pleasant to attend the departmental meeting as it was a catching up session while learning simultaneously (Aphiwe).

The data presented in this section showed that the COVID-19 lockdown limited the number of Consumer Studies teachers who could meet frequently. Face-to-face meetings were used in some cases, and teachers had to follow the COVID-19 health regulations. It was evident from the findings that most physical meetings took place after a strict lockdown. There were teachers who

discussed the difficulties of meeting this way because of their long-distance travel, but they made every effort to attend the meetings. Some teachers stated that they enjoyed meeting in person.

5.2.2 Virtual teacher engagement in learning communities

In addition to Consumer Studies teachers collaborating through face-to-face engagements, the participants also mentioned that they collaborated using modern technology. In both individual and Focus group interviews, the participants described the extent to which they had managed to continue supporting each other and sharing information and materials through virtual space during lockdown. They explained that they engaged through modes such as smart phones, tablets and computers.

Most participants mentioned that they used social media platforms such as WhatsApp-based messaging and Facebook to share important resources required to facilitate teaching and learning. Focus Group 1 members told how beneficial it was to learn on a virtual platform because they met with teachers from other provinces besides KwaZulu-Natal in Consumer Studies Facebook and WhatsApp groups, and communicated at any time. They also mentioned that there were learning materials for Grade 12 that were available online. Other teachers downloaded and shared these materials with those who could not access them online:

We used Facebook and WhatsApp, and some teachers joined Consumer Studies teachers' groups in Facebook where teachers from different provinces engaged with each other. There were notes shared and activities for Grade 12 to work with while still on strict lockdown. The priority was the exit grade, as they would sit for the national exam at the end of the year. Those who were part of the Facebook group downloaded the resources and shared with others who were not part of Facebook via WhatsApp (Member of Focus Group 1).

When asked how teachers learned virtually, the participant from Focus Group 2 stated that they learned from the Facebook Consumer Studies teachers' group, which announced when the subject was to be broadcast on the local radio stations in the other provinces, and teachers obtained information about when the Consumer Studies channel would be activated:

From the Consumer Studies teachers' Facebook group, there were provinces that shared that they would broadcast the content on a specific radio channel for Consumer Studies on

a certain day since it was during a strict lockdown for COVID-19 (Member of Focus Group 2).

A Focus Group 1 member explained the importance of using a WhatsApp platform because it had features for recording video lessons that could be edited before being shared with other group members. They found this learning platform fascinating and not limiting in terms of time and space because they continued meeting virtually without going to the meeting venues. Below is one participant's view:

By using a WhatsApp group, we learned something new: that we are not limited to learning physically. This brought changes as we quickly recorded the videos of our lessons. We really enjoyed this method as we could record ourselves, and if we were not happy about the recording, we edited it before sharing it with others (Member of Focus Group 1).

Because there were few face-to-face meetings, teachers could chat or send messages to other teachers through a Consumer Studies district WhatsApp group. They could communicate at any time and did not have to wait as they used to when meetings were face-to-face. The participants explained that they used digital platforms, such as Microsoft Teams, that they had previously never tapped into, which were very useful in facilitating Teacher Learning Community programmes in Consumer Studies. One member from Focus Group 2 explained how she managed to share teaching and learning resources in a virtual collaborative space such as MS Teams. She added that it was enjoyable to learn through attending virtual meetings. In addition, meeting and sharing information through digital platforms motivated some teachers to enrol for a computer course in order to hone their computer skills. This is what she said:

What we really enjoyed was the ease of communication through a district WhatsApp group. We were compelled to use digital technology as there were no means of meeting face-to-face during the strict lockdown for COVID-19. It was a great learning curve and fun to learn on the Teams platform. It was interesting to see that anyone could take control of the slides presented online by projecting teaching and learning material in MS Teams. We really saw the need to register for a computer course since everything has gone digital (Member of Focus Group 2).

The findings indicated that teachers used smartphones in accessing websites with Consumer Studies additional teaching and learning materials. They explained that they used Google as

another learning platform for searching information in order to improve their teaching and learning. This allowed them to keep abreast of curriculum developments. Phume added that they used WhatsApp to share this information, which was downloaded from Google, with peers. She stated:

We could browse through food websites and download recipes we used for teaching. We could also access websites on housing and interiors for a better understanding and to relate them to the curriculum. Those who had accessed the information would share it in the WhatsApp group (Phume).

Because technology was mostly used during COVID-19, participants indicated that they used Microsoft OneDrive as a learning platform to access all policy documents for the subject. Aphiwe explained how they learned to access the required documentation through online media by following the link provided by their Subject Advisor. This allowed teachers to access the materials at any time via the link. She commented as follows:

We learned through OneDrive. Our Subject Advisor shared a link with us to access OneDrive. All the documents and circulars pertaining to the subject were uploaded there. We did know where to access information, which was good. We always downloaded the teaching and learning materials and monitoring tools from OneDrive. (Aphiwe).

Although platforms like MS Teams were used, most participants relied heavily on WhatsApp, which was in line with advancement in technology. They explained how WhatsApp helped them collaborate and share the downloaded materials with other teachers. It was evident that participants used this mode of social media for teaching and learning with the benefit of getting instant feedback and being more cost-effective compared to the time and expense of travelling to a venue for a physical meeting. Tomby had this to say:

We didn't hesitate to consult our peers if we were stuck or needed clarity in some content, as we had a WhatsApp group. Communicating via WhatsApp was cheaper than travelling a distance to your peers, especially for me in a rural area. We quickly got answers from what we were looking for with ease on this platform (Tomby).

Participants revealed that they often had difficulty accessing messages because of an unstable internet. Toko had difficulty accessing the internet because she worked in a remote area. She

indicated that she was only able to read WhatsApp messages and access teaching and learning materials during the weekends when she was at home. This resulted in implementing what the Subject Advisor shared at a later stage, which was not intended. The participant asserted:

My challenge is poor network connectivity when I am at school, so I ended up having access to WhatsApp during weekends, as I stay in the cottage at school. I must confess I missed much information shared by the Subject Advisor, as I saw the WhatsApp messages later (Toko).

There were teachers who struggled to access these materials uploaded online since they did not have laptops, and they used smartphones. Those teachers applied to their peers, who could share the materials through a WhatsApp group. Below is the participant's submission:

Every time I tried downloading from OneDrive to access documents, I failed. I did not know whether it was because I used my phone or what ... maybe I would have been able to download materials if I had a laptop. I always asked the teacher, who was an expert with technology, to share the resources in WhatsApp after having access to them (Nelly).

Even though technological platforms like Zoom and MS Teams were helpful in allowing teachers to attend meetings and workshops, most participants raised several concerns because they often could not afford to buy data bundles. Their schools did not make any provision for them, so it was difficult to attend virtual meetings held on this platform because they needed more data. This is what Sphe said:

Data bundles are very expensive. I did not attend the meetings held through MS Teams as my school did not buy me data, MS Teams needed more data bundles, so I missed whatever was discussed on that platform (Sphe).

Another concern that was raised by teachers was the issue of technophobia attached to new technology such as the use of Zoom and Microsoft Teams. Teachers revealed that they were afraid of using MS Teams as they were not familiar with it; but they relied on their senior education specialist, who capacitated them on its use in order to communicate effectively without any barrier. They mentioned that using MS Teams frequently enhanced their computer skills as they were familiarising themselves with the digital platforms. A participant commented:

We were anxious about using MS Teams before as we had no idea how it worked. However, with the Subject Advisor's assistance, who took us through everything with visuals and presentation of the basics to grasp in order to be able to work effectively on this platform, we survived. There was progress each day we met on MS Teams (Thando).

In addition to the above concern, participants mentioned the issue of the online platforms with which they were unacquainted. Most struggled when required to attend meetings. According to Nelly, the MS Teams platform was introduced to her as she neared her career's end. Although she attended meetings on this platform, she relied on someone familiar with MS Teams for guidance, and that individual was present for all meetings held on this platform. She said:

This MS Teams came when I was about to retire. I am always struggling to use it. Whenever there is a meeting I ensure there is someone next to me who will guide me where to press should I wish to speak (Nelly).

This section presented data on learning platforms used by Consumer Studies teachers in their TLC engagements. The teachers stated that they used primarily virtual meetings because their engagements occurred during COVID-19, which had restrictions. However, there were instances which compelled them to meet face-to-face. Smartphones were the most commonly used devices by the participants for virtual learning. Furthermore, teachers mentioned specific challenges that prevented them from fully participating in meetings. The following section presents data on learning spaces that Consumer Studies teachers could engage with.

5.3 LEARNING SPACES AND VARIOUS FORMS OF CONSUMER STUDIES TEACHERS' ENGAGEMENTS IN TLCs

This section will present data on spaces that Consumer Studies teachers used to learn. The section will also discuss various forms of Consumer Studies teachers' engagements in TLCs.

5.3.1 Learning spaces used by Consumer Studies teachers

Findings revealed that teacher learning in Consumer Studies occurred within and outside schools.

5.3.1.1 Learning spaces within the schools

According to the participants, both novice and seasoned teachers needed constant professional development to find ways to curb challenges that arose in the classroom. Teachers with vast experience believed that novice teachers needed to learn continuously to build on recently learned skills and knowledge acquired from their teacher preparation programmes to respond to the daily challenges they faced in their work. Participants viewed seasoned teachers as more conversant with current pedagogic training procedures and strategies. However, they indicated that even these teachers needed to learn continuously to cope with the ever-changing Consumer Studies curriculum requirements.

During the semi-structured interviews, participants explained how they learned in Consumer Studies TLCs. Learning engagements also occurred in schools where teachers could learn collaboratively during departmental meetings, meetings with master teachers and peer observation. The verbatim quotes supported Consumer Studies teachers' views on their school engagements with the departmental head, master teachers and subject teachers.

5.3.1.2 Teacher engagement in departmental meetings

It was evident from the findings that Consumer Studies teachers met in Commerce or Science Departments because, in most schools, there was no stand-alone Consumer Studies Department. Since one teacher taught Consumer Studies in such schools, the subject was taught under the Science or Commerce Department. This meant that Consumer Studies teacher learning in subject-specific content knowledge during departmental meetings was very limited. However, this did not hinder Consumer Studies teachers from learning in the school as they shared and observed good practices with colleagues from the Science and Commerce Departments.

Departmental meetings allowed teachers to tackle various issues such as lesson plans, appropriate teaching aids, and knowledge-sharing opportunities for better delivery of the lessons. The main reason for departmental meetings among Consumer Studies teachers was to ensure that all the activities in the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) were implemented appropriately. Regular departmental meetings allowed ongoing evaluation and realisation of the objectives of CAPS, as well as opportunities to check whether the teachers were operating in terms of the curriculum requirements.

The participants indicated that during the lockdown, they had numerous departmental meetings conducted by the departmental head to discuss changes regarding the restructuring of the curriculum and other challenges related to teaching and learning during the lockdown. This was confirmed by Nelly, who said that meetings with the departmental head allowed them to share and unpack circulars which governed the way assessments had to be conducted:

Once a month we had meetings in my department when the departmental head invited us to the Commerce Department, and we spoke on issues pertaining to curriculum coverage. Circular S3 of 2020 was discussed. This pertained to changes such as trimming some content, National Circular 02 of 2020 and Circular E11 of 2020, which guided the SBA. Challenges one faced in teaching and learning Consumer Studies during this new term were addressed as the school had opted for alternative day timetabling due to COVID-19 (Nelly).

During the departmental meetings, participants were also informed about trimming certain aspects of the curriculum. Consumer Studies teachers had to adjust to the COVID-19 curriculum changes as they were set out. This resulted in various challenges for teachers as some formal assessments were eliminated owing to this recovery annual teaching plan. This is what a participant stated:

The departmental head informed us about excluding formal assessments such as the Entrepreneurship project in Grade 12 and practical lessons in Grades 10 and 11 in term 1. These were replaced with the practical skills test, which was in written form and was administered in term 1. However, it constituted the final year-end mark of the PAT exam. (Phume).

Within the departmental meetings, teachers also learned new ways of grouping learners when conducting practical lessons since there were restrictions on visiting well-resourced neighbouring schools. Sbo highlighted how her departmental head and school principal opted for paying a fee at the restaurant so that the requirements for practical assessment were met as her school was under-resourced:

It was difficult to administer practicals during this era as I mainly conducted my practical lessons in a well-resourced neighbouring school. My departmental head said that I should stop doing this. Going to that school meant I often conducted practicals as I had to work from my school according to regulations. My principal ended up paying a fee at the local

restaurant so that my learners got to go and do practical lessons. At least I didn't have a large group, so the restaurant could accommodate us (Sbo).

Teachers indicated that because they were prohibited from grouping learners during practicals, they could not conduct fair assessments because of inadequate resources. Engaging with other teachers during departmental meetings allowed teachers to learn different and innovative ways of delivering practical lessons to adhere to COVID-19 health protocols during lockdown. Linds explained how she created a demonstration video for the practical lessons. The video was posted in the WhatsApp group for learners to watch and answer questions about what they observed. She said the following:

I could not group learners per stove as I had to abide by COVID-19 regulations. My departmental head shared that with me. Conducting practical lessons with inadequate equipment was strenuous as I had two stoves with a large group of learners. I must say I did not do justice to learners in the practical lessons evaluation; I only demonstrated to learners and shared the video through WhatsApp. Thereafter, learners had to do written work, which was integrated into the practical demonstration, in order to be awarded a mark (Linds).

Although teachers were meeting with peers from other departments, they were pleased that they got an opportunity to share their good and bad practices as well as the challenges they faced in Consumer Studies. Teachers also discussed ways of curbing and solving some challenges common to all teachers across the subjects. This is what Tuks said:

During departmental meetings, we shared the good and bad practices we faced in the classroom. Although we taught various subjects, we discovered that some challenges were similar, so we found ways to resolve them collaboratively (Tuks).

This section outlined data on how teachers learned through departmental meetings. They stated the benefits of learning through the departmental heads, although they were not necessarily Consumer Studies experts. Teachers learned generic information that applied to all of them, but each member had to apply it to her subject. The following subtheme presents data on what Consumer Studies teachers learned from master teachers.

5.3.1.3 Learning from master teachers

Teachers explained that there were master teachers at their schools who helped inexperienced teachers. In this study, master teachers came from various departments, such as Science and Commerce. Although the master teachers were unfamiliar with Consumer Studies, they offered participants valuable information since they had extensive expertise and knowledge about teaching approaches and subject policies that the Consumer Studies teachers could grasp and incorporate into their subject. Indeed, master teachers acted as mentors to the novice teachers. Because they had general expertise as professionals in the field of education. The findings suggest that this assisted teachers who were not yet grounded in the teaching of Consumer Studies to be mentored on the requisites of the subject. A participant asserted:

I got to learn as the master teacher developed me in the field. Especially since I am a novice teacher, I got exposed by attending the meetings as they taught me what is expected of me as a Consumer Studies teacher. They gave me a thorough outline of all the necessary documents, such as the structured lesson plans provided by the province, and discussed the subject guidelines for Consumer Studies, such as the notional time per week, the number of practicals to be done per term, and the minimum number of written activities to be given to learners as set by the policy document (Thando).

Since teachers learned from master teachers, the participants explained how master teachers helped them gain exposure to the use of the examination guidelines. They emphasised that this was done to be on track with the styles of questioning on topics that were challenging to learners. Master teachers also shared guidance on how to prepare learners for examinations. Teachers were told to focus more on topics with the highest weighting of marks so that they could cascade the information accordingly to learners so that they do not lose marks on those questions.

Nelly explained how master teachers shared her experience of setting practical examinations. Although she was not a Consumer Studies specialist, during our engagement at school, she highlighted the most up-to-date practical assessment guidelines that should be used to prepare the practical examinations for internal and external assessment in Grades 10-12. She stated:

Master teachers ensured that every teacher had recent practical assessment guidelines and that they were used in planning for practical examinations for Grades 10-12, and ensured that the correct skill codes with weightings were used when setting (Nelly).

Linds mentioned the guidance she gained from the master teacher on the use of provincial learner-teacher support materials when planning lessons and during teaching:

Master teachers offered guidance, so I did not have any trouble planning my lessons as the 2021 national examination guidelines and learner-teacher support materials developed by the province were stressed to be used so that gaps were quickly identified and teacher workload in planning was reduced. I used the examination guidelines to focus on the most problematic areas which had a higher weighting for the National Senior Certificate (NSC) examination such as Nutrition, which dealt with diseases, terminology, causes, prevention, allergies, etc. (Linds).

In Consumer Studies, there is an integration between the subject and other subjects such as Mathematics, Business Studies, Life Sciences and Agricultural Science. Consumer studies teachers and master teachers from the Commerce Department shared their practices in teaching financial literacy and business-related topics. They also shared strategies to raise funds for effecting teaching and learning practicals. In this situation, the group benefited from the best practices teachers from other subjects communicated. This is what Toko said:

As a Consumer Studies teacher at school, I was under the Commerce Department. I did benefit from the Commerce master teachers as we discussed ways of fundraising and deriving business plans at school. This assisted me as my subject was demanding, requiring finances to conduct practicals. I easily taught Entrepreneurship and integrated it with the actual practical, where learners had to do market research before food production (Toko).

Thando expressed her appreciation to her master teacher, who provided information on important learner-teacher support materials (LTSM) for Consumer Studies. She also mentioned that the master teacher suggested obtaining a culinary dictionary because she was having problems interpreting some recipes because of the French terminology used in the recipes. Thando shared the following thoughts:

I never knew there was a food and nutrition dictionary; the master teacher came to my rescue. I learned that one should invest in one and use it in the teaching and learning of Consumer Studies for French terminology. I failed to interpret the recipe when I did spaghetti bolognese. The recipe stated, “Cook pasta al dente”, which meant until firm (Thando).

Teachers teaching Grade 12 mentioned the valuable information they had accumulated from their master teachers. Teachers learned the importance of diagnostic analysis in finding errors and misconceptions about specific topics and how the National Senior Certificate (NSC) moderators' report helped guide teaching and learning consumer studies. Meeting with master teachers also equipped them with knowledge on how they should use past examination papers. Sbo explained how she applied knowledge grasped from Grade 12 moderators' reports and past examination papers to compile good-quality learning materials for her learners. She asserted the following:

When planning my lessons, I always referred to the NSC moderator's report for the previous year to identify areas that performed poorly so that I could address them to learners and try to mitigate those challenges. I ensured that I used the question paper and the moderator's report. I developed learner and teacher support materials using the past NSC exam papers to teach topics to drill learners with the type of questions expected for their exams (Sbo).

Another dimension of learning from master teachers revealed by the participants was that of classroom management. Teachers indicated that discipline was needed to ensure that the curriculum was delivered within a specified time frame and that there were no learning losses. This was confirmed by Sphe, who highlighted that she learned the skill of maintaining discipline, especially regarding learners who did not submit their cooked dishes for evaluation. The participant assigned particular tasks in the practical classes for misbehaving learners, with duties to keep them occupied to instil a sense of responsibility. This is what Sphe had to say:

I learned that I needed to give more responsibility to learners who were troublesome in order to maintain discipline in the practical classroom, as some ate the product before evaluation. I ensured this was done by tasking them with the role of observing others and ensuring they submitted their finished dishes on time (Sphe).

This section presented data on how the participants learned from the master teachers. Some teachers reported that because the master teachers were from other departments, they did not learn much from the subject-specific knowledge. However, the generic aspects shared by the master teachers were valuable and implemented in Consumer Studies. The next subtheme presents findings on peer observation from other teachers.

5.3.1.4 Peer observation as a learning space

The teachers reported how they benefited from observing their peers and discussing with them how they overcame practical challenges in their subjects. Since there was only one consumer studies teacher in most schools, they learned from peers who taught physical sciences, life sciences, information technology, agricultural management practice, and commerce. Furthermore, this fostered team building and good working relationships among them because it was easy to relate to Consumer Studies. Sphe indicated how she shared information pertaining to practical lessons with teachers who offered subjects with practicals as there were some similarities in their practices, such as the way they handled stock to avoid wastage:

I enjoyed learning from teachers teaching Physical Sciences and Life Sciences, so I could voice my opinions as we shared the same interest, that is, practicals. I learned ways of controlling stock in the kitchen, as well as the precautionary measures to avoid food wastage owing to the mishandling of food items such as perishables. As my meeting consisted of colleagues from Life Sciences, I learned ways to prevent food from spoiling quickly from bacteria/micro-organisms, and from Physical Sciences, I learned ways to prevent cooking oil from becoming rancid. These two subjects were somehow integrated with Consumer Studies (Sphe).

Information Technology (IT) teachers enhanced the participants' digital skills. Nelly indicated that they had great exposure to networking with an IT expert, as learning virtually was most dominant during the COVID-19 pandemic. Nelly asserted:

We live in the 21st century, where everything has gone digital. I found networking with IT teachers very useful as they took us step by step on using technology in our classrooms. We learned that learning can occur online since COVID-19 imposed many face-to-face meeting restrictions (Nelly).

Consumer Studies teachers explained that the subjects' finances are the schools' responsibility. They often encounter difficulties in conducting effective teaching and learning in a practical component owing to financial constraints. However, during peer observations, participants learned enlightening ideas to accumulate the ingredients needed to conduct practical lessons. Linds learned that asking her learners to bring ingredients from their homes helped carry out effective practical lessons because all learners participated. She had the following to say:

It helped to work with other subject teachers as one learned from them how they conduct practical lessons in other subjects without being financed by the school, as learners were told in advance what to bring for the practical lessons. I issued a recipe, divided learners into groups, and asked them to bring whichever ingredient from home they could for that practical lesson to be conducted that time, which was to be shared (Linds).

Aphiwe learned that growing a vegetable garden at school and linking it to the content which dealt with organic vegetables would help with ingredients for practical lessons. another benefit would be that she would not spend money on buying vegetables, and learners would grasp the content more easily.

After observing an Agricultural Science lesson, I wanted to start a vegetable garden to integrate with a theory lesson on organic vegetables, making the learning permanent to learners and saving money as vegetables would be produced at school (Aphiwe).

In most schools, a shortage of equipment hindered the effective teaching of the practical component of Consumer Studies. Participants also shared some solutions to class overcrowding and how to curb problems of inadequate infrastructure and equipment during practical lessons. Collaborating with other teachers of practical subjects brought ideas on how to devise strategic ways to raise funds for equipment. Tomby indicated that other teachers suggested ways to ask for sponsors for the kitchen from local companies and municipalities:

We had something in common with the teacher from Agricultural Management Practice as we both needed equipment for conducting our practicals. The teacher told me how he got a sponsor from the municipality to buy the necessities for his subject. I also learned to ask sponsors so that the curriculum's needs were met for Consumer Studies for infrastructure and resources (Tomby).

By meeting and observing other teachers, participants discovered different teaching methods from observing Commerce and Life Sciences lessons. Phume recounted how they learned different approaches in teaching costing from their Commerce colleagues. Thando learned to use technology as a teaching and learning tool because learners could comprehend information more easily through illustrations, specifically in relation to nutrition. Below are their views:

From Commerce lessons, we learned new ways of finding a solution as teachers from other fields, such as Accounting and Economics, assisted us in calculating gross profit, an actual markup of the product, etc. (Phume).

Meeting with Life Sciences teachers equipped us with knowledge and skills in teaching strategies for Consumer Studies, such as using PowerPoint slides with images showing nutritional disease symptoms to teach the Nutrition section so that the learning would become permanent for learners (Thando).

This section presented findings on how Consumer Studies teachers gained knowledge from collaborating with Science and Commerce teachers. Teachers said they observed and shared information and strategies for preparing and conducting practicals. Teachers were able to work together to solve problems and devise solutions to ensure effective Consumer Studies teaching and learning. The following section presents findings on how Consumer Studies teachers learned outside the school.

5.3.2 Learning spaces outside the school

According to the participants, learning also occurred outside the school, where teachers engaged in TLCs. As discussed above, some of these spaces were face-to-face, while others happened online or virtually. Participants indicated that they learned outside school through developmental workshops, moderation, subject committees and conferences.

5.3.2.1 Developmental workshops

The participants indicated that participation in these developmental methodology workshops was vital because it equipped them with numerous skills and refreshed their existing skills, thereby enhancing Consumer Studies teaching and learning. The Subject Advisor organised these workshops, and teachers had to attend them on the scheduled dates. All the teachers teaching grades 10 - 12 attended the workshops. They also revealed that sometimes, the workshops were

split according to their teaching grades. The findings indicated that the participants learned from four types of developmental workshops, namely orientation, assessment, content and PAT mediation.

5.3.2.2 Orientation workshops

Participants stated that orientation workshops at the beginning of the year were essential as they outlined what was expected in Consumer Studies. This workshop was done virtually during the strict lockdown of COVID-19. In these workshops, the Subject Advisor met the novice teachers and teachers teaching the subject for the first time. The Subject Advisor was also informed of schools that have reintroduced the subject in the current year, as well as teachers who were new to the district. Nelly mentioned how attending the orientation workshop benefitted her:

Orientation workshops assisted a lot as I got to know which cluster I belonged to and who my cluster leader was. I recently joined the district and am still familiar with the environment. So knowing whom to consult to discuss the subject matter of Consumer Studies was great (Nelly).

Since the orientation workshops were attended by all the grades throughout the FET phase, the focus was usually on analysing the external National Senior Certificate results and identifying challenges and ways to mitigate those highlighted misconceptions during the teaching of Consumer Studies. Toko asserted the following:

This workshop was held online. We discussed the NSC results and the moderator's report from the previous year. I learned a lot in this workshop as it is my first time teaching Grade 12, so being informed about the critical issues identified and solutions to these issues assisted me a lot as I knew what I needed to prepare and how I should go about planning for the lesson on that specific topic (Toko).

Participants indicated they received documents needed in preparation for informal and formal assessments. Aphiwe confirmed this by explaining that the Subject Advisor issued the Examination Guidelines, which teachers were expected to distribute to learners at the beginning of the year through the OneDrive link. She commented as follows:

We learned that we had to distribute the current Examination Guidelines by sharing the OneDrive link with Grade 12 learners so that they could access examination preparatory documents from the onset and prepare themselves with them even in the teacher's absence. This would allow learners to practice in preparation for the examination (Aphiwe).

The participants indicated that during lockdown, numerous workshops were organised under the auspices of the Consumer Studies Subject Advisor to discuss changes implemented because of COVID-19 restrictions. During these developmental workshops, teachers were capacitated to reduce the number of assessment tasks. Furthermore, they were informed about the topics that were removed from the assessed topics since they would not be examined. The aim was to reduce the number of topics to be taught and assessed because the teaching time available had been affected. Tomby stated that these workshops helped her plan by including dates for the administration of formal tasks and submitting these to the departmental head at school so that they were incorporated into the school year's academic plan:

We were told that there were changes with regard to the assessment programme for three consecutive years as some assessments were removed, such as practicals in term 1 for Grades 10 and 11, owing to COVID-19. It was stressed that I should put dates when I wished to conduct the various assessments and that I communicated those dates to the school to reflect them in a year calendar. We discovered that some diseases were trimmed in the recovery ATP for Grade 12. This was great as we did not have to teach all of them. There was a breakdown each year of which nutritional and food-related health conditions would be tested, as in 2021, there was diabetes, high and low blood glucose levels and osteoporosis. In 2022 there was coronary heart disease, high blood pressure and anaemia (Tomby).

Teachers reported that virtual orientation workshops were conducted at the beginning of the school year to outline the DBE's expectations and changes for the subject during the COVID-19 era. The next section is on assessment workshops.

5.3.2.3 Assessment workshops

The participants reported that the assessment workshops were conducted to train teachers and provide guidelines on conducting fair assessments. Assessment workshops took place once a term and were facilitated by the Subject Advisor. The target group was all Consumer Studies

teachers throughout the FET phase. The teachers mentioned that they were equipped with numerous skills in setting formal tasks and also learned about the types of informal assessment activities that should be conducted. The workshops were also hands-on because, in the end, the participants were grouped according to the grades they were teaching and then required to set formal tasks for the current term. The aim of this activity was to test if they had mastered the skills they were offered during this learning space.

The participants indicated that they learned various forms of assessment in Consumer Studies by using the appropriate assessment tools for the formal tasks specified by the departmental head. Teachers got the opportunity to enhance their skills in setting tasks according to the prescribed requirements for Consumer Studies assessment guidelines.

Every term in our departmental meetings, one learned to set quality tasks for Consumer Studies that met the cognitive demands of easy, moderate, and difficult questions. This ensured that the question paper catered for a well-balanced range of cognitive levels and learner abilities. The departmental head gave us a rotational wheel with Bloom's taxonomy levels which aided as a guide and was to be used when setting formal written tasks (Linds).

Aphiwe also talked about the fact that assessment workshop engagements create opportunities for Consumer Studies teachers to tap into different assessment strategies from their Subject Advisor and other colleagues. She was of the view that by so doing, she could use tools for marking formal tasks in Consumer Studies, which eventually translates positively into improved assessment skills. She expressed her views as follows:

I am grateful to my departmental head, as I can now develop and use the correct allocation of marks in marking guidelines or rubrics for Consumer Studies practical tasks. I was told that if there was a mark allocation of 3, for instance, then three responses were needed from the learner (Aphiwe).

During this workshop, the participants also learned how to set quality assessment tasks by considering the difficulty level and the cognitive demand when setting examination papers. Nelly confirmed that they were trained to write a balanced paper that catered to various learners' abilities during the assessment workshops. She had the following to say:

We were given a Bloom's taxonomy levels wheel during the assessment workshop for Consumer Studies. I used to set papers that were not up to standard before there was a Subject Advisor appointed in my district, but now I am confident as I attended the workshop quarterly where my Subject Advisor drilled me on setting papers of quality that met the cognitive demands and levels as required by the Consumer Studies subject guidelines. I must say it made my life much easier when I set the papers as it gave an outline of the difficulty levels and an indication of the keywords/action words needed when setting (Nelly).

The participants highlighted the importance of integrating work from the previous grade, as learners were assessed on it in the following grade owing to progression:

We learned that we needed to be thorough with design elements in Grade 11 because in Grade 12, only application was required, and it came in various forms, such as vertical lines or horizontal lines, and the effect it has on clothing or housing (Sphe).

Teachers also learned the importance of assessing daily to ensure that learning objectives were met at the lesson's end. They were also reminded of the need to conduct formal and informal assessments. It was stressed that written work should align with the number of periods in the subject per week.

In addition to learning about formal testing, the participants revealed that they were equipped with knowledge for conducting informal assessments as more practice exposes learners to new concepts and enhances their learning of new knowledge skills. This allowed learners to express themselves better and improve their performance in formal assessments. Consumer Studies teachers were advised to consider the minimum number of activities to give learners based on the notional time for the subject per week and according to the CAPS. They were required to have adequate evidence of the weekly assessment tasks as stipulated in the Consumer Studies subject guideline (Tomby).

The main aim of the Consumer Studies curriculum is to produce learners who are adequately equipped with the comprehensive theoretical knowledge and practical skills required for producing saleable products to generate an income. Participants were reminded to develop assessment tasks based on real Consumer Studies problems to broaden the learner's knowledge and keep them abreast of the changes in the subject. During assessment workshops, teachers

were provided with many examples of source-based questions that they could use to assess learners' understanding of authentic problems in Consumer Studies.

What is evident from the findings is that teachers were equipped by their Subject Advisor with numerous skills for setting formal and informal assessment tasks. This assisted them as they could set questions of a high standard, ensuring that learners obtained fair marks and met all the required standards of the subject.

5.3.2.4 Content-based workshops

The findings revealed that the participants held content workshops at the beginning of each term. The participants explained that the Subject Advisor rolled out the Just in Time (JIT) content workshop programme in the district so that the materials were used in each term because they contained relevant content. These materials were meant to be used with CAPS-compliant Consumer Studies textbooks. These workshops were grouped according to each grade because they were comprehensive and intended to cover the curriculum for the current term. It aimed to facilitate theory content and capacitate teachers using learner/teacher support materials developed by KwaZulu-Natal provincial colleagues. Teachers who developed the "Step Ahead" LTSM were requested by their Subject Advisor, owing to their subject expertise, to represent the district in compiling content learning materials for learners and teachers in order to identify the curriculum gaps and loss of contact time as a result of lockdown for the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020/2021. Furthermore, the participants highlighted other objectives for this type of workshop, such as learning differentiated approaches for teaching different topics and improving learner performance in Consumer Studies.

The participants reported that training on specific aspects of the content benefited the teachers and provided a platform for teachers knowledgeable on specific topics to assist others in understanding the most recent trends in teaching Consumer Studies content. Sbo explained how they were invited and how experienced teachers were responsible for being facilitators during the rollout of material development resources. She said:

Every term, our Subject Advisor sends out a WhatsApp group invitation for the JIT content workshop. The emphasis was on the scope of work for the current term. The Subject Advisor typically assigned various topics to the experienced teachers who served as facilitators throughout the workshop, unpacking the content from the Step Ahead LTSM materials

developed provincially, and I was able to take notes from them on how to approach a particular topic when teaching (Sbo).

Likewise, teachers noted that content workshops advanced their knowledge of designing materials that supported their teaching and learning of design elements. Linds added that they learned how to design a colour wheel, a learning tool showing the relationships between primary, secondary and tertiary colours in a circular diagram. Teachers could comprehend better and apply their knowledge when asked about the significance of colours in housing and interior design as well as clothing. Linds shared the following opinion:

We learned how to design a colour wheel, which helped teach design elements. We will be able to instruct our learners in detail by demonstrating which colours are analogous and split complementarily and apply our knowledge in housing, such as which colours are appropriate for summer or winter in a room, and in clothing, such as which colours create the illusion of height (Linds).

Teachers also shared creative teaching strategies to enhance the teaching and learning of various topics. They mentioned strategies for delivering nutrition-related content to make learning new content more permanent and more accessible for learners to comprehend. Aphiwe explained how they learned to deliver the content using alternative housing and interior design teaching strategies. She mentioned how she exposes her learners' real-life situations by integrating authentic examples into her theory lessons:

I thoroughly enjoyed attending the quarterly JIT content workshops. We discussed topics for the specific term with other teachers and gathered various approaches to teaching the same content, particularly housing and interior design. One teacher stated that she takes her learners to complexes, simplexes and townhouses to expose them (Aphiwe).

Consumer Studies teachers often found it challenging to teach topics that involved calculations. Some participants indicated that more time was given to these calculations during content workshops to assist those who encountered difficulties in teaching them. Various strategies were shared in how to formulate easy methods of performing calculations. The participant stated:

In the Entrepreneurship topic, costing was discussed and practised in-depth, and various methods for deriving calculations were shared. Most of us found this topic difficult. This learning space allowed us to learn from our Consumer Studies peer teachers (Tuks).

Although teachers learned from their peers, they also sought knowledge from those often appointed as the markers of NSC examinations. During the content workshops, the experienced teachers shared their experience of common mistakes that learners frequently made in particular topics, especially in Nutrition, during examinations. Nelly expressed the following view:

There are colleagues who always go for NSC marking. We learned so much from them as they pointed out learners' common mistakes when confusing disease causes and incubation periods. It was emphasised that a comprehensive glossary of all diseases should be compiled and thoroughly revised (Nelly).

This section demonstrated how teachers' subject-matter knowledge grew due to their learning from more seasoned teachers. Additionally, new techniques for teaching were discovered to help teachers teach the subject more effectively.

5.3.2.5 PAT mediation workshop

The participants indicated that a PAT mediation workshop led by the Consumer Studies Subject Advisor was held once during the first semester. In order to prevent teachers from frequently leaving their schools, which would harm the teaching and learning of Consumer Studies, the Subject Advisor invited all the FET phase teachers to attend this workshop simultaneously. The participants regarded this workshop as beneficial because it clarified the guidelines for practical assessment for the current academic year. They indicated that the Subject Advisor explained what their practical planning should entail, factors to consider based on their school context, and the level of readiness required for the practical tasks. This learning space provided solutions to several challenges encountered in schools due to inadequate infrastructure and funding for practicals.

During the PAT mediation workshop, participants had the opportunity to voice their concerns about issues that hindered the effective execution of practicals in their schools. They explained that they used to encounter problems with practicals when there were outages owing to load shedding. However, during the workshop, participants emphasised that they had learned to have contingency plans so that teaching and learning would not be impacted by a lack of electricity,

especially when the whole country was experiencing load shedding. They also learned about appliances that used alternative sources of electricity, such as gas stoves and refrigerators, to eliminate disturbances during practical lessons caused by intermittent power outages. Aphiwe mentioned that upon her return to school, she reported this to the headmaster, who swiftly bought her a generator:

We learned that in a power outage, we should have a backup so practicals could continue as scheduled. I informed the principal, and he promptly bought me a generator (Aphiwe).

This learning space allowed teachers to raise their concerns regarding the prescribed time allocated for practical lessons, which made it difficult for the majority of learners to complete their dishes in time. Teachers indicated that big class sizes hindered the effective learning of practicals because of inadequate resources to carry out the practicals efficiently. However, during the practical mediation workshop, teachers came up with solutions to their problems, such as dividing learners into groups, although this was time-consuming because each practical task required several days to complete the assessment of all the learners involved in practicals. The participant had this to say:

I learned how to group learners per session for regular practicals and the practical examination while ensuring obedience to safety protocols. Because I had so many sessions, I ultimately spent too much time on practicals (Phume).

While grouping learners seemed to be the solution to big classes and the time allocated to practicals, it turned out that this practice was not acceptable because of unreliable mark allocation. It was evident that the issue of grouping learners during practicals was a concern because most teachers who used the grouping strategy awarded identical marks. It was found that their SBA marks were usually rejected by the Umalusi Council, which is responsible for quality assurance at the end of the year. Umalusi discovered that there was a bunching of marks, which compromised the credibility of SBA. In some cases, learners were not involved in practicals but instead observed the teacher demonstrating practicals owing to financial constraints emanating from inappropriate budgeting. The Subject Advisor emphasised the importance of having a per-learner budget requirement for the practical examination for each grade in addition to regular practical lessons. Linds said:

*My Subject Advisor emphasised the need for a budget for all grades. She stressed that a minimum of R80 and a maximum of R150 per learner in Grade 12 was required for the practical examination, with the regular weekly practical lessons excluded. She also shared statistical moderation principles on how SBA marks are accepted, scaled down or rejected, so we knew all the principles used by Umalusi to prevent rejection of SBA marks. Some schools always had SBA marks rejected for giving learners the same marks because they grouped them **(Linds)**.*

Nelly's main concern was a shortage of water supply in the Consumer Studies class, which was a huge hindrance to time management during practicals. She expressed the following:

*I wish that schools in Quintile 1 were given more time to make up for inadequate resources that entailed fetching water from tanks and using bowls for washing dishes. Learners had to throw the dirty water outside and refill their bowls with clean water for rinsing, which was time-consuming, as was sharing equipment **(Nelly)**.*

During PAT workshops, teachers revealed that they learned that as there was grade progression, they were required to execute various techniques and skills during practical lessons for their learners. Toko added that they learned from the workshop that Grade 12 learners' packaging and labelling skills would be evaluated in their practical examination to check whether they had mastered the nutrition theory content and marketing skills by applying their knowledge. Toko's view was as follows:

*One should not test Grades 11 and 12 with the same practicals administered in Grade 10 since, in Grade 10, only basics are taught. In Grade 12, one product should be packaged and labelled, while the other should be plated. Labelling and packaging tested nutrition knowledge and marketing skills **(Toko)**.*

In addition, participants explained that doing the PAT mediation workshop allowed teachers to share information on assessment requirements, such as the number of practical assessment tasks required per grade. They also discussed requirements for setting practical assessment tests and examinations. Sbo made an example of what they learned regarding the assessment of the practicals, stating that each recipe should have an image of how the final product should look after production and should be evaluated using a particular criterion that suits the desired characteristics of the product. This learning space developed teachers since the practical skills

test administered in the first term would contribute to the year-end PAT exam mark. The participants asserted:

We learned that we must conduct a minimum number of practical activities per term for each grade. It was stressed that when setting practical tests, each recipe should have desired features, and the recipes should include a picture of how the finished product should look. We were informed that the practical skills test administered in the first term would contribute to the year-end PAT exam mark (Sbo).

I gained numerous skills for setting a practical skills test for Grades 10 and 11, which was done at the beginning of the year for 25 marks, but was going to be added to the final practical examination for 75 marks at the end of the year to make 100 marks (Tuks).

The findings revealed teachers' challenges, including the difficulty of effectively delivering practical lessons in their schools, overcrowding and inadequate resources. However, their peers shared various strategies to overcome the challenges, enlightening them on managing practical lessons. Furthermore, teachers learned how to set practical assessment tasks of quality, and various techniques of food preparation, which are required of each grade from the processing stage to the final stage, which is packaging and labelling of the product.

5.3.3 Moderation

The participants revealed that moderation was another space they used to learn collaboratively. Teachers gather in one venue to verify their performance or progress in conducting assessments of their learners. They reported that the Consumer Studies Subject Advisor convened the moderation process. In Consumer Studies, there are two types of moderation: SBA, which happens in Terms two to four, and PAT, which is done during school visits in Terms three and four.

5.3.3.1 Learning through SBA moderation conducted at cluster and district level

The participants indicated that SBA was done at a cluster level prior to the district moderation by the Subject Advisor. Teachers reported meeting as a cluster in one venue where district moderation occurred. They revealed that participating in cluster moderation was beneficial in that it helped to correct some mistakes that were not noticeable at school-level moderation. Tomby had the following to say:

We usually meet as a cluster in the morning in the same venue where district moderation will begin after formal tasks have been moderated at the school level. This assisted me as sometimes errors in marking are not discovered at school by my departmental head but will be identified at the cluster level (Tomby).

Teachers explained that during the process of moderation they got an opportunity to review assessment tasks that were given to learners for SBA. Communal discussion of questions created spaces for the participants to interpret various solutions and learn how to allocate marks for various questions in the marking guideline. This was done to ensure a common understanding of questions and consistency in mark allocation. The participants also shared some technical file organisation and record-keeping methods. Toko explained as follows:

Moderation at a cluster level provided an excellent opportunity for learning as we sometimes made additions to the memorandum and came up with alternative responses, especially since our learners were mostly struggling with the medium of instruction, which is English. So we tried to figure out the learner responses as sometimes they spelt incorrectly, or did not express themselves fully. We also learned to arrange the assessment file orderly and manage the safe-keeping of assessment records as they serve as evidence (Toko).

It was clear that teachers meeting in moderation ensured that the marking of learners' assessment tasks was consistent by comparing their judgement at cluster and district levels to that conducted at a school level. Meeting as subject specialists also assisted teachers in discussing what their moderation files should comprise.

5.3.3.2 Learning through PAT moderation conducted at the district level

Participants explained that PAT moderations were conducted in schools. They explained that during PAT moderation, the Subject Advisor visits each school or tasks a teacher to moderate practicals on-site. Grade 12 PAT moderation is externally moderated in Term three, whereas Grades 10 and 11 are externally moderated in Term four. This moderation is intended to check the credibility of learners' PAT marks.

Teachers who were requested by the Subject Advisor to conduct moderation of practical examinations mentioned that being tasked assisted them in learning new ideas from peers

pertaining to practicals. In addition, they learned different styles of presentation of the finished products. As a result, they shared recipes with the neighbouring schools after doing observations during practical moderation. The participant stated:

My Subject Advisor allowed me to conduct PAT moderation on her behalf for Grades 10-11 as the district is large, I learned innovative ways of presenting food in an appealing manner from other schools. PAT moderation gave me a chance to exchange recipes with other teachers and share best practices after visiting the school for observation (Nelly).

Another participant mentioned that PAT moderation was a time for her to excel since she learned from mistakes in her PAT planning. She recounted some challenges she encountered during practicals the previous year owing to the shortage of equipment and the key intervention strategies she employed in addressing such hinderances. This is what she also had to say:

My learners were disadvantaged last year because they could not finish their dishes on time. We did not have enough stoves, and I realised that when they had already started with their cooking. This year I have to make sure that I plan in time to make sure that they are all prepared and finish their dishes on time. I have ensured that I go beyond expectation during the PAT moderation this year (Linds).

This section revealed that teachers gained knowledge through practical exam moderation since they had the opportunity to observe both good and lousy exam practices at other schools. They had the chance to learn about various recipes, discuss them with other teachers, and look at what was popular in food at present.

5.3.4 Teacher learning through subject committee meetings

The collective response from the participants indicated that they also learn collaboratively during subject committee meetings that take place at the district level. The teachers revealed that subject committees could not be formed at school or cluster level because Consumer Studies was offered in few schools. Furthermore, in most schools the subject is taught by only one teacher. During the Focus Group interview session, the participants raised views on what they learned when they met in subject committees.

The participants spoke of the different expertise that Consumer Studies teachers bring to the table during subject committee engagements. Teachers highlighted how enriching it was to get the opportunity to participate in such engagements and share their experiences and knowledge as Consumer Studies teachers in subject committees at the district level. Subject committees at the district level played an advisory role in determining how to address many challenges the teachers face in delivering their lessons effectively. A Focus Group 1 member explained their view as follows:

In subject committees, it is where all the matters related to Consumer Studies are handled by the Subject Advisor and other experienced teachers. It is the very first and essential learning space where we meet as Consumer Studies teachers. In these meetings we meet with other teachers from the district. The aim of this platform is to share information and network so that you know whom to contact and what strategies other teachers use to approach topics **(Member of Focus Group 1).**

Teachers reported that subject committee meetings brought teachers from the district together and allowed novice and experienced teachers to engage with one another. They had the opportunity to be developed in subject-related matters such as content teaching strategies and other general matters that needed the attention of senior teachers. Twinning and networking with other teachers in one venue helped them share improved classroom practices, especially how to accommodate learners who had difficulty learning. The participant from Group 1 shared the following:

A committee was really helpful as we joined with other schools to ensure that there was quality, and teachers who struggled were assisted as there was use of differentiated methods of instruction by various teachers. In most cases you need to share challenges and strategies to address those challenges. We found these committees very helpful. They are developmental- you are growing and getting motivated on a daily basis, and you become a better Consumer Studies teacher **(Member of Focus Group 1).**

Participants regarded subject committee meetings as the main space where they relaxedly met as Consumer Studies teachers. During these meetings, teachers exchanged information and shared challenges they faced in their classrooms regarding the teaching and assessment of Consumer Studies. Each member was responsible for and committed to the growth of other

committee members. A Focus Group 2 member felt strongly about members' accountability for the learning and growth of other committee members. She commented as follows:

In these meetings teachers come with various problems they encountered in teaching, but we all came together and provided very useful strategies to solve the problems. We all knew that we were responsible for helping each other. Sometimes we were given tasks to finish at home and share with other teachers when we meet **(Member of Focus Group 2).**

Similarly, Focus Group 1 members indicated that experienced teachers got an opportunity to facilitate meetings and develop other materials to be used by other Consumer Studies teachers:

At the end of the year, our Subject Advisor invited the leading teachers to develop programmes for revision, and the aim was to capacitate them so that they could assist other Consumer Studies teachers in order to raise the NSC pass rate in the district **(Member of Focus Group 1).**

Teachers pointed out that during the subject committee meetings, they had the opportunity to meet and share ideas and resources with other teachers at the district level. Linds explained how they were assigned by their Subject Advisor to attend the subject committee meetings outside the district to be involved in developing teaching and learning materials. Such meetings allowed them to share knowledge with other teachers in the province. She also shared the developed material with teachers in the district. They had this to say:

In Term 1 our Subject Advisor took us for the development of Consumer Studies Learner and Teacher support materials, which was held in Durban, and the all the Consumer Studies teachers in KwaZulu-Natal province attended. We got to meet and share ideas with other provincial colleagues for better performance in the subject. It was an outstanding achievement for us to be recognised for our contribution to the subject **(Linds).**

Nonetheless, teachers indicated that the development of committees not only focused on challenges related to teaching the subject. They also intervened if there were problems that were related to human resources in schools. Since committees created the spaces for teachers to network and share their difficulties, it was easier for teachers to assist each other if the need arose. In this way, teachers in the committees felt that they were all accountable for constant teaching and learning in Consumer Studies.

This was confirmed by Aphiwe, who highlighted that there were times when the neighbouring school had no Consumer Studies teacher, which resulted in the subject not being taught. One teacher from the subject committee volunteered to assist. Aphiwe's opinion was as follows:

Learners were not left stranded in a case where there was no teacher at a particular time as we assisted in the school by teaching. The spirit of teamwork was exercised. This was for the benefit of the whole district (Aphiwe).

The participants highlighted the importance of diversity in expertise and experience in the committees. The fact that teachers were not at the same knowledge and competence level stimulated the exchange of knowledge and experience during subject committee meetings. Diversity in a committee creates spaces for novice teachers to learn from teachers with extensive teaching experience. In this way, all teachers worked together and learned from the collaboration. Toko affirmed that such cooperation is conducive to the development of novice teachers, as well as the continuing development of seasoned teachers:

Subject committee meetings permitted both seasoned and novice teachers to learn from each other as we were all subject experts, but with different years of experience. The seasoned teachers were more enriched with knowledge by sharing with novice teachers (Toko).

Similarly, the participants indicated that novice teachers were professionally developed and nurtured during the subject committee meetings since they got broad exposure to the subject. Sphe explained how their professional journey was shaped, and development was furthered by attending these meetings. Although some participants had only recently joined the teaching profession, they were actively involved during discussions. Therefore, novice teachers became more involved and felt part of the Consumer Studies subject committee through these subject committee meetings. The group revealed that this learning space benefited them as there was a lot to learn, which was essential in the subject to ensure that teaching and learning were conducted effectively, as in ensuring that there was close monitoring and recording of resources such as textbooks and equipment. Sphe said:

We learned from our senior Consumer Studies colleagues a lot of things such as administration tasks for the subject, and the importance of regularly controlling stock for both theory and practicals, so that there is no hindrance to delivering the lessons (Sphe).

Subject committee meetings were regarded by the participants as an opportunity which allowed them to raise their views and come up with suggestions regarding content that they felt needed restructuring and rearranging for the term. They had to provide valid reasons for their contributions so that their views were considered in drawing up a teaching plan for the following year. Tomby confirmed this by emphasising that the district subject committee meetings permitted the teachers to draft their ideas for the district, which were shared with the province and then sent to the national DBE.

The provincial Chief Education Specialist requested inputs for the content that we felt should be trimmed or reorganised in the upcoming annual teaching plan by providing reasons for doing so, and these inputs were to be shown to the national Department of Education the (Tomby).

Tuks shared these sentiments as they mentioned that the meetings at the end of the year were when the teachers drew up the annual provincial teaching plan to be used in the district in planning for the upcoming year:

We met with colleagues in the province in December to formulate the annual provincial teaching plan from the annual national teaching plan. This was done so that we aligned it with the way it suited us in the province, and to include dates for when a particular content should be taught. The annual teaching plan was shared with colleagues at in the district so that they could plan for the following year (Tuks).

What came out from the data was that teachers who lacked experience in teaching the subject learned from those that were more highly experienced. The findings indicated that teachers also learned to address challenges that hindered effective curriculum delivery, regular stock control of resources, and development of LTSM. Furthermore, teachers made contributions on reorganising or trimming curriculum content in the annual teaching plan. The last subtheme will present data on learning through conferences.

5.3.5 Learning through Conferences

During conferences, some teachers acknowledge the importance of learning communally with other Consumer Studies specialists worldwide. A few participants indicated that they attended various conferences held in a specific venue or virtually to enhance their content knowledge. Attending the South African Association of Family Ecology and Consumer Science (SAAFECS) conference created opportunities to share knowledge with Consumer Studies experts worldwide. One participant from Focus Group 1 was requested by their Subject Advisor to attend a national conference in another province to represent KwaZulu-Natal province. This was very beneficial because it enabled the Focus Group to learn what other provinces did in relation to the teaching of the subject. The participant asserted:

In July 2022, we were provided an opportunity by the Subject Advisor to attend the South African Association of Family Ecology and Consumer Science (SAAFECS) international conference which was held in Pretoria. We must say we did benefit a lot from attending (Member of Focus Group 1).

The participants indicated that they were invited to the South African Association for Food Science and Technology (SAAFOST) conference, but it was limited to online transmission from which teachers learned how Consumer Studies is taught in other countries. Sbo reported that after attending a conference, she met with other Consumer Studies teachers from neighbouring schools to share the distributed resources. This gave them time to discuss new strategies and ideas and put them into practice. This is what the participant said:

There were speakers from abroad, and we learned how Consumer Studies is taught in other countries. When we returned to our schools, we implemented new strategies and shared with our peers who did not attend the conference owing to lack of financial support from the school management team (Sbo).

Nelly believed that attending a conference was very enlightening because they shared materials that they believed had improved the quality of their PAT exams:

Recipes were shared in the Prue Leith Culinary Conference. It finished up our PAT planning which we had to provide for our Grade 12s, and would be externally moderated by our Subject Advisor in the third term (Nelly).

Although communal learning in conferences was viewed by most participants as beneficial, they were concerned that not all teachers were given an opportunity to attend conferences. Even if they received calls for conferences, they did not get financial support from the school management.

This section indicated that teachers attended conferences where they were able to learn from other subject specialists from within and outside the country. Some conferences were held remotely, while others were held physically at a specified location. Teachers from across the world were able to discuss how they taught Consumer Studies, and shared their experiences in teaching the subject.

5.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter presented the first level analysis and discussions of the study's findings on the two broad themes obtained from the participants' responses. The first theme revealed the types of learning platform that allowed teacher engagement in TLCs, and which comprised two subthemes. The second theme was concerned with learning spaces and various forms of Consumer Studies teachers' engagement in TLCs. It consisted learning spaces within the school, with three subthemes, and learning spaces outside school, with four subthemes. It was evident that learning occurred within school or outside it, either face-to-face or virtually. Participants revealed how COVID-19 brought changes in their learning as mostly technology was used. But there were exceptional cases which compelled physical meetings. There were advantages and disadvantages raised by the participants in their use of various platforms and learning spaces.

The next chapter presents the last broad theme, which is the kind of the learning that happened in the Consumer Studies TLCs.

CHAPTER SIX

THE KIND OF LEARNING THAT OCCURRED IN THE CONSUMER STUDIES TLCs

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented data on learning platforms and spaces that allowed teacher engagement in TLCs. The current chapter thematically presents gathered data on what teachers learned and the impact of what they learned for their professional and self-development, which are presented verbatim. Three main themes emerged from the data and will be presented in this chapter. The first theme focuses on managing reforms in the Consumer Studies curriculum. The second theme presents data on TLCs that enhance Consumer Studies teachers' pedagogical content knowledge. The third theme presents managing and nurturing personal growth. The chapter also presents how learning community programmes contribute to the understanding and management of curriculum reforms in Consumer Studies.

6.2 MANAGING REFORMS IN THE CONSUMER STUDIES CURRICULUM

This theme sheds light on how teacher participation in learning community programmes creates the opportunity for them to be exposed to curriculum-related matters. Participants demonstrated how their engagements helped them to understand how to contribute to curriculum implementation when there were changes in the Consumer Studies curriculum. This section is divided into four subthemes which include managing drastic curriculum changes during COVID-19, managing reforms in Consumer Studies, developing sustainability in education and developing personal entrepreneurial skills.

6.2.1 Managing drastic curriculum changes during COVID-19 lockdown

The participants reported that changes made by the DBE resulted from the COVID-19 lockdown. It was evident that there was inclusion, exclusion, and trimming of specific topics, as well as reformulation of the annual programme of assessments with new subject weightings. Aphiwe explained how the orientation workshop helped her to manage the inclusion of an assessment task which was not part of the previous curriculum for Grades 10 and 11. She mentioned that practical lessons were excluded in the first quarter and included in the second quarter but only contributed towards SBA as there was no examination during that quarter. Furthermore, she indicated that

the pass requirements for the subject differed from that before COVID-19 as SBA had a higher weighting when compared to the final year-end exam, which was lower:

There was introduction of skills test for Grades 10 and 11 in Term 1 and exclusion of practicals. For Grade 12's there was exclusion of project in Term 1 and Term 2 and only practicals contributed towards SBA. The subject weightings changed so that SBA was 60% and year-end Exam 40%. Since this was new to everyone, we assisted one another in the orientation workshop and adapted to the changes (Aphiwe).

In addition, Phume recounted some curriculum changes she had witnessed and the critical intervention programmes used in addressing such reforms:

In Grade 12 there was exclusion of exams and tests at mid-year therefore, our Subject Advisor stressed in our orientation workshop that we should set a mock test based on the content covered in Term 2. Learners were not informed that it would not count towards their SBA so that they were well prepared for writing. The purpose of this mock test was to train learners for their upcoming trial exam which was to be written in September (Phume).

Sbo spoke of how the District Consumer Studies Subject Advisor worked together with other expert teachers during curriculum reforms to empower teachers so that they were able to comprehend the reform process during orientation workshops:

COVID-19 brought changes in managing curriculum. The use of handover tool was introduced in order to identify the content gaps that were not taught in the previous year. This was more beneficial to teachers who hand over the learners to the next teacher in the following grade, so that there is a recovery plan for the content that was not taught. During orientation workshops, we were urged to use the handover tool as means of tracking curriculum coverage (Sbo).

The participants were dissatisfied that the pandemic came with many administrative duties, including identifying the content that was not taught in the previous grade by utilising the handover tool. They revealed that they had to indicate in the tool how they would recover the content that was not covered. Nelly believed that the handover tool would have been ideal for the teacher who would be handing over learners to the next teacher. This is what she said:

We had to adapt to the curriculum changes as there was introduction of handover tools, which were to be completed by us from the previous grade. I failed to understand why a

tool was needed from me since I was the only one teaching Consumer Studies in my school. I asked myself who would I be handing it over to as the following grade would be taught by me, and I had in mind what I hadn't taught the previous year. It highlighted the content that was not taught so the learning content gaps were apparent to the Subject Advisor. However, we were to come up with ways to bridge the content gaps which were addressed during orientation workshops (Nelly).

Tomby mentioned that individual performance influences school improvement strategies in different subjects. She recounted that performing well in Consumer Studies as a result of teacher participation in subject committee meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic indicated the programme's ability to contribute to the overall improvement strategy of the school. Her view was that learners performed better during the pandemic than before COVID-19, owing to the revised subject weightings. She stated how they learned in various ways, such as using a virtual platform to continue teaching and learning during the pandemic:

The subject committee meetings were very helpful as we had each other's back. We devised many ways to reach out to our learners during this time when they did not attend school. All my learners passed in Grade 10 and 11 during COVID-19 as the subject weightings differed from that of pre-COVID time, so that the exam mark had a lesser percentage and SBA had a higher percentage. Presently we are aware that even after COVID-19 we must support teaching and learning with other platforms (Tomby).

Toko believed that subject committee meetings created an opportunity for Consumer Studies teachers to tap into different teaching strategies during COVID-19 that were shared by other colleagues. She thought that by so doing, she was able to improve her teaching practice in conducting practical lessons virtually, which ultimately resulted in good learner performance, which positively affected the school's performance:

The different approach towards teaching practicals was learned from my peers during subject committee meetings. I used to divide ingredients and issue recipes for learners and would ask them to do a video at home whilst preparing, so that I would be able to award them marks after they had sent them to me. I must say it was difficult to conduct practicals during the time of COVID-19, as learners didn't come to school on a daily basis and there were restrictions on social distancing, etc (Toko).

This section has presented data on Consumer Studies teachers' managing drastic curriculum changes during COVID-19 lockdown. The participants stated that their learning engagements assisted them as they could tap into new ways of teaching the subject, address what needed to be

taught, and highlight the type of assessment to be given to learners with revised subject weightings during the pandemic. Lastly, they had to indicate how the lost content owing to the lockdown would be recovered by using hand over instruments. The following section will highlight the general reforms in Consumer Studies.

6.2.2 Managing Consumer Studies continuous curriculum reforms

According to the participants, building a Consumer Studies learning community with the aim of sharing and support assists in managing continuous reforms. This section sheds light on how teachers' engagements in learning community programmes allowed teachers to learn the curriculum related matters in the subject. The participants indicated that their congregation helped them to understand how the curriculum should be implemented during the Consumer Studies curriculum reforms. The data are presented according to the participants' views on how TLCs contribute to the understanding and managing curriculum reforms in Consumer Studies. In light of this, a participant explained how the TLCs helped her manage the CAPS curriculum by including the topics in the Consumer Studies curriculum compared to the former Curriculum 2005 (C2005). Toko said:

Consumer Studies replaced Home Economics with the inclusion of a new topic which is called entrepreneurship. Within our subject committee, there was learning that Consumer Studies has shifted to be more focused on the “consumer” rather than “family” which was in Home Economics under C2005 (Toko).

The participants mentioned that Consumer Studies combines theories and practices in responsible consumerism, food and nutrition, clothing, housing and furnishings, and entrepreneurship. Hence, it is a skill-based subject that can equip learners with the fundamental skills and knowledge necessary for self-employment. Tuks indicated how the subject committee meetings benefited them as they discussed and shared practical options to assess their learners. This is what she asserted:

The subject is very broad, it deals with the consumer, food and nutrition, clothing, housing and entrepreneurship. It has five practical options which the school may choose from, depending on the available resources such as: food, clothing, knitting, quilting and patchwork. This aids in developing learners' skills and instils a sense of becoming entrepreneurs among the options chosen by the school. Discussions during subject

committee meetings assisted so much as ideas were exchanged on the types of practicals to be given to learners (Tuks).

Since Consumer Studies takes a professional approach to household chores and has consistently evolved toward sustainable human communities in the 21st century and beyond, Sphe explained that the subject is no longer exclusively studied and taught by women, unlike in the past:

Previously there were misconceptions that Consumer Studies is not taught or learned by males, but the gender roles have brought changes, as now it is learned and taught by males also. The subject offers the necessities for daily life which are needed by both genders. I witnessed that there was no longer an issue of being gender biased as one male teacher was always present at our district subject committee meetings (Sphe).

Managing reform processes in the Consumer Studies curriculum was also related to the subject committees' meetings' ability to empower teachers to contribute to school improvement strategies. The participants' voices in this context revealed how teacher engagement in subject committees supports general school improvement strategies. Arguing from an academic point of view, the participants held that a key performance indicator of a school improvement strategy is the performance in individual subjects. Therefore, since teacher collaborative engagement improves Consumer Studies learners' performance, good performance in Consumer Studies eventually contributes towards the school's overall performance. To confirm this, Thando explained how she had managed to produce an excellent pass rate consistently owing to her active involvement in learning community engagements:

In the previous year, I managed to produce two distinctions in Grade 12 Consumer Studies. I must say the subject committee meetings have played a significant role in this achievement, as I was fully developed. I really hope there will be continuation with TLCs in the years to come (Thando).

Another participant displayed a sound knowledge of the reforms which are related to their personal assessment in Consumer Studies teaching which is integrated quality management systems (IQMS) and performance in their schools.

During our subject committee meetings, we spoke about innovative ways to teach the subject so that when the time comes for IQMS at school, we will be prepared to show that

we are knowledgeable about the subject content. This is where you are able to see where you are lacking as an individual and grow personally (Member of Focus Group 1).

However, those who felt differently listed some very interesting reasons for why they felt the reforms were not suitable. Many of their responses reflected what the current study on the various reforms has noted. The participant from Focus Group 2 mentioned that implementing CAPS poses challenges at times as they lack resources on conducting practicals.

The new curriculum is inappropriate for most of the teachers in Consumer Studies in terms of content and practical application. Many schools do not have the finances and other resources to support the implementation of Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS)-based curriculum (Member of Focus Group 2).

The new reforms make it clear that all the twelve official languages are recognised, yet the reality is that many of the Consumer Studies teachers are still teaching in a language that is not their mother tongue. Since the language of learning and teaching (LOLT) is English for Consumer Studies and is not most teachers' mother tongue, this places them at a distinct disadvantage. When the participants learned about the reforms, they indicated that they learned through developmental workshops that they needed to communicate in English during their teacher learning development programmes as this made their lives easier when teaching their learners.

During our orientation workshops, it was emphasised that we must only teach the subject in English since learners are tested in it as the official language. Some content was complex to explain thoroughly to learners in English so that they understood the content as English was not our mother tongue. However, the orientation workshops changed our mind sets as our peers stressed that in order to be proficient in the language of teaching and learning, we should normalise speaking in English even in our learning engagements (Member of Focus Group 1).

During the interview, the member of Focus Group 2 said that implementing the current curriculum is really not very challenging for her. She said this was because the CAPS curriculum is good since it teaches learners independence. The participant indicated that she only has one challenge:

The main challenge is not having sufficient resources to conduct lessons with technology since I personally don't have access to it. This includes having to teach using computers. How can I start using a computer when my school does not have electricity? Otherwise I don't see any problem with the CAPS curriculum. I like the fact that it develops learners' critical thinking skills and independence (Member of Focus Group 2).

Aphiwe made an interesting assertion that they learned that reforms in Consumer Studies consist of the integrated curriculum. She also indicated that the new curriculum foregrounds everyday knowledge which they should teach learners by allowing them to reflect on their daily experiences by relating to their subject content:

During our content workshop, we learned that whatever learners' experience related to the content taught they are permitted to share during the lesson. By this we were trying to merge the outside world with the school life (Aphiwe).

In expressing her understanding of curriculum reforms in Consumer Studies, Linds highlighted that these reforms entail an integrated curriculum, which allows teachers to better understand concepts and how to impart knowledge to their learners. She mentioned that with the integrated curriculum, learners learn better than from the previous curriculum, where subjects stood in isolation. In further expressing her understanding, she said:

The experiences are incorporated into teaching and learning so that the learners see the link between school life and daily experiences (Linds).

Given this, it is essential to examine how the participants understand new curriculum reforms in Consumer Studies during content workshops. The findings from the interviews with Tomby, Toko, Nelly and Sphe suggest that they understand that there is integration in a curriculum that relates to the concepts across the different subjects. They expressed the following:

The new curriculum builds on concepts from topic to topic and across different subjects. In fact, we no longer have independent subjects (Tomby).

What I discovered in these new curriculum reforms in Consumer Studies was that there were two or more topics from different subjects in one lesson (Toko).

Learning areas are good because they show learners that life is interconnected, not in separate chunks (Nelly).

One lesson integrates different subjects to help learners view life as a whole, not as bits and pieces that don't go together (Sphe).

The participants viewed new curriculum reform in Consumer Studies as learner-centred. Sbo expressed the following:

The new curriculum is very learner-centred as learners are motivated to come up with ideas. As a teacher I only teach and make sure learning takes place, and most of the work is done by the learners (Sbo).

This section has indicated that teachers learned that in Consumer Studies there are many new reforms. These reforms were introduced to them in their TLCs so that they were well implemented in the education system. The following section will highlight the type of reforms that occurred in Consumer Studies due to the TLCs, such as the enhancement of sustainability in Consumer Studies education.

6.2.3 Enhancement of Sustainability in Consumer Studies Education

The participants shared that they learned about the significance of sustainability through their participation in the content workshops. This assisted them in learning about ways to reduce harm to the environment while using the products and services during Consumer Studies lessons and ensured that resources were used effectively. Tuks indicated that they discovered methods for preserving resources while teaching and learning the subject and were able to apply their lessons to the real world:

While Consumer Studies curriculum made significant contributions to education, sustainable development is essential. In our content workshops, we learned various ways to ensure that we maintained sustainability throughout the curriculum content of the subject, and linking it to real life when teaching our learners (Tuks).

Focus Group 2 member shared the same sentiments, stating that their professional development enabled them to teach a curriculum that was focused on sustainability effectively. The teachers' understanding of renewable energy was expanded by the teacher learning space:

Our education provided us with sufficient skills to teach sustainability issues such as solar energy, wind energy and hydropower, which is done under housing and interior topic. We could relate with solar easily as it is something we use daily since the country is facing load shedding. The knowledge gained during the content workshop was enlightening (Member of Focus Group 2).

Participating in content workshops allowed engaging with each other. They learned and shared good practices such as recycling, which allowed schools to exchange their resources for money at the local recycling site, thus promoting interdependence. The Consumer Studies teachers could fund school necessities for practical lessons. It was evident from the member of Focus Group 1 that her peers were interested in the idea that worked for her as she provided an alternative solution to mitigate challenges encountered during practicals:

The concept of sustainability is linked to the schools' culture: for example, recycling of plastic bottles and cans at school to get funds for practicals. In my school, we recycled paper and the money received was added to the Consumer Studies budget. I shared this with my peers when we met during content workshops, so that whoever feels like adopting this strategy may do so. I could see from my colleagues' facial expression that they liked this strategy as it did not involve any costs for the school (Member of Focus Group 1).

The participants highlighted that changes to the curriculum benefited both sexes, as the subject is no longer gender-based, and all of the skills taught in the curriculum were applicable in the home. Various ways of maintaining an eco-friendly environment were shared during the content workshops:

The subject deals with issues that both men and women experience in everyday life, such as the three Rs, namely reduce, reuse and recycle. We all need to practise these, either at home or at school to ensure that we are friendly to the environment. We really benefited from the content workshops as there were examples shared of things we can do with these three Rs (Nelly).

According to the participants, values were instilled during attendance at the content workshops to effectively manage resources such as water and energy and avoid mismanagement of funds. Furthermore, the content workshops enforced sustainability by stressing the importance of

ensuring the availability of other resources for effective teaching and learning of Consumer Studies:

I learned principles of saving resources such as water, electricity and money. Investing in a water tank and solar panels for electricity is very important, as was stressed. Using money wisely was also learned, such as buying in bulk, since it is cheaper than buying in single units; and we were taught to compare prices from various outlets in order to save. I cannot imagine myself missing these workshops as they offer so much to learn (Aphiwe).

Another participant confirmed that she learned about sustainable practices, such as conserving electricity so that it would last longer. She also said that it was not a waste of time attending content workshops as every engagement enabled new learning:

All appliances were to be switched off after use, and disconnected from plugs so as not to waste electricity, and only the appropriate stove plate should be used; that is, don't place the small pot on a big stove plate when cooking as it will consume more electricity. Instead, use the small stove plate. Sometimes, we overlook things, and colleagues stress the essential points to consider during practicals. I got to discover new things whenever I attended the content workshops (Thando).

Tomby indicated how the content workshops broadened their knowledge of sustainability by consuming locally produced food, in clothing through local brands, using local resources in housing for furnishing/infrastructure, managing financial resources and budgeting meticulously to avoid fruitless expenditure. The benefits of buying locally were shared during the content workshops:

We were reminded about sustainability in food, clothing, housing and money management, which is very important. These are basic needs, and we should ensure that they are used efficiently to promote South African products. This means when buying South African products, things will become cheaper and save us a lot of money (Tomby).

Similarly, Phume explained how their level of sustainability and innovation increased in the PAT mediation workshop, which was positive because they learned ways to save money by improvising and reusing packaging from finished products:

We discovered that the containers for packaging should not be thrown away. We should encourage our learners to reuse them for packaging their products. For instance, a mayonnaise bottle would bottle the fruit chutney or pickles. PAT mediation workshop provided creativity- it was great! (Phume).

Because the PAT mediation workshop created an opportunity for teachers to learn about practices for reducing waste and pollution, this ensured eco-friendly living conditions and led to their producing their compost for the vegetable garden by the use of leftover ingredients:

The importance of going green was addressed in the PAT mediation workshop, which are needed at schools and in daily life. Also remains from the vegetables and fruits were to be used as fertilisers in the vegetable garden at school, and should not be discarded (Linds).

This section has presented findings of how Consumer Studies teachers learned to ensure that they maintain sustainability in their teaching and learning. Every individual, irrespective of gender, has a role to play in ensuring they follow sustainable practices in their daily lives. The next section will indicate how the TLCs instilled personal entrepreneurial skills in Consumer Studies teachers.

6.2.4 Development of personal entrepreneurial skills

Participants revealed entrepreneurial strategies as a form of learning from the PAT mediation workshops, which improved the way they taught the practicals. Furthermore, they indicated that they acquired entrepreneurial skills through their collaborative engagement with other teachers as they shared ideas on promoting entrepreneurship. These skills were taken back to their schools so that the learners could integrate the subject with the actual practicals and instil self-sufficiency among learners. The teachers revealed that they learned to instil learners' sense of ownership and passion for the subject as some of the resources were bought through raising funds on their own, instead of having to rely on everything being funded from the school budget:

I learned from the PAT mediation workshop that I needed to come up with ideas for fundraising so that we could get the necessities for the practicals at school. I practised that at school with my learners as I grouped them in teams and assigned them countries they should represent, so that they could do research on the type of food eaten in that country, and discover how the people of that country dress. Tickets were sold to the parents and local community so that they could come and taste the food on the day of the event that was going to be held at school, called "international food-tasting day" (Tomby).

Sbo highlighted that the PAT mediation workshop provided the teachers with ideas for requesting a particular day at school to sell their products. This was beneficial because theory was integrated with practice, and learners got to plan ahead by doing market research for their target group before actually producing the food items:

It was stressed in our PAT mediation workshop that we must have a market day at school. The products that were produced by the learners should be sold to the staff members and learners. This was good for the learners as they got to practise what they learned in theory. Learners were meant to do a survey for market research before food production and sale (Sbo).

The PAT mediation workshop also assisted the teachers by encouraging them to grow a vegetable garden at school, so that they did not have to buy all of their food from the shops. The crops from the vegetable garden could be used to create secondary products that could be bottled, preserved, and sold to members of the staff, allowing Consumer Studies learners to earn profits and purchase whatever was required for their practicals:

We enjoyed the PAT mediation workshop as it promoted the production of organic vegetables at school, and we used it in practicals. I also made and sold achar, pickles and chutney with my learners to make a profit. This also promoted entrepreneurship, which is part of their curriculum content (Linds).

As a skills-based subject, the participants noted that PAT mediation also had a positive impact by fostering self-reliance and innovation among Consumer Studies teachers. The learners were then trained by their teachers to become their own bosses rather than relying on white-collar jobs:

PAT mediation encouraged opportunities for creativity and challenge such as entrepreneurial skills. We equipped learners with the necessary skills needed to start their catering businesses or bakeries for a living since they know all the aspects from market research, analysis, costing and advertising. This ensured that learners developed an interest in being self-employed (Aphiwe).

The participant from Focus Group 2 indicated that the knowledge gained from her peers in the PAT mediation was applied at her school when she marketed themed cakes to the learners. This was beneficial because the generated income would make it easy to buy equipment or ingredients that were needed:

I discovered from PAT mediation that we should help learners advertise novelty cakes at school in posters which were to be ordered for birthdays and anniversaries. This was to assist with buying whatever kitchen necessities were lacking (Member of Focus Group 2).

One participant shared with other teachers during the PAT mediation workshop that she was inventive with her learners as they used Heritage Day to produce cultural foods in order to raise funds. She emphasised that this day should be reflected on the school year calendar so that the school would be aware of the school activities to take place. A member of Focus Group 1 mentioned how teachers from the school would come to dine in the restaurant while being served by the learners, which exposed them to the world of work. This also enhanced communication and problem-solving skills:

During the month of September, as it was Heritage Month, learners cooked traditional dishes on Heritage Day, and the staff members supported them by being guests. This was a great initiative as learners got to feel and experience the world of work as they served teachers in the restaurant, and it boosted their communication and problem-solving abilities. This required a lot of time planning as it had to be part of the school year plan, and therefore, I shared it with my peers as early as possible during the PAT mediation workshop (Member of Focus Group 1).

Toko mentioned how she and her learners created and sold recipe books to individuals interested in cooking and baking. This was done quarterly, considering the dishes that were made in that particular term, and these recipe books were made eye-catching for the readers. This was shared with her peers during the PAT mediation workshop:

During PAT mediation workshop, I shared with my colleagues the strategy of developing recipe books with my learners and helped them to sell to the staff members and other learners who were keen on cooking and baking. We did every term and ensured that they looked attractive (Toko).

According to the participants, the PAT mediation workshop allowed them to exchange ideas with others. Thando said that meetings that required all school stakeholders to collaborate after hours allowed them to sell mini foods to parents with busy schedules, who liked to snack on them. This was also done to demonstrate the learner's abilities to their parents:

In the PAT mediation workshop, I told my colleagues what works for me, such as food sale during parents' meetings. I trained my learners to sell finger foods, tea and coffee, since some parents would love to snack as they usually attended these meetings after work, and to witness what their children were capable of doing (Thando).

Likewise, Phume mentioned that during extracurricular activities at school, her learners produced and sold food items to the spectators. This promoted self-reliance in learners. This idea was enlightening to some teachers during the PAT mediation workshop:

During the PAT mediation workshop, I spoke to my peers about what I do on sports days. I shared that my learners sell doughnuts, burgers, fried chips to other learners, teachers and the parents who have come to watch their learners playing. This instilled responsibility, and at the same time interdependence among learners (Phume).

This section has highlighted the high level of entrepreneurial skills acquired by Consumer Studies teachers. Within their TLCs, the participants exchanged innovative ideas that they practised in their schools with their learners so that they would become self-reliant. The following theme will examine how TLCs enhance teachers' pedagogical content knowledge.

6.3 TLCs ENHANCE CONSUMER STUDIES TEACHERS' PEDAGOGICAL CONTENT KNOWLEDGE

Based on the findings from the participants, this theme will present data regarding the benefits of TLCs in enhancing Consumer Studies teachers' pedagogical content knowledge. Since the subject involves both a theoretical and a practical component, the findings will demonstrate how the TLCs enriched the teachers' pedagogical content knowledge in both areas. It is fortunate that all participants opted for the same practical component which is the food production option, in their schools. It was therefore easier to engage with teachers in the TLCs as there was commonality.

The first subtheme focuses on how TLCs enrich subject matter (CAPS) knowledge. The second subtheme presents analysis on TLCs in improving instructional strategies of Consumer Studies teachers.

6.3.1 TLCs enrich subject matter (CAPS) knowledge

According to the participants, their engagements in learning community programmes contributed to their overall understanding of the content of the subject. The data also revealed how this has been reflected in learner performance in Consumer Studies. Teachers must have knowledge of the subject, otherwise the desired learning outcomes cannot be attained. Teachers believed that attending the district workshops enhanced their understanding of the subject curriculum statement for Consumer Studies. Analysing CAPS equipped them with in-depth subject knowledge, ensuring implementation. The participants' engagements in content workshops contributed to their understanding of the content of the subject matter, and the outcome was learner attainment. This was confirmed by Toko, who mentioned that the content workshop had a huge influence because it enabled teachers to comprehend the subject matter as policy documents were evaluated and analysed in a variety of ways in order to impart knowledge to learners:

My opinion about the TLCs is positive because they provided opportunities for Consumer Studies teachers to translate and interpret the subject matter in CAPS and invest in various teaching strategies in order to generate new knowledge for learners (Toko).

The participants indicated that participating in content workshops provided a platform where they could learn from other teachers who had been in the classroom for a considerable time. They explained that these experienced teachers taught them how to approach the subject content, which helps teachers to understand the subject better. Nelly explained how the content workshops helped her to master aspects of the content that she did not have the opportunity to learn at the university. She also attested to how her learners' performance has generally improved:

At the university, I had only opted for food and nutrition which was one of the majors. Only to find out in the workplace that the content is broad, as there was clothing, housing and furnishings etc. I had to adapt and seek assistance from the experienced peers during our meetings to help me with understanding the subject matter better which was not familiar to me. I can witness that attending the content workshops assisted me in achieving my subject performance target (Nelly).

Since Consumer Studies is affected by global changes in Hospitality, there are constant changes in content. As a result, new topics, and others have been shifted within grades. Getting together in subject committee meetings helps a lot, whereby those who have challenges in a particular

topic get assistance. Thando speaks about how engaging with other teachers enhanced her knowledge of the subject matter. She argues that Consumer Studies has become a very dynamic subject and that teachers get the opportunity to develop regularly by participating in content workshops. She also related the development programmes in subject committee meetings to improve learner performance. The views shared by the teachers revealed that they leave such physical engagement after having been developed in aspects of the content that would otherwise have been difficult for them:

Teaching fibres and fabrics was very problematic to me, therefore my peers came to my rescue as I did not know how to tackle this content. Attending the subject committee meeting has advanced my knowledge in the subject and I am proud as it is evident of good results from learners (Thando).

Phume confirmed that it is evident that the subject committee meeting produced a favourable result since their subject matter knowledge was enhanced by contact with experienced teachers:

Since the time I joined the subject committee, I have really gained knowledge about the subject because I saw veterans in the subject sharing their knowledge with us (Phume).

According to a member of Focus Group 1, every time they attended a conference, they gained something new, and in that way, they were enriched with more knowledge about teaching the subject effectively, as they were empowered. She emphasised that it was valuable to attend this learning space:

I am really developing my knowledge by learning new things, particularly on how to teach the subject. Having said this, I still need more teacher learning programmes. I really feel it wasn't a waste of time to be part of the conferences (Member of Focus Group 1).

Participants noted that the conferences were valued, since they helped them stay abreast with the developments in the subject. Despite the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education's lack of funds to offer regular developmental workshops, they utilised conferences organised by other service providers to increase their knowledge in the subject. Although some teachers were experienced in teaching the subject, they were eager to gain new knowledge because they knew it would enhance their teaching and learners' understanding of the subject. A participant asserted:

The essence of the conferences is purely for professional development for teachers, particularly in this era where there is lack of funds for regular teachers' development by the Department of Education. The best I can do for myself is to attend conferences organised by the external service providers in order to develop myself. I can say I joined conferences due to the fact that I have been teaching the subject for a number of years, and I am still learning (Member of Focus Group 2).

Similarly, the participants indicated that the conferences had a positive impact, as teachers got to share the teacher-learning materials for both the theoretical and practical components of the subject and outline their contents:

Through the conferences I am more knowledgeable and well experienced in the teaching and learning of Consumer Studies. It is where we share experiences, ideas and we compare notes, not only in the practical aspect of the subject but also in the theoretical part of the subject. It provides reinforcement that is building us more about the subject (Member of Focus Group 1).

Other participants concurred that the conferences allowed the exchanging of knowledge, which made learning the subject more interesting as the teachers got to share what was unique in the subject. Engagement in conferences allowed teachers to overcome their fears, as there was no criticism and everyone could speak their minds:

I can say the primary benefit of the conferences is that it promotes knowledge sharing of what we felt was distinctive in teaching Consumer Studies. This makes the teaching of both practical and theoretical aspects of the subject easier as we share experiences with each other without judging one another therefore, we don't find ourselves being fearful to raise our opinions (Member of Focus Group 2).

Because school contexts differed, the members of Focus Group 1 indicated that they learned from the PAT mediation workshop that they should not compete with other schools, but rather, each teacher should understand her school context. In planning practical lessons, they should bear in mind their school norms as they determine which practicals they should conduct. This means that practicals varied from school to school, depending on the availability of funding and other resources:

During our PAT mediation workshop, I got to understand that our schools are not the same. Each teacher should set practical lessons taking into consideration the available funds of their school and not compare themselves to others, as they might be well resourced (Member of Focus Group 1).

According to the findings, teachers were prepared with knowledge for personal development. The participants emphasised the importance of becoming a lifelong learner as a teacher and the benefits that this produces in terms of obtaining excellent results from learners. This was corroborated by Tuks, Tomby and Sbo, who stated that the PAT mediation and content workshops were helpful to teachers since they could learn and stay current on issues related to the subject, given that it comprised both a theoretical and a practical component. Tuks also specified that a teacher must be a lifelong learner in order to perform well in the subject:

There is a common saying that nobody has the monopoly of knowledge. Based on this assertion, I learned from both PAT and content workshops that I need to be current and stay up-to-date with knowledge about the subject I am teaching. This subject involves both theory and practical. A good teacher always has to seek knowledge, that is why I must be ready to learn so that I conduct my teaching duties well (Tuks).

Tomby highlighted how the PAT mediation and content workshops equipped her with teaching from the contemporary world. She emphasised that by teachers exchanging their views, she benefitted from it. Sbo agreed:

I learned from the theory and practical workshop since it provides insight and knowledge on how to teach the subject in line with the modern world. You see, many teachers share their experiences in the workshops, and it helped me to develop myself personally (Tomby).

The content workshops are highly beneficial, closed knowledge gap, and learning new content. These are the benefits I derived from being part of them. Honestly, it really encourages knowledge sharing among teachers of Consumer Studies (Sbo).

The section illustrated how Consumer Studies teachers' engagement enriched their subject matter knowledge and highlighted that the focus of the developmental workshops, subject committees and conferences was more on the mastery of major concepts in Consumer Studies. The next section focuses on how TLCs improve instructional strategies.

6.3.2 TLCs Improve Instructional Strategies

The participants believed that meeting as a community of teachers assisted them in enhancing their instructional methods by allowing them to share their most effective practices and their peers to observe what works for them. The content workshops allow rural Consumer Studies teachers to be empowered to learn content they might struggle to teach at their respective schools. Toko shared how she integrated theory into practice by exposing her learners to some topics by conducting an educational excursion:

I took my Grade 11 learners to the interior designers in the city since they are from the rural school. I did this when I dealt with housing and furnishings content. Therefore, I wanted them to be exposed and be able to relate the actual theory with the practical (Toko).

When teachers gathered in content workshops, they were encouraged to plan field trips related to the content they covered at a specific time so that learners would better comprehend the content. The participant said:

With the teaching strategies I discovered from my peers, I got to organise an educational excursion for my Grade 10 learners. We were dealing with different shopping outlets under The Consumer topic. I planned a trip to town so that learners were able to observe what I was speaking about during the theory lesson and be able to grasp the content (Nelly).

Since Consumer Studies is a dynamic subject, new content compels teachers to use new methods to deliver the theoretical content. Teachers agreed that this is not only the case when introducing a new topic. It could be an old topic they found challenging to address when teaching. When the teachers met, they got the opportunity to be regularly developed in terms of approaches that are relevant for teaching the new topics effectively, and this helps improve the method of instruction, which translates into better learner attainment. Tomby had this to say:

There is a new strategy that I learned from my peers, which is to teach nutrition diseases by allowing learners to do role-plays so that learners are actively engaged and motivated, and this will lead to better understanding of the topic and increase their grasping of content (Tomby).

Sphe spoke about how she got the opportunity to sit in discussion groups and listen to other colleagues as they presented lessons during the PAT mediation workshop. According to her, this

enabled Consumer Studies teachers to identify their limitations in the teaching strategies they usually use in their classrooms. It also helped them to tap into the expertise that the more experienced teachers brought on board during the PAT mediation workshop and also be able to share their difficulties with their colleagues and ask for help. In this way, teachers were allowed to improve or work on areas where they had challenges:

I used to give recipes and instruct my learners to follow the methods. Learning from seasoned teachers during PAT mediation workshop assisted me as it stressed on the importance of demonstrating a practical to learners first prior to giving it to learners. I learned that I needed to try out the recipe beforehand so that I could observe if the product comes out perfectly; if not, I should change the recipe. The importance for self-discovery as a teacher is paramount as it will ensure that teaching and learning of practicals is conducted effectively. The learning space permitted us an opportunity to seek possible causes for products to fail (Sphe).

Phume echoed these sentiments, stating that she learned the importance of experimentation from the PAT mediation workshop. She added that there is value in experimenting with learners because it fosters their curiosity and equips them with problem-solving skills:

The PAT mediation workshop stressed the importance of conducting experiments with learners. Before, I failed to understand why the cream puffs were not rising when being prepared by learners. But after engaging with my peers in the PAT mediation workshop I was able to show a demonstration after the theory lesson to test if learners still remember the causes leading to a product failure. This instilled a high level of critical and problem-solving ability amongst the learners as they could point out the problem themselves (Phume).

It was evident that the PAT mediation workshop ensured that teachers bring their existing knowledge of good practices for practical lessons to the upcoming practical lessons. Tuks revealed the benefit of this as ensuring that the teaching and learning during practicals run effectively since thorough planning has taken place:

We are obliged to bring prior knowledge and experiences, especially in practical lessons, in order to make sure that the lesson is easily understood and it enables to link the lesson with the previous knowledge to the current one. Planning thoroughly was a necessity, since

it allowed us to see if the resources we have will be able to be used for conducting practicals. These were discussed in detail during the PAT mediation workshop (Tuks).

The participants noted that the PAT mediation workshops strengthened their pedagogical approaches to develop essential 21st-century skills in utilising technology because this facilitates learning and will increase learners' engagement. According to Linds, there are learners who learn best through visuals as opposed to written text:

New ways for making my lessons interesting to learners through using social media, watching DStv cooking channels were discovered in PAT mediation workshop. I must say I will introduce this to my learners, as their learning capabilities were not the same. I am not going back to using the old method of only using the textbook. My learners will be eager to do their homework, as they could link what they learned with what they see (Linds).

Sbo shared the same sentiments:

The content workshops assisted me a lot in using a different approach when teaching. I will be able to use the PowerPoint presentation when I teach my lessons. I am confident that I will notice a change in learners' attitude when I project my lessons with the visuals, they will pay more attention when compared to learning from textbooks.

It was evident from the participants that teachers stressed the importance of the learner-centred approach during their content workshops. Moreover, the participants emphasised that learners should be given tasks to complete in small groups which enhances their collaborative abilities and autonomy. Aphiwe added that this method makes it easier for learners to recall content when they write summative assessments:

I used to think group work was chaotic, but the content workshops suggested that I should divide learners into smaller groups so that they learn from one another, and by doing they will remember easily when they write their tests or exams since they will be able to discover things themselves (Aphiwe).

This section presented that within the developmental workshops, the participants learned various teaching strategies so that their learners may have interest in learning the subject and ways to grasp the content quicker. The next theme will present the benefits of TLCs in managing and nurturing personal growth.

6.4 MANAGING AND NURTURING PERSONAL GROWTH

The findings revealed that engaging in Consumer Studies TLCs helped participants in the development of personal growth. I present data on how TLCs encourage capacity building and how TLCs promote confidence and job satisfaction.

6.4.1 TLCs encourage capacity building

Participants revealed that participating in TLC activities fosters the ability to accept feedback and work towards improvement. This was effective because the teachers who met shared a common mission and vision. The participants' engagements ensured that they maintained mutual respect and trust while exchanging information and working with their peers:

Being a member of the subject committee created a positive relationship between teachers working towards the common objectives. We had to develop trust with each other so that we were able to learn from each other (Member of Focus Group 1).

Since content workshops had disseminated more computer skills information, a member of Focus Group 2 added that teachers were willing to adapt and learn through the use of information and communications technology (ICT) to assist learning, and that they used their basic computer skills to compile the data by filling out the performance analysis link provided by the Subject Advisor in Google forms. In addition, the materials to support teaching and learning were accessible at any time, because the Subject Advisor provided the link for self-help in OneDrive:

I that the content workshops have been supportive in increasing the knowledge of the teacher. Having said that, I will still like to suggest that Consumer Studies teachers should accept change and learn from the various positive changes from the platform, like using technology to support teaching and learning in the classrooms. We were capacitated as we completed the performance analysis which was sent by the Subject Advisor through Google Forms. My life was at ease as I could access all the resources in OneDrive which was accessible through the link provided by the Subject Advisor (Member of Focus group 2).

A member from Focus Group 1 echoed this sentiment - that the content workshops allowed the teachers to improve themselves professionally in the subject. They learned that regardless of age, they had to advance their learning through the use of ICT in teaching and learning:

Content workshops offers the effective learning space that gives us a chance to uplift each other and develop ourselves. Most of us, due to being old were not knowledgeable about Google Classroom, making a good PowerPoint presentation and using data projectors, etc. We learned from the young teachers, who are good with technology (Member of Focus Group 1).

The member of Focus Group 2 articulated that they benefitted from the content workshops as the veteran teachers were very supportive and served as a reliable source of information. This allowed them to improve in teaching and learning. This is what the participant said:

As a new teacher, joining the content workshops is a real blessing for me, because the senior teachers have been helpful in sharing their experiences in the environment, and all these experiences are building me up to be a better teacher (Member of Focus Group 2).

The teachers indicated that they had to reflect at the end of their engagements to track whether they were able to meet the objectives for their meetings and come up with the solutions if any gaps were identified. This afforded them an opportunity for personal growth, as they were able to provide feedback on what works and what does not, so that their meetings were conducive. The participant asserted:

We were able to evaluate by reflecting at the end of our meetings, this ensured that we were all capacitated. If the meeting didn't meet the intended purpose, we voiced it out and came up with ways to stop this from happening in future (Nelly).

The Consumer Studies teachers state that participating in subject committee meetings created opportunities to lead in group discussions and report feedback to bigger groups, and in the process they became empowered, which will also inspire learners to do well in the subject. The participants were also of the view that their collaboration allowed sharing of responsibility, which nurtures leadership skills among the teachers. Lead and master teachers' leadership skills were bolstered since they were entrusted with the responsibility of developing other teachers, especially novice teachers. Linds' view was that leadership is about inspiring others, a practice which is the embodiment of the learning community activities:

I was assigned duties of being a cluster co-ordinator. I had to ensure that all the teachers in my ward have all the necessary documents to support the teaching and learning; if not, I had to inform the Subject Advisor. I liaised with the teachers to set quality question papers and moderated them, as most schools do not have departmental heads that are Consumer Studies specialists. To ensure that the question papers are of expected standard, I sent the papers to the Subject Advisor for verification (Linds).

Similarly, Phume shared her opinion regarding SBA moderation which provided a learning space for teacher leadership. She was of the view that in SBA moderation teachers were afforded opportunities to make presentations in front of their colleagues, which is also a way of nurturing teacher leadership:

I got to experience being a moderator at the cluster level during the district SBA moderation. This was done after tasks were administered. I would present to my peers the expectations for cluster and district moderation. I stressed on the layout of teacher SBA file, the percentage of learner portfolios to be brought, and emphasised all the necessary tools that were to be used for pre- and post-moderation at school level as well as the colour pens to be used representing each level (Phume).

A similar view was echoed by another participant, who suggested that assigning responsibilities to teachers in the PAT moderation empowers them to manage or lead in classroom situations especially during practical lessons. Sbo had the following to say:

My leadership skills have developed as I was tasked by my Subject Advisor to assist with practical moderation for Grades 10 and 11 in Term 4. This permitted me to be able to manage my practical classes well (Sbo).

Teachers revealed that sometimes they were given the responsibility to co-ordinate the activities within their wards. Toko believed that this process has empowered her as she has grown in terms of managing people in general:

At the end of the year, I was tasked by the Subject Advisor to host for the year end revision programme at my school. I had to ensure that each teacher was assigned the topic that they will be teaching our learners, and that the venue to be used will be able to accommodate

all learners. The task gave me a skill to be able to manage both teachers and learners (Toko).

The orientation workshop inspired teachers to further their studies in the subject, so that they looked at things from a different perspective and grew professionally outside their classrooms, while at the same time developed a specialisation which will assist with the improvement in teaching and learning of Consumer Studies:

During the orientation workshop, we were motivated to study further in the subject. I must say, I now have a desire to enrol for the Master's degree in Consumer Studies so as to broaden my knowledge in the subject. In order to offer quality education, there is a need for career advancement. Through observing my Subject Advisor from the things she shared with us, I witnessed how rich the information was and also wish to possess knowledge of this level (Linds).

The section indicated that the participants' leadership skills were nurtured as they were engaged with a number of activities where they led within their TLCs. The data indicated how the Subject Advisor developed them in the subject. Moreover, teachers were capacitated to a greater extent in the use of ICT for teaching and learning. The next section presents analysis on enhancement of confidence and job satisfaction by TLCs.

6.4.2 TLCs promote self-confidence and job satisfaction

Mutual trust among the Consumer Studies peer teachers was necessary for the efficient execution of duties. The participants revealed that the content workshops provided them with an opportunity for self-improvement and increased value in conducting effective teaching and learning for Consumer Studies. The teachers' confidence enabled them to perform to the best of their abilities and to achieve their subject-specific goals. Thando supported this claim by stating that she benefitted from the content workshops because she was able to explore new aspects of the subject every day, which boosted her self-confidence and resulted to being admired by her learners:

Attending the content workshop allowed me to learn new things from the experienced teachers, especially in clothing, and this made me more knowledgeable about the subject. It also built more self-confidence in me and it made my learners respect me more (Thando).

The participants reported that content workshops enriched them with the principles of life such as respect. There were certain topics that needed to be taught taking into consideration the diverse

cultures of the learners. The teaching and learning of the subject enhanced Phume's sense of self-worth:

I like your question a lot ... By joining the content workshop, it has really build my self-confidence on how to teach the subject. The content workshops have educated me on certain socio-cultural issues in The Consumer topic and in teaching it by not being judgemental (Phume).

The participant revealed that she was sceptical about teaching Consumer Studies during her early years as a teacher. The content workshops assisted her as she gained self-confidence which led to teaching the subject better. Furthermore, she was equipped with more knowledge and skills to create learner profiles after summative assessment, so as to mitigate challenges that led to failure in assessment. She said the following:

I learned from the content workshops since it improved my self-confidence in the subject. When I joined teaching, I was very nervous in my earlier days as a teacher, but ever since I joined the communities of learning, I can say that I have really improved in identifying learners that need special attention after conducting summative assessment (Member of Focus Group 2).

Teachers highlighted that the content workshops boosted their self-confidence, as they learned from the experienced teachers, who always shared information. The participant highlighted that although others were not well vested, the veteran teachers afforded them an opportunity to share what they know:

The content workshops have really improved my skills in giving classroom activities of a quality standard. It has also served as a tool for professional development for me, because I learned from my senior colleagues when they are sharing their knowledge; this served as morale booster for me. They gave me a chance to voice out my opinions as well (Member of Focus group 1).

As a result of her participation in the content workshop, Aphiwe is now able to teach the entire curriculum without omitting any content out of fear. It was evident that prior to joining this learning space she taught what was believed to be the most convenient to herself, since she possessed a greater understanding of that aspect. She asserted:

Before I attended the content workshop, I was not comfortable in teaching costing as I am not a mathematical person. After attending, I did not skip any content because I was unable to teach it. The learning communities programmes boosted my self-confidence (Aphiwe).

Toko emphasised that teaching was enjoyable after she engaged with peers during content workshops and developed a variety of pedagogical methods, which boosted her self-confidence in the nutrition section:

Teaching nutrition became fun as various teaching methods were shared in the content workshop to help in grasping the theory better. I must say, my self-confidence was improved (Toko).

Nelly agreed that the content workshops benefitted them because they learned more effective ways to approach difficult topics. She learned how to make the lesson engaging through the use of fibres and fabrics, and was capable of carrying out the lesson independently:

Attending the content workshop made my life easy, as I no longer had to invite my peers to come and assist me at school in the teaching of fibres and fabrics. I knew how I had to teach that topic and make it interesting so it will be understood by learners (Nelly).

Tomby revealed that she initially lacked self-confidence when she had to facilitate a certain topic to her peers, but attending additional content workshops helped her overcome her reluctance because she realised that they were intended for the purpose of learning and supporting, and not being judgemental in a negative way:

During the first content workshop with my colleagues, I was hesitant to present the topic that I was assigned by my Subject Advisor, thinking that I will be judged. Attending various workshops of this nature boosted my self-confidence as I did not fear to stand in front of my colleagues (Tomby).

The participants indicated that the PAT mediation workshop allowed them to stay abreast of the most recent developments in the subject. This include: the way baked or cooked products are garnished to make them more appealing should demonstrate that the teachers are not out of date. Linds was confident that she taught her learners well during practicals because she kept up with the most recent trends:

The PAT mediation workshop was useful as it allowed us to share the latest cooking and baking trends in the subject. How we garnished in the previous years differed from how we should garnish in the current year. I was self-assured that I am doing right for my learners (Linds).

This section demonstrated how Consumer Studies teachers' self-confidence was boosted by attending TLCs programmes. It was evident that through professional development, learning in terms of content resulted in teachers having a passion for the subject as they were clear about the content and used various teaching methods which suited the current era.

6.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter focused on the third broad theme which presented the kind of learning that occurred in the Consumer Studies TLCs. The data gathered provide a comprehensive understanding of the kind of learning which occurred during the developmental workshops, subject committees, moderation and conferences. The study dealt with Consumer Studies teachers professional engagements during the COVID-19 pandemic. It further demonstrated the need to develop new skills to help Consumer Studies teachers use technology, more specially during the lockdown since it required them to be technologically savvy. The most common new skill that most teachers had to learn was the use of technology, as the teachers used OneDrive, Google forms, Power point presentation, videos, which required them to conduct effective teaching and learning. The participants showed that TLCs were beneficial to Consumer Studies teachers, as it developed them in the profession in terms of managing curriculum reforms. There was also development of sustainability in education and teachers were equipped with personal entrepreneurial skills. Furthermore, TLCs enhanced Consumer Studies teachers' subject content knowledge and instructional strategies, personal skills such as capacity building and promotion of confidence in the job. The next chapter will discuss findings based on the data that was presented in Chapter Five and this chapter. In addition, relevant literature is used to illustrate how this study expands understanding of what is presently known about type of platforms teachers used for meetings, learning activities teachers were engaged with and what they learned during those learning engagements.

CHAPTER SEVEN

LEARNING PLATFORMS, SPACES AND THE KIND OF LEARNING THAT OCCURRED IN TLCs

7.1 INTRODUCTION

As outlined in Chapter One, this study examines how Consumer Studies teachers learned through TLCs in one district in KwaZulu-Natal. This objective gave rise to the findings presented in Chapters Five and Six. Chapter Five presented data on learning platforms and spaces facilitating Consumer Studies teachers' engagement in TLCs. Data on the kind of learning that occurred in the Consumer Studies TLCs was presented in Chapter Six.

This chapter discusses the study's findings presented in Chapters Five and Six and engages with the existing literature in Chapter Two. The chapter explores the relationship between the current study's findings and the existing body of literature in the field of Consumer Studies teacher learning in TLCs. In this chapter, I also used a theory that framed the study to discuss the main findings emerging from the two previous chapters. This chapter moves beyond the descriptive analysis presented in the two preceding chapters to a second level of analysis.

I discuss the research findings under three key issues organised into the following themes:

- Learning platforms that allowed teacher engagement in TLCs;
- Learning spaces and various forms of Consumer Studies teachers' engagement in TLCs; and
- The kind of learning that occurred in the Consumer Studies TLCs.

While conducting a more thorough analysis of these findings, I shall demonstrate how this research expands our comprehension of the existing knowledge regarding teacher learning in TLCs. This study will furthermore demonstrate the nature of learning that took place in the TLCs. The findings are discussed within three themes, which are interconnected and interrelated.

7.2 LEARNING PLATFORMS THAT ALLOWED TEACHER ENGAGEMENT IN TLCs

The research findings provided insights into the types of learning platforms Consumer Studies teachers used to engage in TLCs. The findings revealed how teachers' engagement in learning

communities through virtual and face-to-face learning platforms enabled the Consumer Studies teachers to congregate for teacher capacity building.

7.2.1 Face-to-face teacher engagement in learning communities

Based on the findings provided by the participants, face-to-face interactions occurred in many forms. Engaging in this form enabled Consumer Studies teachers to meet physically across various locations to foster professional growth and development. The findings drawn from the interviews revealed that the participants expressed various views to illustrate how their involvement had primarily relied on direct physical interaction. The benefits of teachers congregating face-to-face in sharing ideas, resources and expertise that advance teaching and learning have been emphasised by several scholars in the teacher education and development literature (Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2015; Hargreaves, 2019; Macià & García, 2016; Trust *et al.*, 2016; Tytler *et al.*, 2017). Trust *et al.* (2016) posit that collaborative teacher meetings create spaces for teachers to share resources and ideas that facilitate developing and advancing one's professional skills and knowledge. These scholars speak of teachers' face-to-face engagements in joint activities like workshops, subject committees, conferences and clusters as means of improving classroom practices and learner attainment. In this study, the collective views of the participants further revealed that Consumer Studies teachers engaged in face-to-face learning communities through the subject committees and the pairing of schools to share and present obstacles that limit the successful implementation of the curriculum. Tarnanen *et al.* (2021) mention that a recommendation for enhancing the strength of the subject committee involves implementing a systematic, ongoing professional development through the schools' partnerships which aim to support and collaborate in addressing challenges during face-to-face encounters. The ISPFTED, a primary educational policy document, values teachers' physical engagement as clusters (DBE, 2015). The study finds that Consumer Studies teachers raised concerns that clusters were not formed within their wards owing to fewer schools offering the subject. As a result, teachers could not find the necessary support from their peers in neighbouring schools. Although scholars confirm that engagements at the cluster level provide a setting and the needed support for classroom teachers (Ansong *et al.*, 2017; Danielson, 2020; Nakamonde-Daniel, 2018), the shortage of schools offering Consumer Studies in the ward hindered the opportunity for teachers to learn as clusters.

Because it was not possible for teachers to meet with other Consumer Studies teachers at a cluster level, they relied heavily on subject committee meetings, which were held at the district level.

Scholars like White *et al.* (2015) confirm that teachers are situated in several places where they are responsible for guiding their professional development. This concurred with Tytler *et al.* (2017), who conducted a study in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) which found that numerous formal professional development activities include physically held meetings that are scheduled at specified times. In this study, Consumer Studies teachers were unhappy they had to travel long distances to get together at subject committee meetings since they were conducted at the district level. Hence, Consumer Studies teachers were frequently behind schedule for the subject committee meetings because of their distant location. When reaching the location, they experienced a significant level of physical exhaustion. It appears that there was a challenge with regard to teachers from rural areas travelling to urban areas for meetings as it increased travel time. While Consumer Studies is regarded as a dynamic subject that constantly develops, teachers felt that there was a gap in their professional growth since they could not engage with other teachers at the cluster level. This is confirmed by various scholars who assert that geographic isolation and physical distance pose significant barriers for rural schools to deliver adequate professional development opportunities for teachers, which results in them being sent to workshops in areas which are not close to their school locations (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; Glover *et al.*, 2016; Lavalley, 2018).

Teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the inconsistent occurrence of subject committee meetings. Because subject committee meetings were not held regularly like cluster meetings, teachers had to wait a long time for their queries to be answered. Karpen (2015) confirms this finding regarding the irregular subject committee meetings. He mentions that teachers are willing to endorse the structure of the subject committee yet frequently encounter unaddressed obstacles that hinder their ability to engage in collaborative efforts. Lo (2021) states that inconsistent meeting schedules are one barrier to continuous teacher development. According to Consumer Studies teachers, it was convenient for other teachers in their schools to meet at nearby schools since several schools offered their subjects within the ward. This was not the case for Consumer Studies teachers, as they were expected to drive to a central location in order to engage in face-to-face discussions with peers during the subject committee meetings. This is consistent with Du Plessis and Mestry (2019), who argue that some schools encounter challenges locating a group of teachers with the same interests owing to the limited availability of schools offering the subject in the area, hindering teachers' communal learning.

In this study, Consumer Studies teachers also engaged in face-to-face interactions during developmental workshops. The Consumer Studies Subject Advisor coordinated these workshops. During these meetings, the Consumer Studies teachers were given the chance to engage in these

meetings and interact with their peers. Thus, these interactions enhanced the content areas that Consumer Studies teachers were not confident about teaching. Kucuk *et al.* (2021) and Mantra (2017) confirm that in workshops, teachers work in partnership to resolve all teaching-related issues so that their concerns and doubts can be addressed without hesitation.

Despite the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the teachers revealed instances where they were obliged to engage in physical meetings as part of the moderation process. This process of checking and confirming marks for Grade 12 was conducted through direct interaction between the teachers and the school Subject Advisor. Teachers previously met at one place, where they confirmed whether the assessment evaluation was in accordance with the subject guidelines. Adie and Wyatt-Smith (2020) support that teachers discuss their interpretations of the context-specific quality of learners' work during moderation.

Literature confirms the importance of in-person teacher engagements as they enable the sharing of practical knowledge (Ansarimoghaddam *et al.*, 2017). However, findings of this study reveal a significant reduction in the frequency of face-to-face meetings among Consumer Studies teachers owing to COVID-19 lockdown measures. In certain instances, in-person meetings were compulsory. Departmental meetings that were held to discuss urgent changes in the teaching plan were attended by a smaller number of teachers. Most teachers expressed different views as they were satisfied with face-to-face interactions.

7.2.2 Virtual teacher engagement in learning communities

During COVID-19 pandemic, teacher education programs shifted to remote teaching due to lockdown restrictions (Al-Bashabsheh & Pradhan, 2022; Bahar *et al.*, 2022; Carrillo & Flores, 2020; Jena, 2020; Kapasia *et al.*, 2020; Noor & Sofyaningrum, 2020). The South African Basic Education sector like other education sector globally introduced virtual eLearning as a legitimate means of teaching and learning for Consumer Studies teachers. Studies have been carried out on the effectiveness of virtual space as a ground for teachers in schools, but there is a paucity of literature done in South Africa on its use as a TLC.

The findings revealed that Consumer Studies teachers used various electronic devices like smartphones and laptops to access virtual platforms that they used to engage with peers during workshops. They used various eLearning platforms such as social media (WhatsApp and Facebook) and video conferencing (Ms Teams) for learning in their TLCs.

Social media were the significant platforms that Consumer Studies teachers utilised to facilitate the learning process during the COVID-19 era. According to Ajamu *et al.* (2024), a study

conducted in Nigeria revealed that 243 ICT teachers used social media platforms for online meetings particularly during the COVID-19 period. This is confirmed in a study conducted in India by Al-Bashabsheh and Pradhan (2022) that indicated teachers used social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook groups in order to engage with their colleagues during the pandemic.

Teachers often raised concerns that it was not possible for them to meet with other Consumer Studies teachers during departmental meetings and at a cluster level. While Consumer Studies is regarded as the dynamic subject which constantly develops, teachers were unable to engage regularly with other teachers. As a result, they relied heavily on subject committee meetings which were held after sometime at the district level. The fact that they could not meet with other Consumer Studies teachers within schools and as a cluster hindered their professional growth. However, shifting to online learning which allowed teachers to use social media to share ideas and materials at any time enhanced communal learning. It emerged from the findings that Consumer Studies teachers interacted from various geographical regions through WhatsApp.

According to Papademetriou *et al.* (2022), a study conducted in Greece posits that Information Technology teachers adopted the use of social media to learn from other teachers because they enhance teaching and learning of the subject which motivated the teachers to learn. Because teachers communicated mostly through this mode, it permitted continuous interaction and enabled access to support at any time of the day. Furthermore, social media platforms enable Consumer Studies teachers to create social networks with other teachers at their level to support one another nationally. This finding is confirmed by various scholars (Carpenter & Krukta, 2015; Davis, 2015; Kendall, 2019, Stone, 2019; Van den Berg & Mudau, 2022) who asserted that technology fosters connection between teachers. Therefore, social media was not only seen by teachers as ways to engage with fun activities, they allowed networking and stimulated teachers' interest as they could use them as a form of learning as they exchanged information with their peers. This implies that if Consumer Studies teachers collaborate virtually, they can improve their practice through communal sharing of ideas to advance the needed practical experience.

The study participants acknowledged that there are limitations in terms of infrastructural deficiencies and socio-economic constraints within the context in which they work. These constraints did not allow the Consumer Studies teachers, especially in rural schools, to engage at their potential in learning community programmes. The participants expressed different views like schools without electricity, challenges with network signal, no access to Wi-Fi, shortage of technological resources and lack of digital knowledge. Although virtual collaboration was beneficial for the participants, it seems that their engagements were mainly limited to the

utilisation of the WhatsApp group chats. Due to the shortfall in terms of internet connectivity, teachers ended up being able to access their WhatsApp messages and educational resources shared during weekdays and on weekends as they moved from their workplaces to their home towns which had a stable internet connectivity.

Some studies from the United Kingdom, Finland, China and Australia have all demonstrated the use of technologies such as video conferencing, Twitter-based professional learning and the use of WeChat to facilitate the sharing of pedagogic information among teachers (Hilli, 2020; Maher & Prescott, 2017; Qi & Wang, 2018). What the study finds is that video conferencing in the form of MS Teams was used, but not to a large extent as it was complicated. Suleri and Cavagnaro (2016) assert that if teachers possess a limited understanding of MS Teams, it may result in their fear and reluctance to engage with MS Teams. In this study, Consumer Studies teachers were hesitant about using MS Teams in the early stages of being introduced to this platform. Some reported it was introduced to them during the later stages of their professional service as they were about to retire. This implies that teachers were not proficient in using this platform. Thus, Consumer Studies teachers preferred using the WhatsApp platform as they were familiar with its features.

The two preceding sections presented findings that emanated from physical interactions and virtual engagements during COVID-19 among Consumer Studies teachers in learning communities. The following section will present findings from the participants' learning spaces and what they learned during the various forms of their engagements.

7.3 LEARNING SPACES AND VARIOUS FORMS OF ENGAGEMENTS IN CONSUMER STUDIES TLCs

This section discusses the findings on learning spaces and various forms of teachers' engagement in Consumer Studies TLCs. The research findings indicated that Consumer Studies teachers have opportunities to engage in learning for their development in the subject, both within and outside schools.

7.3.1 Learning spaces used by teachers to learn within the school

In Consumer Studies, both seasoned and novice teachers felt that there was a need to continuously develop themselves professionally because of the ever-changing Consumer Studies curriculum. As a result, all teachers engaged in learning activities within the schools during departmental meetings, meetings with master teachers, and peer observation.

7.3.1.1 Sharing knowledge in departmental meetings

According to Vangrieken *et al.* (2015), departmental meetings are a form of team meeting where members discuss the school vision and mission, latest updates, challenges, and the following steps to take collaboratively in order to improve the teaching and learning at school. The benefits of teachers congregating in departmental meetings, sharing ideas, resources and expertise that advance teaching and learning in their subjects, have been highlighted by various scholars in the teacher education and development literature (Battersby & Verdi, 2015; Borko *et al.*, 2015; Hopkins, 2015; Lavonen *et al.*, 2020; Smith & Gillespie, 2023). In a study conducted in Australia, Kelly *et al.* (2019) found that teachers often met in their departments because they saw the need to enhance understanding of the subject matter, as well as pedagogical methods to impart this knowledge to learners effectively.

While studies show the benefits of teacher learning through departmental meetings, the findings of this study revealed that Consumer Studies teacher learning was insufficient in terms of subject-specific content knowledge. Although they attended numerous departmental meetings, Consumer Studies teachers expressed concern that they met with the Science or Commerce department teachers under the supervision of departmental heads who did not understand Consumer Studies subject content knowledge. Most schools could not form a stand-alone Consumer Studies department, since the subject was taught by one teacher across the FET phase. Therefore, since Consumer Studies teachers could not get any assistance within the school with regard to the subject content knowledge, they were compelled to network through social media with other schools that offered the same subject in order to advance their understanding.

What the study finds is that teachers attended several meetings coordinated by their departmental heads, as a means of keeping abreast of changes regarding restructuring of the curriculum that were devised by the DBE during the COVID-19 pandemic and had to be implemented, and other challenges related to teaching during lockdown. Although teachers were informed about the changes, the Consumer Studies teachers did not learn much and were concerned about the information they received from the Commerce or Science departmental heads, who could not provide them with further information on the adaptations, because they were not well versed in the subject. As a result, teachers had to meet virtually through WhatsApp with other Consumer Studies teachers outside of the school to share knowledge and materials on changes in their subject. Literature from various scholars across the globe contrasts with these findings. In Kenya, departmental heads are regarded as knowledgeable of subject content and able to develop others (Tapala *et al.*, 2022). A study conducted in Kuwait emphasised the importance of teachers'

exposure to instructional skills and subject-related expertise during departmental meetings, which concurred. This exposure was beneficial in supporting school education (Alsaleh, 2021, 2023).

It was evident from the teachers' views that the absence of a Consumer Studies department did not hinder Consumer Studies teachers from learning within the school, as they listened to and observed good practices from colleagues from the Science and Commerce departments. Consumer Studies teachers felt that meeting with teachers from other subjects allowed them to network and exchange knowledge in terms of generic practices to improve the teaching and learning in the subject, such as interpretation of subject policies, teacher planning, resources, and experiences they encountered in their classrooms during their lessons. This signifies that sharing information and experiences among teachers contributes to individual growth. Many teachers demonstrate a willingness to openly share their experiences during departmental meetings, as they firmly believe that the feedback received from their colleagues can significantly impact classroom practices. It is apparent that departmental heads promoted teamwork among the staff and ensured cooperation between teachers so that they were on the same level and kept in mind the expectation to work towards achieving their departmental goals.

Literature conducted in the Philippines confirms the importance of using videos for instruction (Setiawan *et al.*, 2022). Since Consumer Studies is viewed as a subject that requires particular teaching strategies to equip learners with practical skills, demonstrations are essential in teaching practicals. In this study, Consumer Studies teachers also learned innovative ways to teach by sending videos through WhatsApp to demonstrate the practical lessons to their learners. They learned to create teaching resources like demonstration videos they shared with other teachers. As a result, their skills for integrating their lessons with technology were enhanced for conducting practical assessment tasks. From a theoretical lens, the utilisation of technology and social networks is consistent with what has been noted as enabling members of a still-emerging CoP. Technology facilitates communication and initiates connections among individuals in recognition of their shared interests (OECD, 2016; Themelis & Sime, 2020; Townley, 2020).

If Consumer Studies teachers collaborate, they can improve their practice through what Caulfield (2023) describes as a communal sharing of ideas to achieve practical experience or skills that improve the learning outcome. In this study, teachers collaborated in departmental meetings to improve their classroom teaching practice. This is consistent with the CoP theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), which suggests that CoPs are formed when individuals collaborate towards a shared objective.

Generally, the CoP theory supports the findings, in that learning within the school enhances the institution's objectives. The departmental heads played a role in coordinating meetings within

their departments to encourage staff members to interact with one another for their professional learning to improve results in the subjects. This is confirmed by various scholars, who posit that the presence of a facilitator who coordinates opportunities for professional discussion encourages both personal and collective exploration and empowers individuals to actively participate and take responsibility for pedagogical transformation, facilitating the development of a CoP (Brennan & King, 2022; Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2017; Kumar *et al.*, 2024).

7.3.1.2 Collegial support and learning from master teachers

The study also revealed that Consumer Studies teachers learned from master teachers at their schools who possess a senior status at the school based on their teaching experience. Although all teachers valued the knowledge they gained from these teachers, it appears that novice teachers were perceived to have benefitted the most from them. Donohoo and Velasco (2016) highlight the need to create collegial support for novice teachers within the school. This support provided a platform for Consumer Studies teachers to openly discuss their experiences and challenges while also receiving valuable guidance and support from their peers, which is not subject-specific but generic.

According to Schatz-Oppenheimer (2017), the master teacher's responsibility as a mentor is to help novice teachers develop a deep and meaningful concept of teaching. Stronge (2018) further asserts that master teachers assist new teachers in analysing the various facets of teaching and provide them with the sources and resources they need to deliver lessons effectively. Although master teachers did not possess any specific content knowledge in Consumer Studies since they belonged to Science and Commerce departments, nevertheless, they played a crucial role in mentoring novice teachers to develop an understanding of the concept of teaching. Since master teachers had vast experience, they had the ability to mentor and provide guidance for novice teachers irrespective of their subject differences with the extensive knowledge they had in their fields to improve learner results within the school. Teachers mentioned that they usually met with master teachers to share very important LTSM. Since Consumer Studies is a subject with unique terminology, teachers typically use a very useful dictionary to clarify these terms. For an example, during their meeting with Commerce master teachers they also shared information on using a culinary dictionary to interpret some recipes with unique terminology.

Most scholars from the Philippines, Singapore and Zimbabwe regard master teachers as senior teachers with a high level of expertise in their subjects. These researchers say master teachers have superior lesson-planning techniques and exceptional teaching strategies. Hence, they often

served as mentors to promote the professional development of their colleagues, with the ultimate goal of enhancing effective teaching (Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2017; Mpofu & Chimhenga, 2016; Smith & Gillespie, 2023). In this study, Consumer Studies teachers benefited from the best practices shared by Commerce master teachers in teaching financial literacy and business-related topics like entrepreneurship. As a result, the network of Consumer Studies teachers with these master teachers was beneficial as they provided solutions to their challenges with regard to conducting practicals effectively.

In Consumer Studies, the teachers' role is to produce learners who are adequately equipped with the comprehensive theoretical knowledge and practical skills required for engaging in producing saleable products to generate income (Du Toit, 2016, 2021; Tengeh *et al.*, 2015; Umalusi, 2014). Consumer studies include topics related to business and economics, such as entrepreneurship. Therefore, teachers were content about master teachers as collaborating with Commerce master teachers offered teachers different strategies to alleviate various challenges they usually encounter in delivering curriculum content effectively. They shared different fundraising techniques, which were viewed by Consumer Studies teachers as essential skills for accumulating funds for practical lessons.

Consumer Studies teachers revealed that they relied on master teachers to acquire classroom management skills as they possessed the skill of maintaining a controlled learning environment. Teachers viewed classroom management skills as vital in ensuring that teaching and learning occur effectively during practicals. This is in line with a study conducted in Canada by Sieberer-Nagler (2016), who asserts that the aim of classroom management is imperative for a classroom to function effectively. Therefore, novice teachers should be encouraged to use effective instructional practices to eliminate disruptive learner behaviour.

In a nutshell, teacher engagement in a collaborative effort with individuals who have similar goals and interests promotes the reciprocal development of staff members' specialised knowledge and skills, cultivating a nurturing atmosphere conducive to the provision of emotional support and assistance to one another (Owen, 2016; Patton & Parker, 2017). In this study, novice teachers demonstrate an appreciation for the commitment shown by master teachers as they have played a significant role in fostering their understanding and development in the teaching profession to ensure that they were proficient in conducting their duties. This is consistent with CoP theory which allows mentoring and support to fellow community members (Tembo *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, experienced teachers within the CoP guide and mentor newcomers or less-experienced individuals.

7.3.1.3 Mutual learning and support through peer observation among teachers

Most authors have emphasised the benefits of teachers observing each other's practices (Hendy *et al.*, 2021; Inel Ekici, 2018; Lai *et al.*, 2018). These scholars agree that peer observation provides a valuable opportunity to discuss the challenges and successes of teaching practice with trusted colleagues. Consumer Studies teachers indicated that they often encountered challenges that obstructed them from conducting effective teaching and learning in a practical component due to financial constraints and inadequate equipment. Collaborating with other teachers and observing their teaching practices offered Consumer Studies teachers an opportunity to learn different strategies they could use to overcome their challenges pertaining to practicals in teaching the subject. Observing other teachers' teaching strategies from practical subjects brought creative ideas for devising strategic ways to solve some of their financial limitations. This finding is in line with Alsaleh (2020), who found that when teachers observe each other, they learn new techniques and methods and discover new ways of approaching challenges or problems by discussing options and ideas with their colleagues following observation.

Breiman (2019) posits that peer observation is more effective when teachers have similar disciplinary knowledge and if it is between experienced teachers and inexperienced colleagues. Although Consumer Studies teachers could not observe each other, they learned a lot from observing teachers teaching topics related to their subject. As they observed other teachers, they shared ideas and practices that they applied to improve teaching and learning in Consumer Studies. Commerce teachers learned different strategies for teaching topics related to consumer studies, like costings, while life sciences teachers learned the precautionary measures to take heed of food wastage due to mishandling of perishables. The above finding is consistent with Pazhoman and Sarkhosh (2019), who assert that peer observation aims to support the sharing of practice and builds self-awareness about the impact of one's teaching practice on change. Consumer Studies teachers benefitted from the positive enforcement that comes with sharing their strengths, teaching skills and areas of good practice with other teachers who were also teaching practical subjects.

Another benefit of observing the practices of peers from other subjects was that from Agricultural Sciences teachers, participants learned practical ways of saving from buying food for practicals by growing their vegetable gardens. They also described how they learned to use illustrations and specifications related to nutrition to enhance learners' understanding of the nutrition topic. Through peer observation as a method of professional learning, the participants are seen to be tapping into the available resources at their disposal within their context to improve the teaching

and learning of Consumer Studies (Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2017). Even though their subjects differed in curriculum content, their main aim was to learn the methods of practical session management, which helped bring about positive working relationships and respect among them. Wenger (1998) describes mutual engagement and shared mutual knowledge as the procedures of how teachers do things in their learning communities while sharing knowledge on different levels. Through this engagement, the participants were able to collaborate with subject teachers with different expertise, and this played a vital role as teachers do not see it as a platform where they will be judged but rather as a form of professional development where they can reflect and improve their teaching irrespective of their subject differences.

7.3.2 Spaces utilised by teachers to learn outside the school

Consumer Studies teachers indicated that they also collaborated with peers knowledgeable about the subject's content outside their schools. Therefore, the study findings revealed that Consumer Studies teachers learned communally through various teacher learning engagements such as developmental workshops, moderation, subject committees, and conferences. Some of these learning activities were conducted face-to-face and virtually.

7.3.2.1 Teacher engagement in developmental workshops

All the participants identified workshops as the leading professional development meeting used by the DBE to update them with the current information on the subject as they continue to teach throughout the year. As an education official in the district, the participants indicated that the Subject Advisor ensured that these workshops were organised and rolled out to Consumer Studies teachers. Teachers' attendance in developmental workshops ensured that all of the districts were well-equipped with consumer studies subject content, teaching methods, and skills. Furthermore, teachers learned an interpretation of the policies that govern CAPS as the new curriculum. This is consistent with literature by Sithole (2020), who posits that teachers can learn by assisting one another in CAPS interpretation and discussing methodologies and instructional material to use through planning together in workshops. Thus, inviting external support, forming partnerships and networking with other schools is a critical factor in developing and promoting TLCs (Harris *et al.*, 2017; McIntyre & Hobson, 2016). In this study, TLCs external support tends to come in the form of district support (Subject Advisor) and other external agents (Consumer Studies teachers).

The participants indicated that they meet in orientation workshops organised by the Subject Advisor at the beginning of each year. These workshops aim to orientate teachers and guide them about what they are supposed to be teaching throughout the year in Consumer Studies. Although these workshops are not always informative, during lockdown teachers found them to be very enlightening since there were changes regarding restructuring of curriculum due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This notion is confirmed by Alsubaie (2016), who asserts that teachers need guidance in many different areas as they attempt to implement a constantly changing curriculum and other policies. This learning space also provided a forum for new teachers in the district to overcome their fears in teaching the subject as they became familiar with whom to consult and how to address challenges pertaining to curriculum delivery in Consumer Studies. Therefore, the Consumer Studies office-based teacher (Subject Advisor) needs to develop a mutually beneficial relationship with Consumer Studies school-based teachers for a conducive teaching and learning environment that could yield quality 21st-century education.

Subject Advisors analyse learners' performance in the NSC in Consumer Studies during the orientation workshops. The benefit of attending the orientation workshop was that teachers acquired knowledge about the most effective ways that other schools used to achieve excellent results in Consumer Studies. Teachers revealed that they learned how to prepare a proper lesson plan, determine which resources to utilise and formulate assessments for quarterly tasks and the final examination.

Collaboration is a key element for successful schools and districts (Bantwini & Moorosi, 2018; Caplan & Farling, 2017; Deschaine & Whale, 2017; Peel, 2021; Vangrieken *et al.*, 2015). In this study's context, the aim of the DBE Consumer Studies orientation workshops was to provide professional development based on teachers' proficiencies that would have been identified through the needs analysis undertaken by the Subject Advisor. Teachers sharing resources for effective teaching and learning in Consumer Studies is regarded as the shared repertoire. According to Wenger (1998), the concept of shared repertoire has been described as the common resources that members of a community draw on to negotiate or transfer meaning

Literature from various international scholars asserts that teacher learning might be essential in equipping teachers with a deep understanding of assessment (Brevik *et al.*, 2019; Darling-Hammond & Oakes, 2021; Mausethagen & Mølstad, 2015; Tveit, 2019). In this study, collaboration also occurred between the Subject Advisor and Consumer Studies teachers. The attendance of assessment workshops allowed teachers time to learn, compiling common assessment tasks of high standard with a range of cognitive levels as specified in the policy

assessment document for Consumer Studies for both formative and summative assessment activities. These workshops also enabled teachers to work together to implement what was shared by the Subject Advisor and put it into practice. This is consistent with Reiser (2023), who posits that teachers collaborate when they choose to proceed to an application task or receive additional explanation and discussion of concepts and skills first or when they choose amongst learning tasks at different levels of complexity. Consumer Studies teachers worked with their Subject Advisor in the assessment workshop to support each other's learning in enhancing learner assessment tasks. The primary purpose of the common assessment tasks was to ensure that there was uniformity in assessment activities throughout the district for Consumer Studies. Therefore, a major role of the Subject Advisor was to mentor teachers by showing them how assessment is done in Consumer Studies and sharing strategies that assist in making the learners pass the subject. As teaching evolves, teachers must constantly reflect on their assessment knowledge and skills. Although the teachers were sharing ideas on setting balanced assessment tasks with the Subject Advisor, they were concerned that there was no continuous mentorship by the Subject Advisor to provide the necessary individual support in schools. Given the fact that teachers congregating during workshops serves as a means of building a network for information and resource sharing among teachers, teachers continued to communicate and share their experiences with other teachers through social media.

The CoP allows mentoring and support, which involves mentoring and providing support to fellow community members (Tembo *et al.*, 2021). This confirms the study's finding as Consumer Studies teachers' participation in assessment workshops organised by the Subject Advisor built and maintained supportive TLCs since various assessment strategies were learned, a prerequisite for this type of collaboration.

Research shows that teachers lacking content knowledge are ill-equipped to explain and represent topics in ways that make sense to learners (Kennedy *et al.*, 2023; Molise, 2020; Olufalorin & Abolore, 2023; Stephenson, 2018; Tachie, 2020). Gravett and Kroon (2023) assert that when teachers lack content knowledge and are unsure of how their subject curriculum is structured, they tend to teach it as a scattering of isolated facts. Khoza and Biyela (2020) opined that teachers' content knowledge must be updated and conversant with the environment and level of learners to be taught. Consumer Studies constantly evolves and adapts to a world where the speed of change is increasing, making it relevant in this 21st century. Therefore, Consumer Studies teachers must keep abreast of the changes to equip themselves with contemporary content knowledge of the subject. The content knowledge the teacher has as a qualified teacher needs to be supplemented by attending content-based workshops. In this study, content workshops were held quarterly for

each grade to allow teachers to develop the usage of learner/teacher support materials. The participants revealed they were obliged to attend these content-based workshops for each grade, which took place at the beginning of the new term. These workshops were also used to distribute teaching resources from the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education to be used with CAPS-compliant textbooks for Consumer Studies teaching and learning. This is in line with Du Toit (2015), who suggests that the Department of Education provided relevant learning and teaching support material (LTSM) to all schools during the content workshops to ensure CAPS is implemented effectively.

Consumer Studies is viewed as a complex and dynamic subject requiring explicit, unambiguous and succinct pedagogical guidance to support teachers in effectively facilitating learning in the subject (Du Toit, 2016). The simultaneous teaching and learning of theoretical content and practical content and skills requires a particular kind of teaching expertise. Du Toit (2018) asserts a need to apply an integrated, holistic approach to teaching and learning in Consumer Studies education. However, the Consumer Studies CAPS curriculum lacks pedagogical guidelines to support teachers in the practical implementation. According to Hudson (2023), the benefits of content-based workshops aim to develop a positive approach to teachers as they improve their skills in dealing with challenging topics. In this study, some teachers had limited understanding of some topics, which led to their not teaching some content accordingly. Therefore, Consumer Studies teachers meeting in content-based workshops significantly impacted their teaching since the Subject Advisor provided a platform for teachers who were experts in the subject to address challenging topics and discuss strategies to teach challenging topics. Furthermore, Consumer Studies teachers also observed these expert teachers teaching topics such as nutrition, design elements for clothing and housing, housing and interior as well as costing in order to improve their teaching practices in the subject. Since these teachers were usually markers for NSC exams, they shared their experiences on problematic areas identified at marking centres and provided possible solutions. Hence, this finding is consistent with various scholars who posit that teachers learn best through participation and involvement where teachers are involved in discussions, sharing ideas, trying out new teaching strategies and interacting with other teachers (Cereseto, 2015; Khenan, 2019).

Teachers emphasised that the content-based workshops gave the teachers an opportunity to meet other teachers within their district, something that does not happen often. Teachers from various geographical areas did not feel isolated as they collaborated in this learning space. Therefore, teachers shared knowledge and experiences which assisted other teachers regarding how to

effectively teach Consumer Studies and work as a team to tackle specific topics. Darling-Hammond *et al.* (2017) assert that teachers benefit greatly from attending content-based workshop, which includes networking with other teachers, learning new skills, information and solving problems jointly. This implies that a context for collaboration and problem-solving skills among the teachers was created within this learning space. Such CoPs form when Consumer Studies teachers engage in collective learning in a shared domain during content-based workshops (Farnsworth *et al.*, 2016). Hence, within a Consumer Studies content-based workshop, knowledge is created, exchanged, organised, revised, and transmitted (Wenger, 1998).

The study's findings revealed that teachers met in PAT mediation workshops, which were conducted by Subject Advisor at the beginning of the year for Grades 10-12 Consumer Studies teachers. This was crucial as it ensured that Consumer Studies teachers were well prepared for administering practical tasks to their learners. Teachers who were engaged in PAT mediation workshop viewed practice as convenient since they could voice out their challenges which hindered the effective delivery of practical lessons. Their peers solved those challenges by sharing ideas on overcoming them. This is confirmed by Boeksens *et al.* (2020), who assert that the PAT mediation workshop enhances classroom and learners' performance more effectively than the theoretical content workshop. The PAT mediation workshop equipped Consumer Studies teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively conduct practical tasks in class.

Consumer Studies teachers highlighted numerous benefits of the PAT mediation workshops. The teachers learned about having a backup plan in case of an electricity power failure. Due to inadequate resources to conduct practicals resulting from many learners enrolled in the subject, teachers learned from their peers about grouping their learners to save time during practical lessons. However, teachers' views differed from those of their Subject Advisor since they learned from her that grouping learners had its drawbacks since learners were awarded identical marks, which resulted in Umalusi quality council rejecting SBA marks, especially in the exit grade, which is Grade 12. Furthermore, Consumer Studies teachers indicated that PAT mediation workshop provided a space for learning how to draw up a budget for their practical lessons to ensure adequate funds throughout the year for all practical tasks to be administered per grade as prescribed in CAPS. This is consistent with DBE (2011), which states that the budget must allow for ingredients for at least twelve practical lessons per year for Grades 10 and 11 learners, six practical lessons for Grade 12 learners, and two practical examinations per year per learner. Since Consumer Studies as a subject promotes entrepreneurship, teachers learned to set practical skills tests of an appropriate standard. They had to equip their learners with adequate practical skills such as packaging and labelling their finished products.

In Consumer Studies constant practice is necessary, as the subject deals with a practical component that learners need to master to produce and market different products. Since Consumer Studies is viewed as a subject that requires a particular kind of practice, theoretical work in class activities plays a crucial role in enabling learners' understanding of new knowledge, as it is integrated with practicals. Findings revealed restrictions on sharing practical resources with neighbouring schools when conducting practical lessons. Networking with other Consumer Studies teachers during the PAT mediation workshop created opportunities for teachers to share innovative strategies to curb the challenges of a shortage of resources for conducting practicals aggravated by the lockdown restrictions. Through the ability to collaborate virtually, the participants accessed abundant educational resources that advanced their teaching practice and learning outcomes since their scope was broadened through collaboration.

Consumer Studies teachers reported that they benefitted from other teachers in PAT mediation workshops, as they were able to network with them. They even learned to partner with local restaurants for practical assessment tasks since their schools were under-resourced. In a study conducted in Kenya, Karisa (2015) confirms that teacher networks and partnerships can grow from team efforts in solving school problems. A study conducted in the USA highlights that networking and partnerships were used to improve the quality of results in Mathematics and Science teaching, to implement solutions to common problems (Russel *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, in this study networking and forming partnerships with various stakeholders is significant to mitigate the challenges encountered at schools with regard to teaching and learning, as solutions are arrived at with ease when working collaboratively.

The PAT mediation workshop offers an opportunity for Consumer Studies teachers to extend the perspectives of their everyday learning and develop various skills and competencies. In this study, the PAT mediation workshop is an ideal means to engage Consumer Studies teachers, emphasise interaction, and promote active participation and motivation to gain a deeper understanding of practicals and their requirements. On the extreme social end are what Wenger (1998) calls modes of participation. These are the ways that Consumer Studies teachers interact relative to the endeavours of a PAT mediation workshop. Furthermore, it is a dynamic and practical approach which helps teachers to be equal, active and to learn from each other.

7.3.2.2 Collaborative engagement through moderation of SBA and PAT

According to the findings, teachers collaborated in the School-Based and Practical Assessment Task moderation meetings organised by the Consumer Studies Subject Advisor. Its purpose was to check the credibility of learners' results and teachers' consistency in marking. According to

Admiraal *et al.* (2021), teacher learning should be a collective effort and clusters serve as sites of teacher learning. This study revealed that Consumer Studies teachers learned as a community during the moderation of learners' work. The participants indicated that they often met in one place as a district to moderate SBA and PAT moderation. The participants indicated that cluster moderation was enlightening and ensured standardisation took place in all schools within the district. Teachers viewed moderation as an essential learning space since they were accountable for their learners' evaluation while also improving their assessment knowledge skills. This is confirmed by literature conducted in Australia, which posits that teachers participate in moderation to ensure that there is consistency in their judgements of learners' achievement (Brandenburg *et al.*, 2023; Stacey *et al.*, 2020). Since teachers must provide constructive feedback to learners, parents and the district every quarter, there is a necessity for ensuring quality assurance in assessment. Hence, teachers collaborated in this learning space three times a year to enhance their teaching and assessment practices. Consumer Studies teachers' collaboration in cluster moderation provided several benefits to ensure adherence assessment procedures were followed, marks were consistent, and tasks given were fair and set to the expected standards aligned with the CAPS curriculum. In this way, Consumer Studies teachers could learn formally how to set formal assessment tasks and mark and assess their learner's work. This finding is consistent with Didion *et al.* (2020), who view moderation as a teacher-professional learning strategy that allows teachers to learn together to ensure consistent judgements about learner achievement.

The participants indicated that SBA moderation was done at a cluster level to ensure consistency, reliability and accuracy in marking learners' assessment tasks. During the moderation process, participants shared their interpretation and understanding of solutions and marked allocation for different questions in the memoranda. This finding agrees with Trust *et al.* (2016), who assert that teachers share their expectations and understandings of standards during the moderation process by interpreting and applying agreed standards and assessment criteria when marking.

According to Adie (2017), moderating practical work involves teachers sharing evidence of learning and collaborating to establish a shared understanding of what the quality of evidence looks like. In this study, teachers mentioned that they also learned skills during moderation of practicals, which were crucial in deciding if learners demonstrated the necessary skills outlined in the Consumer Studies curriculum. Some teachers entrusted with the responsibility to conduct moderation of practical tasks in schools were content that they gained knowledge of different ways of the presentation style for the dishes during practical exam moderation. They also learned

different ways of improvising that teachers employed because there was a shortage of equipment essential in conducting practical work effectively.

In this way, moderation involves the sharing, negotiation and construction of meanings in order for the resources (such as assessment guidelines, moderation criteria, learners' work and any guidelines) used to come to decisions (Ajjawi *et al.*, 2021; Sadler, 2017; Wyatt-Smith & Adie, 2021). Teachers bring their knowledge to how they draw on these resources during moderation, and it is through the experience of sharing and negotiation that shared meanings and understandings can be created during moderation (Wenger, 1998).

7.3.2.3 Subject committees as a space for communal learning

Due to the limited number of schools offering the subject in the ward and the lack of Consumer Studies subject teachers within the schools, it was impossible to form subject committees at the school and cluster levels. Consequently, Consumer Studies subject committees were formed at the district level. Although Consumer Studies teachers met with other teachers on different platforms, meeting at the district subject committee meetings allowed them to meet with a broader community of Consumer Studies teachers to participate collaboratively in professional development. Literature by scholars confirms that during the subject committee meetings, there is a collaboration where teachers in different schools or who teach a common grade or discipline work together (Hargreaves, 2019; Ronfeldt *et al.*, 2015; Toropova *et al.*, 2021; Vangrieken *et al.*, 2015). Although teachers expressed concerns that they had to travel extensively to the venue and that their challenges took time to be addressed as these meetings were not held regularly, they were happy they met as Consumer Studies specialists.

During Consumer Studies district subject committee meetings, teachers met with their Subject Advisor and expert teachers, which helped them with challenges with content knowledge, pedagogy and setting assessment tasks according to the Assessment Guidelines and CAPS for Consumer Studies, especially the novice teachers. This is confirmed by scholars who found that the district fulfils its role to support teacher learning, as laid in policy that designated highly skilled and knowledgeable teachers and Subject Advisors are recognised to train new teachers in the profession (DBE, 2015; DHET & DBE, 2011) in the form of subject committee meetings.

Moreover, collaborative learning in subject committee meetings provides teachers valuable opportunities for professional growth and development in their teaching (Bantwini, 2018; Tam, 2015). Seasoned teachers with a substantial understanding of subject knowledge shared their

knowledge and experience with other teachers, particularly novice teachers. This finding corresponds with what DBE (2015) and OECD (2019) discovered in their study on learning opportunities in subject committees. Furthermore, teachers discussed resources to be utilised in teaching Consumer Studies. They shared challenges hindering effective curriculum delivery, and their peers offered solutions to the challenges specified. Therefore, the benefits of subject committee meetings allowed teachers to teach the curriculum with uniformity that enabled them to understand current issues in Consumer Studies.

According to Lave and Wenger (1991), teacher learning is the movement of teachers from peripheral (i.e. novice) to complete (i.e. expert) participation in the subject committees and their associated ways of knowing and thinking, which define the subject content. Hence, Consumer Studies expert teachers' collaboration with novice teachers through subject committees contributed constructively to their professional development. Teachers witnessed professional growth and a better understanding of the subject, worked cooperatively, and benefitted from sharing ideas, information, and experiences through their interaction with other teachers. They also assisted other teachers, enabling them to develop into independent critical thinkers.

7.3.2.4 Collaborative learning in Consumer Studies conferences

Various scholars across the globe posit that conferences offer new spaces in which teachers may enhance their professional development, fostering growth and learning with support from a diverse network of people and resources through technology using internet connections beyond the face-to-face networks (Carpenter & Krutka, 2015; Carpenter & Linton, 2016; Trust *et al.*, 2016). Several studies confirm that Consumer Studies is complex because of its broad and diverse theory topics ranging from food and nutrition to housing, clothing and entrepreneurship (DBE, 2011; Umalusi, 2014). This complicatedness of the subject requires teachers to be well acquainted of the latest developments that transpire in the subject. Consumer studies teachers indicated that they were given the opportunity to keep abreast of the latest trends and research in the subject by attending various face-to-face and virtual conferences. The participants acknowledged the support and knowledge they garnered while meeting with Consumer Studies specialists globally since attendance at conferences provided exposure to national and international approaches to teaching the subject. Those who got an opportunity to attend conferences felt that presentations and discussions on contemporary practices enhanced their teaching strategies of different topics. They added that attending the conferences allowed them to network with Consumer Studies experts globally and to enlighten each other on the subject matter

and content so they improve their teaching. Since teachers were often deprived of the opportunity to learn as Consumer Studies teachers during other meetings, such as departmental meetings and attending conferences where they engaged as specialists, increased their chances of learning.

According to Barahona (2018), conferences promote knowledge sharing and reflection on own beliefs and perspectives on teaching. Literature concurs with this study's findings since the recipes shared in conferences assisted Consumer Studies teachers in improving their practical assessment skills and knowledge as they set good quality practical tasks. Reflecting on their own practice and discussing with peers was the most valuable experience teachers gained from engaging in conferences.

As Consumer Studies is a practical subject, trends are constantly shifting in different components of the subjects. Since teaching the subject requires understanding what is happening worldwide, engaging in conferences helped teachers enhance their teaching skills and knowledge and ensured that they stay abreast professionally. Online Conferences permitted a learning space to reach a larger community of Consumer Studies specialists since there was videoconferencing professional learning. Wenger (1998), affirms that engagement is when there is active participation in exchanging information to negotiate meaning. Consumer Studies teachers attending the conferences participated actively and networked with other teachers nationally and internationally. The significance of teachers' networking was that it builds relationships with each other and impacts their willingness to adopt ideas at the conference jointly. The teachers' benefits of attending the conference were related to being members of the community of Consumer Studies teachers as they mostly spoke about what they observed in their practice. Education conferences are excellent professional development opportunities.

The previous section presented findings from learning spaces and various forms of Consumer Studies teachers' engagements in TLCs. The following section will present findings from the participants' kind of learning that occurred in their TLCs.

7.4 THE KIND OF LEARNING THAT OCCURRED IN THE CONSUMER STUDIES TLCs

The preceding section discussed learning spaces and various forms of Consumer Studies teachers' engagement in TLCs. This section discusses findings on the kind of learning that occurred in the Consumer Studies TLCs. The findings of this section are discussed under three main themes. What emerged from the findings is that the participants' engagement in learning communities equipped them with the knowledge and skills they constantly need to manage reforms in the

Consumer Studies curriculum. Findings also revealed that collaborating with colleagues in TLCs enhanced Consumer Studies teachers' pedagogical content knowledge. Consumer Studies teachers believed that learning as a community of teachers benefited them in managing and nurturing their personal growth.

7.4.1 Managing Curriculum Reforms in the Consumer Studies TLCs

Participants demonstrated how their engagements helped them to understand how to manage curriculum implementation when there were changes in the Consumer Studies curriculum. The participants indicated that their meetings as a community of Consumer Studies teachers equipped them with the knowledge to implement the latest curriculum changes that took place in the subject during the lockdown due to COVID-19. Teachers valued the knowledge that they garnered from the District Consumer Studies Subject Advisor who combined effort with other expert teachers during curriculum reforms to put various intervention strategies into action to support teachers comprehend the reform process. This finding is in line with a study by König *et al.* (2020) carried out in Germany which revealed how Consumer Studies teachers adapted to the situations they faced during the COVID-19 lockdown in their teaching and learning. The orientation workshops helped teachers with strategies to manage changes in assessment guidelines, annual teaching plans (ATPs) and practical lessons. Teachers learned various ways such as using a virtual platform to continue teaching and learning during the pandemic.

The subject committee meetings that were conducted virtually created opportunities for Consumer Studies teachers to tap into different teaching strategies to disseminate information to learners during lockdown. Although it was challenging to teach practical lessons during lockdown, teachers shared innovative teaching practices in conducting practical lessons virtually. Learners were also involved in learning virtually by recording videos at home whilst preparing dishes. Teachers felt that this improved learner performance, which positively affects the school's performance. This finding is in agreement with a study conducted in Australia which revealed that teachers had to reinvent lesson plans to allow for different forms of lesson delivery, which included WhatsApp, Google Classroom, etc (Fray *et al.*, 2023). In this study's context, Consumer Studies teachers' collaboration in their learning communities created a situation where teachers had to expand their knowledge of technology in order to teach learners remotely, such as using videos for practicals. Therefore, teachers felt that technology was a new skill that they needed to learn, or one that they had to improve on.

In South Africa, although major curriculum reform processes in Consumer Studies took place during the implementation of the Revised national curriculum statement (RNCS), the subject is plagued by continuous changes because of its focus on being practical in nature. The participants were of the view that their involvement in learning communities programmes facilitated them in understanding the reform processes and its implementation. They shared how they manage to understand the challenging changes in the Consumer Studies curriculum. The Consumer Studies teachers' ability to acquaint themselves with curriculum changes is consistent with the strengths of teacher collaborative cultures which is mentioned by various scholars that TLCs afford an opportunity for teachers to work in collaborative cultures (Baloch & Brody, 2017; Bantwini, 2019; Voogt *et al.*, 2015).

These collaborative cultures are seen to be essential in reform programmes since the learning engagements result in motivation for learning new skills among teachers, developing critical, creative thinking and problem-solving abilities. According to a study conducted in Netherlands by Bouckaert and Kools (2018), during curriculum reforms, the TLCs afford teachers an opportunity to understand the pedagogic requirements. These enabled teachers to mediate the delivery process of a new curriculum. In this regard, it has been noted that Consumer Studies TLCs creates spaces where there is hands-on teaching, mentoring, networking and sharing of new ideas that facilitated implementation of developments in the subject (Govender & Ojani, 2021). The process of collective sharing of ideas related to the teaching of Consumer Studies is confirmed by the majority of researchers who agree that during curriculum reforms, sharing of ideas produce results in terms of teacher practice and learners outcome (Lucas & Spencer, 2017; OECD, 2019; Schleicher, 2016; Stephenson, 2018).

Participants mentioned that during departmental meetings they met with teachers from other subjects. As Consumer Studies is multidisciplinary in nature, meeting other teachers within the departmental meetings equipped them with the knowledge that they used to enhance their knowledge of different topics such as the consumer, food and nutrition, clothing, housing and furnishings, and entrepreneurship. These topics are considered in terms of meeting the needs of the learners, their families, and society since they include the learners' skills and capacity to perform various tasks in everyday life. This is confirmed by Erjavšek (2021) in Slovenia who posits that Consumer Studies is connected with the contents of varying topics such as healthy lifestyles/nutrition, home/family, economics/consumerism, and textiles/design as they pertain to the need of individuals, families, and societies.

Scholars have also shown that curriculum reforms in schools generally require the development and operation of group of teachers working together for understanding of such process and mutual support (Desimone & Garet, 2015; Gokmenoglu & Clark, 2015; Voogt *et al.*, 2018). In this study, Consumer Studies teachers mentioned the type of support they received in implementing curriculum reforms during their TLCs.

The next section discusses the finding on how TLCs develops teachers in sustainability education.

7.4.2 Enhancement of sustainability issues in Consumer Studies Education

Haapala *et al.* (2014) maintain that Consumer Studies education has always dealt with sustainable living and responsible use of resources. Turkki (2015) views Consumer Studies as a field that is concerned with the development and well-being of individuals, families and communities. These views are consistent with the findings of the study where teachers shared that they learned about the significance of sustainability through their participation in the content workshops and PAT mediation workshop. Their engagement supported them in learning about ways to reduce harm to the environment while using the products and services during Consumer Studies lessons, and also ensured that resources were used effectively.

According to Imoto (2015), integrating sustainable development principles into the curriculum can educate and strengthen families as the primary source of support and nurturing, leading to sustainable lifestyles. Participation in learning communities equipped teachers with sufficient knowledge and skills to teach sustainability issues related to each topic such as solar energy, wind energy and hydropower, which are done under housing and interior topic. Consumer Studies teachers shared good practices that were in turn used to alleviate challenges encountered during practicals such as recycling, which allowed teachers to exchange their resources for money at the local recycling site. This practice promoted interdependence since money generated from recycling was to fund needs for practical lessons.

The majority of the scholars agree that it is essential to address sustainable topics in Consumer Studies education (Achebe & Akande, 2021; Autio *et al.*, 2021; Erjavsek *et al.*, 2021; Gisslevik *et al.*, 2017; Haapala *et al.*, 2014; Smith, 2019; Līce & Reihmane, 2015; Øvrebø, 2015). Smith (2021) holds a view that the concept of Consumer Studies literacy integrates various literacies such as environmental literacy, nutrition and health, and financial literacies. The benefits of teachers congregating in learning communities sharing ideas and expertise that advance understanding of knowledge and integration of sustainability in teaching and learning of

Consumer Studies has been emphasised by the participants. In this study, teachers explained how content workshops extended their knowledge of sustainability in Consumer Studies topics such as buying and consuming locally produced products and brands. Such engagements of teachers during content workshops and PAT mediation workshops created opportunities for teachers to learn various ways of financial resources management and budgeting.

7.4.3 Development of personal entrepreneurial skills

Consumer Studies integrates theoretical learning with practical application in real-world situations, with the aim of generating income, creating employment opportunities, and preparing learners for self-sufficiency (Chua, 2022; Du Toit, 2021, 2023; Du Toit & Kempen, 2020; Ngwenya & Shange, 2019; Umalusi, 2014). The participants revealed that their collaboration in the PAT moderation and PAT mediation workshops allowed them to share various ideas of accumulating funds to aid with the practical necessities, which developed entrepreneurial skills among them and their learners. As a practical subject, Consumer Studies requires teachers to teach in a way that enables learners to plan and create their own entrepreneurial venture or produce homemade products on a small scale. Scholars confirm that the practical component of Consumer Studies offers learners opportunities for small-scale production, entrepreneurship, and marketing of quality products (DBE, 2011; Du Toit, 2021, 2023; Lemchi *et al.*, 2016; Ngwenya & Shange, 2019; Umalusi, 2014). In this study, Consumer Studies teachers learned ways of fundraising for their practical lessons through the development of entrepreneurial skills learned from their peers. This includes the production and sale of novelty cakes, vegetables, food from different cuisines, finger food and the compilation of a recipe book. This information also equipped teachers with personal entrepreneurial knowledge and skills which they used in teaching the subject effectively. Therefore, Consumer Studies teachers learning in their engagements helped with the development of personal entrepreneurial skills that they believed enhanced learners' motivation and engagement since it enables learners to develop their critical thinking on entrepreneurship and improve their entrepreneurial mindset.

Educational experience that teachers accumulated about entrepreneurship by engaging in TLCs can be regarded as a form of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). During Consumer Studies teachers' collaborative engagements where they develop personal entrepreneurial skills and knowledge means they will also be able to transfer their learning to learners. Consumer Studies teachers' collaboration in TLCs developed their entrepreneurial knowledge and skills personally and professionally as it promoted their creativity and capacity for innovation. It also allowed them to acquire new skills which include problem-solving,

management skills, financial literacy, knowing how to start a business, and working better in teams so that they can have more active participation in the community (Yin *et al.* 2021, p.14). For Consumer Studies teachers, learning is rooted in contributing to and engaging in the practice of their community through active participation in certain kinds of activities (Wenger, 1998).

7.4.4 TLCs enhance Consumer Studies teachers' pedagogical content knowledge

Teachers acknowledged the benefits of TLCs in enhancing Consumer Studies teachers' pedagogical content knowledge in both theoretical and practical components. In Consumer Studies, there are five practical options the school has to choose from which include: food, clothing, soft furnishing, knitting and crocheting, and patchwork quilting by hand. However, in this study, all the participants opted for food production in their schools.

According to Spangenberg (2021), in order for good teaching and learning to occur, teachers must have sound subject-matter knowledge. What Spangenberg (2021) said is confirmed in the literature by various scholars in South Africa that stresses the importance of teachers engaging in different learning communities to understand the official Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (Makumane & Khoza, 2020; Mpungose 2021; Msimango, 2023; Stewart *et al.*, 2015). These scholars highlighted that teachers need to know their subject matter in order to ensure that there is high-quality teaching and that the intended curriculum is achieved. In this study's context the participants got the opportunity to enhance their subject-matter knowledge in various learning communities outside their schools which included content workshops, PAT mediation workshops, subject committees, and conferences. Therefore, Consumer Studies teachers felt that collaboration in their TLCs resulted in the thorough acquisition of subject-matter knowledge, which is linked to better performance in learners' examination results in Consumer Studies.

What emerged from the findings is that Consumer Studies teachers' participation in learning communities was mainly focused on the interpretation and implementation of CAPS in content workshops. According to Bjerke and Solomon (2020) for successful subject-matter knowledge there, should be development of novice teachers and mentoring from experienced peers. Therefore, it is important for experienced teachers to support the novice teachers who encounter challenges in teaching due to limited subject-matter knowledge since the professional teacher learning development programmes foster norms of sharing and practicing the art of collaboration (van Ginkel *et al.*, 2016; Henning *et al.*, 2017). This view confirms this study finding since Consumer Studies novice teachers indicated that they learned during both content workshops and

subject committees from the experienced teachers on how to address the subject-matter knowledge they felt was difficult for them and that they did not tap into during their learning at the university. The implication of this is that all the Consumer Studies teachers need to strengthen their subject-matter knowledge and teaching skill. Hence, it is essential for Consumer Studies teachers to have sound knowledge of the concepts that they teach and knowledge of different ways of representing these concepts.

According to Ngwenya and Shange (2019), Consumer Studies was phased in the NCS to replace Home Economics as a subject in the FET Phase in South African secondary schools in 2006. Its aim was designed to better align the Consumer Studies curriculum with the international curriculum as well as adapt to the evolving demands of individuals in contemporary times (Ngwenya & Shange, 2019). The subject switched from the needs and wants of the family (in Home Economics) to the needs and wants of the consumer in the 21st-century (in Consumer Studies) (Umalusi, 2014). Based in the context of this study, Consumer Studies teachers' collaboration in the PAT mediation workshop and conferences ensured that they were kept abreast of the latest developments in the subject in order to produce quality results in learners' performance and prepare them for the world of work. This makes it essential for teachers to compete globally in learning, where change is constant and learning never stops to meet demands with the necessary skills for the profession for learners' better attainment of results and future careers (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2015). It is for this reason that scholars have emphasised that the world is ever-changing; therefore, it is crucial for teachers to be equipped with the 21st -century skills that will help them impart skills to their learners in order for them to thrive outside the school environment (Deagon, 2021; Dillon, 2017; Du Toit, 2021; Scott, 2015; Yurt, 2023). Hence, teachers must learn new ways of supporting their learners with the subject-matter knowledge in order to acquire the necessary skills that will help them succeed in the 21st-century. The major benefit for teachers' collaboration in the learning communities is the enrichment of the subject-matter knowledge (Pan, & Chen, 2023; Yang *et al.*, 2020). In this study, Consumer Studies teachers belonged to the CoP based on mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire which influenced their learning on the subject-matter knowledge (Wenger, 1998). Therefore, the teachers were mutually engaged around the work of teaching and strived to promote learners' success in Consumer Studies.

Extant literature globally has shown that TLCs provide teachers with common attitudes and goals with a forum to work collaboratively to upgrade their own instructional strategies and make use of best practices to improve the academic performance of their learners (Battersby & Verdi, 2015; Brown *et al.*, 2023; Carpenter *et al.*, 2022; Charner-Laird *et al.*, 2017; Kellner & Attorps, 2024;

Kools *et al.*, 2020; Marsh *et al.*, 2021; Matherson & Windle, 2017; Othman *et al.*, 2020; Popp & Goldman, 2016). This notion supports the study's finding, as the participants indicated that their teacher learning engagements permitted them to learn by observing and listening to their peers while exchanging good practices. This helped them improve their instructional strategies that they felt lead to learners' better performance in Consumer Studies.

What emerged from the data was that the participants felt that they learned a lot about teaching by watching and providing feedback on their peers' lessons. Consumer Studies teachers discussed how watching their colleagues' lessons exposed them to some effective teaching strategies that they integrated into their teaching repertoire. One of the participants mentioned how the feedback sessions enabled him to see various teaching strategies and come into contact with a variety of appropriate strategies for practical lessons. Other teachers identified specific instructional techniques that they learned from watching their peers such as highlighting the importance of involving learners in demonstrations by asking them to practise and record their dishes at home and send them to their teachers. These findings are in accordance with other studies whose findings reported that teachers who observe the lessons delivered by their peers felt that reflecting on these lessons had a positive effect on their teaching ability (Carpenter *et al.*, 2022; Matherson & Windle, 2017; Thacker, 2023). Like in the present study, Matherson and Windle (2017) reported that observing lessons of their peers can help teachers to gain new ideas, share their teaching experience and teaching strategies.

According to Du Toit (2021), teaching Consumer Studies in secondary schools can be challenging due to the requirement that broad knowledge content be taught concurrently with multifaceted practical skills, with an overarching aim to support small-scale production and entrepreneurship. Consumer Studies teachers benefited from teacher engagements in content and PAT mediation workshops since they were able to brainstorm and formulate the appropriate teaching strategies to address the topics that were challenging. It emerged from the findings that the content workshops provided an opportunity for Consumer Studies teachers to share the best instructional strategies, such as engaging in educational excursions. Teachers believed that this strategy enhanced learners' performance because it allowed integration of theory and practice to real-world environment.

Since Consumer Studies is a very dynamic subject, new content compels teachers to use new methods to deliver the theoretical content and conduct practicals. Many topics in Consumer Studies link directly to real-life situations, making learning life relevant to learners while

preparing them for the real world (Du Toit, 2021, 2023; Umalusi, 2014). As a result, the subject requires teachers to be prepared with a specific set of skills and attributes to support effective facilitation of new content (Alharbi, 2021; Du Toit, 2016; Dupuis, 2020; Gisslevik *et al.*, 2018). According to Du Toit (2023), Consumer Studies teachers need to consider different instructional strategies to equip learners with contemporary skills required in 21st century teaching and learning. Moreover, Consumer Studies teachers' collaboration during the PAT mediation workshop permitted them to share good teaching strategies in conducting practical lessons. Teachers talked of practices such as doing experiments with the learners and integrating technology in learning to arouse learners' interests and help them develop critical thinking skills. Consumer Studies teachers' participation in TLCs ensured that they improved the instructional strategies for delivering content, making it meaningful to learners, and enhanced their independence in learning.

The effectiveness of TLCs relies on the collaborative efforts of colleagues to work together and make informed decisions regarding instructional strategies (Gee & Whaley, 2016; Gore & Rosser, 2022; Greenleaf *et al.*, 2023; Feldman, 2020; Huijboom *et al.*, 2020; Marsh *et al.*, 2021; Nguyen & Ng, 2020). Engaging as a community of Consumer Studies teachers benefited teachers to tap into expertise brought by more experienced teachers. It is within the concept of community of practice that Consumer Studies teachers engage in problem solving, seeking the experiences of others, developing coordination and synergy, discussing developments, visiting other members, mapping knowledge, and identifying gaps in instructional strategies (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

7.4.5 Managing and nurturing personal growth

Findings of the study revealed that teacher collaboration in various TLC activities assisted teachers in managing and nurturing their personal growth. What emerged from the study findings is that their engagement in TLCs encouraged capacity building and promoted self-confidence which led to job satisfaction.

Literature on learning communities of teachers have generally associated the notion of professional development programmes of teachers with teacher capacity building which eventually leads to school improvement (Davis-Singaravelu, 2022; Day *et al.*, 2016; Hargreaves, 2021; Harris *et al.*, 2017; Jensen *et al.*, 2021; Ratts *et al.*, 2015; Sharratt & Planche, 2018). What emerged from the findings is that collaborative learning afforded teachers an opportunity for

continuous professional growth by reflecting on what they learned during their engagements. Consistent with the study findings, in Chen's study (2022), teacher learning as a community enabled the sharing of their practices with the aim of securing continuous improvement, collective responsibility for learners' learning and also achieving reflective professional enquiry.

Studies showed that developing teachers as a community is a way to build their capacity to improve and change (Harris *et al.*, 2017; Murphy & Masterson, 2022; Owen, 2016). In this study, participating in learning communities allowed Consumer Studies teachers to gain capacities individually and collectively to perform activities, solve their challenges and learn new teaching strategies. Enhancing the capacity of TLCs improves teaching and learning, supporting collegial relations, encouraging teachers' ideas, individual and collective continuing professional development, and promoting a culture of trust (Admiraal *et al.*, 2021; Campbell, 2020; Lee & Louis, 2019; Drago-Severson & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2018; Scoggins & Sharp, 2017; Vangrieken *et al.*, 2017). Additionally, other studies on TLCs showed improved learner learning outcomes (Drew *et al.*, 2016; Ratts, 2015; Fischer *et al.*, 2018; Lewis & Perry, 2017; Owen, 2016; Zhang *et al.*, 2021). This finding also emerged from what the participants reported in this study where they felt what they learned as a community of teachers resulted in enhanced learners' performance in Consumer Studies.

Developing teacher capacity occurs through the interaction between teachers' knowledge and skills, interpersonal interactions, and professional community where collective skills are improved (Kools & Stoll, 2016). Existing studies provided evidence about teachers in TLCs and their endeavours to solve teaching issues and share expertise and knowledge that foster their growth and learning (Juuti *et al.*, 2021; Wang & Wong, 2019; Windschitl *et al.*, 2019).

The participants revealed that participating in TLC activities fosters the ability to accept feedback and work towards improvement. This was effective because the teachers who met shared a common mission and vision. During the workshops, teachers who were technology savvy helped other teachers by downloading teaching and learning materials that were accessible online. Novice teachers found seasoned teachers to be reliable sources of information. The participants were also of the view that their collaboration allowed sharing of responsibility, which nurtures leadership skills among the teachers. Lead and master teachers' leadership skills were bolstered since they were entrusted with the responsibility of developing other teachers, especially novice teachers. In this way, the participants' engagements in TLCs ensured that they maintained mutual respect and trust while exchanging information with their peers. This finding is confirmed by the majority of scholars who share a similar sentiment that effective collaborative working in TLCs

would give teachers a sense of togetherness that help them to build trust with colleagues (Akinyemi & Nkonki, 2020; Kolleck *et al.*, 2021; Owen, 2016). Akinyemi and Nkonki (2020) emphasise that communal learning that occurs on the basis of trusting relationships enhance support and trust that are improved through effective collaboration among its members.

Capacitating teachers to affect the development of a community can improve its relevance and value as it will thus reflect the up-to-date collective knowledge in Consumer Studies TLCs. This signifies that participating as a community of Consumer Studies teachers inspired them to further their studies in the subject, develop their knowledge and skills as specialists which, they believed would assist with the improvement in teaching and learning of Consumer Studies. This evidence reinforces the importance of building professional capacity as described by Fraser *et al.* (2017), who characterise a CoP as relating to a topic of shared interest in which members help one another to develop their understanding of effective practice.

The findings of this study have shown that Consumer Studies teachers' meetings in TLCs created spaces to explore new developments in the subject and this enhanced self-confidence and job satisfaction since they were able to teach new topics with confidence. This is confirmed by Kasalak and Dagyar (2020) who posit that during teachers' professional developmental meetings, teachers experience a high level of job satisfaction; as a result, self-confidence is improved and learner learning outcomes increases.

According to literature from various scholars across the globe, during teachers' learning engagements, seasoned and novice teachers are interested in developing and improving pedagogical skills which leads to job satisfaction and self-confidence (OECD, 2016; Toropova *et al.*, 2021; Werang & Agung, 2017). This concept supports the study's finding as the participants revealed that their attendance in developmental workshops equipped them with the pedagogical skills which they learned from the experienced teachers, who were constantly sharing information. Other teachers identified specific content topics that were enhanced from after engaging with peers, such as costing, nutrition, clothing to include fibres and fabrics. Teachers highlighting the importance of attending content workshops where they exchanged various strategies on teaching the topics they found challenging was beneficial. Therefore, Consumer Studies teachers' collaboration in TLCs and sharing information with colleagues who are well-versed in the subject enabled teachers to deliver their lessons with confidence.

Consumer Studies is a constantly changing subject that aims to equip learners with skills development in various practical production options with the purpose of helping learners to

produce quality, marketable products for consumers and supporting learners' entrepreneurial development (Du Toit, 2021; Ngwenya & Shange, 2019; Urek, 2018). What emerged from the findings is that PAT mediation workshop allowed teachers to stay up-to-date with the latest developments in the subject. As a result, they were confident in demonstrating and sharing new recipes with learners during practical lessons such as recent trends in baking, cooking and garnishing. This is supported by OECD (2020) which suggest that teachers' professional development programmes strongly emphasise the need for teachers to employ the most up-to-date research on learning, pedagogies, and practices. Hence, the PAT mediation workshop was where Consumer Studies teachers were reminded that they were primary implementers of the curriculum and the effective delivery of teaching and learning depends on the quality of them which is paramount for them to stay abreast of the latest trends in the practical component.

Extent literature from Brazil, Canada, England and Finland, Kenya have shown that teachers who have a high level of self-confidence tend to have a more significant commitment to teaching which leads to higher job satisfaction (Gouedard *et al.*, 2023; Murphy, 2020; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2020; Toropova *et al.*, 2021; Zakariya & Wardat, 2023; Zee & Koomen, 2020). In this study, Consumer Studies teachers reflected on how the skills and knowledge gained as a result of their participation in learning communities made a difference in their ability to achieve important goals such as improved learners' performance (Wenger, 1998). The Consumer Studies teachers' engagement in collaborative activities boosted teachers' morale as they believed in instructional strategies that they applied in their lessons. Self-assurance, which is considered both a product and process of learning, is in line with Wenger's other four components (meaning, practice, identity and community). Self-confidence is conceptualised as an additional component of learning and as such as an individual teacher's movement from the periphery of various overlapping Consumer Studies TLCs towards a more central participation, identification and belonging within these communities. Rather self-confidence is part of an individual teacher's ways of learning through experiencing, doing, being, and belonging which results to job satisfaction and improved job performance. As such it is deeply interconnected with learning as changing meaning, practice, identity and community (Wenger, 1998).

7.4.6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter has presented a second level analysis which involves the integration of literature and theory in the significant findings that emerged from the data presentation in Chapter Five and Six. This was done to ensure a deeper understanding of the critical findings of the study. With that said, the meanings that lie behind the themes were used to analyse and discuss the study findings.

This chapter discussed learning platforms that allowed teacher engagement in TLCs. It also went further to elaborate the learning spaces and various forms of Consumer Studies teachers' engagement in TLCs. Lastly, the kind of learning that occurred in TLCs was discussed. The next chapter will present the concluding chapter of the study.

CHAPTER EIGHT

SUMMARY OF THE KEY FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

8.1. INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter discussed the study findings within the context of the literature and theoretical framework that underpinned the study. This chapter concludes the study by drawing on the previous chapters to establish the extent to which the findings have addressed the critical research questions the study sought to answer. In doing so, the chapter also assesses the extent to which the findings of the study confirm, build on or challenge the existing body of knowledge around how Consumer Studies teachers learn in TLCs from the point of view of both literature and theory. The chapter starts by providing a summary of the study, the synthesis of the study findings which is in line with the critical research questions and goes on to discuss the recommendations of the study in relation to the contributions it makes to existing theory and research while making suggestions for how future research could build on this study. The “WHY” question is addressed in this chapter in an attempt to develop a theory about teacher learning in Consumer Studies. This question shifts the level of abstraction from descriptive to analytical level that provides explanation on why Consumer Studies teachers learn the way they do in TLCs. Other sections of the concluding chapter include the study’s limitations and lastly concluding remarks.

8.2 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

This thesis builds on and contributes to the understanding of current discourse on how teachers learn collaboratively in TLCs with a focus on selected secondary school Consumer Studies teachers located in one education district in KwaZulu-Natal.

In **Chapter One**, I gave a detailed description of the background in order to provide the foundation for understanding the objectives of this study. Rationale was discussed to specify the motive to pursue research on this study. Problem statement in relation to the study under investigation was highlighted. Thereafter, purpose and focus of the study were presented. The study indicated three primary objectives which were to explore how Consumer Studies teachers learned through TLCs in one district in KwaZulu-Natal, to explore the kind of learning that occurred in TLCs in one district in KwaZulu-Natal and to determine why Consumer Studies teachers learn the way they do in TLCs. This was followed by the critical research questions that

guided the study. Moreover, this chapter included the significance of the study, literature review and theory that framed the study. Research generation methods and data analysis methods which is followed by trustworthiness and ethical considerations were presented. Finally, the study limitations were discussed.

Chapter Two is about the review of literature comprising scholarly work at national and international levels. The review span across the divergent understandings of learning platforms and spaces used by teachers in TLCs. Drawing upon the literature, I also discussed the nature of Consumer Studies as a subject, teacher learning as professional development and forms of TLCs. The reviewed literature from general and Consumer Studies education stresses the importance for TLCs.

In **Chapter Three**, I presented and discussed the theory that constitute a theoretical framework; this theory is CoP posited by Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998). A CoP is formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavour. Therefore, this theory assisted me analyse why and how Consumer Studies teachers can develop themselves through social interaction in TLCs.

Chapter Four presented a detailed discussion of the research process that included the interpretive paradigm, qualitative research approach, the case study research design, study population and sampling process, data generation and data analysis. That said, the study population consisted of ten participants through the use of convenience sampling. Data was generated through the use of telephonic semi-structured interviews, WhatsApp-based Focus group interviews and reflective journals. Thematic analysis was used to analyse data (Braun *et al.*, 2019). The thematic analysis of the data resulted to the presentation of the key findings that emerged from the data presentation process.

Issues of trustworthiness were discussed to ensure accuracy of the findings. Ethical issues were considered since the study dealt with the human beings. Lastly, the limitations which highlighted the problems that existed during the research study which were beyond control were discussed.

In **Chapters Five and Six**, I presented findings of the study to respond to the key research questions. Chapter Five presented data on learning platforms and spaces that facilitated Consumer Studies teachers' engagements in TLCs whereas Chapter Six presented data on the kind of learning that occurred in Consumer Studies TLCs.

Chapter Seven presented a discussion of the findings from Chapters Five and Six. These findings were guided by the research questions and the reviewed literature discussed in Chapter Two which supported the analysis and discussion. The final chapter, Chapter Eight, presents the conclusions by summarising the study and theorising Consumer Studies teacher learning in TLCs. The following section provides a synthesis of the study findings.

8.3 SYNTHESIS OF THE STUDY FINDINGS

This section provides a summary of the key findings of the study to establish how the research questions have been addressed. The synthesis process is organised according to the three main research questions which are restated in the three sub-sections for synthesising the findings.

8.3.1 How do Consumer Studies teachers learn through TLCs in one district in KwaZulu-Natal?

What emerged from the findings is that Consumer Studies teachers were learning through various platforms while using different spaces and forms to engage in Teachers Learning Communities.

8.3.1.1 Platforms Consumer Studies teachers used to learn in TLCs

The findings revealed how teacher engagement in learning communities through face-to-face and virtual learning platforms enabled the Consumer Studies teachers to congregate for teacher capacity building.

It is evident that Consumer Studies teachers were engaged through face-to-face learning activities such as developmental workshops, subject committees, moderations and conferences. These learning activities were in a form of group discussions where teachers shared their expertise, resources, challenges and resolved problems which hindered effective curriculum delivery. The learning activities were co-ordinated by the Consumer Studies Subject Advisor. Therefore, Consumer Studies teachers had to meet at the district level for their professional development since there were few schools who offered the subject within their wards. While previous studies confirm that engagements at cluster level offer a platform and the needed support for teachers, Consumer Studies teachers could not find the necessary support from their peers from neighbouring schools due to the shortage of schools offering Consumer Studies in their wards. Although Consumer Studies is viewed as a subject which develops constantly, teachers felt that there was a gap in their professional growth since they were unable to engage with other teachers

at the cluster level. This hindered the opportunity for teachers to learn as clusters. As a result, teachers relied on subject committee meetings which were not held regularly like cluster meetings. This means that teachers would have mostly preferred meeting within their wards as their schools were in close proximity which would have resulted in solutions to their challenges impacting curriculum delivery addressed sooner. Even though face-to-face teachers' engagements were very limited during the COVID-19 era, teacher learning activities such as moderations were compulsory to be conducted face-to-face as it dealt with checking and confirming teachers' evaluation of learners' assessments.

The findings revealed that Consumer Studies teachers used virtual platforms to engage in learning activities during workshops and departmental meetings due to lockdown restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Conducting workshops virtually allowed teachers to use social media to share ideas and materials at anytime. Consumer Studies teachers were able to interact with other teachers from various geographical regions through WhatsApp and this enhanced communal learning. Because teachers communicated mostly through this mode, created spaces for continuous interaction and support anytime. Furthermore, social media platforms enabled Consumer Studies teachers to create social networks with other teachers and sharing of resources that they needed to improve performance in the subject. However, infrastructural deficiencies such as erratic electricity, challenges with network signal, no access to stable Wi-Fi, shortage of technological resources and lack of digital knowledge hindered teachers from utilising other virtual platforms such as Microsoft Teams. As a result, their engagements were limited to the utilisation of the WhatsApp platform since they were familiar with its features.

8.3.1.2 Learning spaces and forms used by Consumer Studies teachers to engage in TLCs

The study findings indicated that Consumer Studies teachers engaged in learning activities that took place within and outside their schools.

8.3.1.2.1 Learning spaces that created platforms for teachers to learn within the school

Consumer Studies teachers engaged in professional learning activities within their schools during departmental meetings and involvement in peer observation and coaching. Consumer Studies teachers also got the opportunity to be developed by master teachers who had vast experience in teaching. Although Consumer Studies teachers engaged with their peers within the school, they felt that their colleagues could not share developments in their subject as they were specialists from the Science and Commerce departments.

Brodie (2021) asserts that in TLCs, teachers discuss different teaching strategies, learn from each other by sharing and become better teachers. Based on the findings, Consumer Studies teachers learned from peer observation the excellent teaching practices of subjects with a practical component to improve their practice. Observing teachers with a practical component served as a significant benefit to Consumer Studies teachers as they could note how the other subjects conducted practicals and shared the best ways of accumulating funds to assist with the practical necessities. In this regard, Consumer Studies teachers felt they could resolve their practical challenges but it also caused uncertainty as their subjects did not have the exact practical requirements. This means the teachers were of the view that what works for the other practical subject may not work for Consumer Studies.

In addition, Consumer Studies teachers learned innovative ways such as teaching by using technology to include creating a video for practical demonstration which was then shared with learners in a WhatsApp platform. This facilitation method was mostly needed during COVID-19 lockdown where there was a shift from traditional method of learning to remote teaching and learning. Consumer Studies teachers explored various teaching strategies and were able to witness that teaching and learning can take place in many forms as they held each other accountable for providing quality instruction. Therefore, the element of sharing practical teaching strategies reflected a good relationship among the teachers within the school.

8.3.1.2.2 Learning spaces that created platforms for teachers to learn outside the school

Since Consumer Studies teachers could not form clusters within their schools they were reliant on the learning activities organised by the Subject Advisor at the level of the district. These learning activities outside the schools were not limited to one area of learning as they include developmental workshops, moderations, subject committees and conferences. Each learning space was designed for the specific purpose of learning that was needed by Consumer Studies teachers. The learning activities were attended face-to-face or either in a virtual form depending on the nature of the learning activity and the purpose it was meant to serve. The participants believed that these learning spaces were beneficial for positively shaping their learning in Consumer Studies.

Since Consumer Studies is regarded as the dynamic subject with contemporary changes, learning in subject committees ensured that seasoned teachers best teach the curriculum content that had

challenging topics and shared their experiences with the novice teachers. In doing so, teachers felt that their collaboration in these professional learning activities focused on learning the curriculum content and sharing teaching strategies for improvement of learners' performance results. The culture of sharing and support that characterises learning community engagements becomes a catalyst for Consumer Studies teachers to learn new content and skills so that they are able to make meaningful contribution towards the implementation of changes in the subject. This was evident as teachers shared resources and hindrances in curriculum delivery and helped others with solutions. By doing so, ensured that teachers maintained the same standard in teaching and be able to learn and comprehend the current trends in Consumer Studies. This would have been impossible within the school since teachers belonged to Commerce and Science departments. Therefore, the subject committee meetings where teachers possessed similar expertise appeared to be beneficial for Consumer Studies teachers' learning and pedagogical growth as they built WhatsApp networks where they worked as a team and shared teaching strategies and resources. At some point, as Consumer Studies teachers interact with others within the social and educational environments, new thoughts, ideas and experiences emerged.

Teachers found practical mediation and assessment workshops beneficial since it was a space where they shared and acquired knowledge that is essential on how assessment for practicals should be conducted and ways to overcome challenges that hindered effective delivery of practical tasks. These learning activities were conducted in order to train teachers and provide guidelines on how to conduct fair assessments.

During PAT moderation, Consumer Studies teachers learned improvisation strategies for practical resources they lacked such as networking with local restaurants. Therefore, the value of PAT mediation workshops and teachers' collaborative engagement through PAT moderation as learning spaces outside the school is immense as they learned about innovative ways they could implement in conducting practicals effectively if there were inadequate resources in their schools. Consumer Studies teachers' networking with different teachers has the potential to have access to diverse teaching practices for practicals and also enhanced teachers' problem-solving abilities as well as create the sharing of knowledge.

Utilising learning spaces outside the school setting is essential since Consumer Studies as a subject continues to advance and necessitates teachers to stay updated with the current advancements in the subject. This has been witnessed as teachers' engagement in conferences brought exposure since subject specialists across the globe shared the best teaching approaches

and latest trends in Consumer Studies internationally and nationally as teachers met virtually through videoconferences.

The following section addresses the response to the second research question.

8.3.2 What kind of learning occurred in TLCs in one district in KwaZulu-Natal?

This section presents learning that took place in the TLCs which is aimed in understanding the kind of learning Consumer Studies teachers learned in their TLCs. The study found that Consumer Studies teachers' collaborative engagements in learning communities provided spaces that enhanced their knowledge and skills which they require to teach Consumer Studies effectively.

Since Consumer Studies is a dynamic subject which is plagued by continuous changes, the participants were of the view that their involvement in learning communities' programmes facilitated understanding and implementation of the reform processes. Meetings as a community of Consumer Studies teachers equipped them with knowledge to implement the latest curriculum changes that took place in the subject, especially during lockdown due to COVID-19. The knowledge that they accumulated from the District Consumer Studies Subject Advisor and other experienced teachers was very beneficial since it supported teachers to comprehend the reform process and to put various intervention strategies into action. The findings indicated that Consumer Studies teachers' collaborative engagement in TLCs equipped them with the skills of managing changes that were challenging in the subject and developed solutions to their problems especially with conducting practical lessons. Teachers felt that utilising technology for teaching and learning motivated learners to be actively engaged with their practical learning which resulted in improved learners' performance.

The participants stressed the benefits of congregating in learning communities sharing ideas and expertise that advance understanding of knowledge and integration of sustainability in teaching and learning of Consumer Studies. Their engagement supported them in learning about the significance of sustainability in terms of mechanisms to reduce harm to the environment while using the products and services during Consumer Studies lessons, and also ensuring effective use of resources. Consumer Studies teachers' learning in their engagements helped with the development of personal entrepreneurial skills that they believed enhanced learners' motivation and engagement since it enabled learners to develop their critical thinking on entrepreneurship and improve their entrepreneurial mindset.

Engaging as a community of Consumer Studies assisted in improving Consumer Studies teachers' pedagogical content knowledge in both theoretical and practical components. For an example, attending conferences ensured that they were kept informed of the latest developments. Although learning during departmental meetings was limited, meeting with teachers from other subjects equipped them with the knowledge that they used to enhance their knowledge of different topics. The findings revealed that Consumer Studies teachers' participation in TLCs encouraged them to take up leadership positions. Leadership in Consumer Studies TLCs appeared to be shared among the Subject Advisor, cluster co-ordinators, lead and master teachers as well as novice teachers. Lead and master teachers were tasked by the Subject Advisor to facilitate content workshops, moderate assessment tasks and co-ordinate activities within their TLCs.

What emerged from the findings of this study have shown that congregating in various Consumer Studies TLCs enabled teachers to explore new developments in the subject and this enhanced self-confidence and job satisfaction since they were able to teach new topics with confidence. Engaging in these communal activities supported teachers in managing and nurturing their personal growth while encouraging capacity building. The following section responds to the third research question.

8.3.3 Why did Consumer Studies teachers learn the way they did through TLCs in one district in KwaZulu-Natal?

In the district where the study was conducted, Teacher Learning Community programmes were predominantly conducted through face-to face workshops. This is the case in most districts in South Africa. The study has demonstrated that traditionally, the learning communities of the Consumer Studies teachers have mainly been through face-to-face engagements. However, shifting to online learning during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic allowed teachers to use social media to share ideas and materials at any time. Although virtual collaboration was beneficial for the participants, their engagements were limited to the utilisation of the WhatsApp group chats which enabled Consumer Studies teachers to interact from various geographical regions.

Challenges and opportunities that teachers encountered while engaging in TLCs activities determined the way learning happened in Consumer Studies TLCs. The findings indicated above seem to highlight the numerous factors that explain the way Consumer Studies teachers were

engaged in TLC programmes. In the next section I present factors that influence the way Consumer Studies teachers learn in TLC programmes.

8.3.3.1 The nature of Consumer Studies as a school subject

Historical practice and the identity of the subject come together to manifest the particular kind of learning that takes place in Consumer Studies TLC programmes. Although, Consumer Studies is regarded as the ever-changing subject which requires teachers to be developed constantly, it was impossible for teachers to meet with other Consumer Studies teachers during departmental meetings and at a cluster level. Limited number of Consumer Studies teachers in the cluster influence the type of learning that happens in the Consumer Studies workshops. Teachers found themselves having to rely heavily on subject committee meetings which were not held regularly at the district level. Consequently, teachers had to wait for subject committee meetings before their challenges are attended. Collegial support offered by master teachers and other teachers during departmental meetings afforded Consumer Studies teachers an opportunity to network and exchange knowledge in terms of generic practices. As a result, their engagements were found to be limited since these teachers did not have any subject specific knowledge. The fact that they could not meet with other Consumer Studies specialists to share their everyday challenges and ideas regularly, hindered their professional growth. Limited amount of time for learning to happen during the Consumer Studies meetings hinders the effectiveness of teacher engagement since there was no time to address all the challenges that teachers were sharing.

Since the subject is affected by drastic changes internationally in the discipline of Hospitality and food industry, Consumer Studies are required to keeping them abreast with the latest developments in the subject. However, the fact that teachers are concerned that workshops do not engage them thoroughly in terms of new content, leave teachers with limited knowledge of current content in the subject.

8.3.3.2 Socio-economic constraints and the context where teachers work

The study revealed the contextual constraints place restrictions on the quality of interaction and learning in Consumer Studies TLCs. Time, space and school context influence the realisation of teachers' engagement from being translated into practice in class. School organisation factors, such as the teachers' perceptions of the support provided by staff management teams, colleagues and other resources during their learning period can influence the way teachers learn. In this study, teachers felt that they were supported by the master and lead teachers as well as the departmental

heads from the subjects like Science and Commerce. Even novice teachers were encouraged and supported by peers and experienced teachers like master teachers from the schools. They discussed challenges and teaching experiences. Although Consumer Studies teachers could engage with their peers in matters, discussions as a community of teachers in departmental meetings encouraged moral support and reflection on teaching strategies. These engagements may have contributed to Consumer Studies teachers' confidence.

Consumer Studies teachers' working in rural contexts complained about having to travel a long distance for their learning engagements for subject specific knowledge in the district. It was noted that they preferred virtual learning compared to physical engagement. However, the drawbacks for virtual learning was that of poor network connectivity which hindered effective collaboration with peers through WhatsApp group chats and MS Teams. Another concern was that of financial constraints since there was lack of support for provision of data from the school. Due to these challenges, teachers in rural areas felt that their learning was not optimal especially through virtual mode.

Although it is believed that learners in Consumer Studies practical lessons are better handled in small groups, circumstances such as inadequate resources and time allocated for practicals discouraged teachers and they divided learners into big groups. This caused a burden on teachers during practical lessons since they did not conduct fair assessments for practicals as they grouped learners for the purpose of keeping track of time. Given this, Consumer Studies teachers mostly spent time conducting practicals and failed to attend teacher learning development programmes as they are overburdened with large class sizes. This could mean they forget about the planned learning activities or either they end up prioritising practicals with their learners so that they are able to award them marks and not realise the importance for self-professional development.

Consumer Studies as a practical subject requires purchases of ingredients. It is essential for the parents to provide financial support to the learners to conduct practicals. Since the schools enrolled a large number of learners in the subject, they were not able to provide for all the practical necessities. Therefore, schools relied on parents of which not all of them were able to provide necessary support due to their low cost of living standards measure. Given that, Consumer Studies teachers were concerned about the ineffectiveness of the practicals as learners from the poor socio-economic status were not awarded with marks for practicals. This means that learners were deprived as they were only assessed on the theory aspect and not practical. The implication for this is that learners were not equipped with the necessary practical skills needed to be self-

sufficient and alleviate poverty which is part of the Consumer Studies curriculum whereby learners have to develop products on a small scale and put them up for sale. Therefore, Consumer Studies teachers realised that congregating in PAT mediation workshop to share and exchange innovative strategies for accumulating funds was essential.

8.3.3.3 Inadequate professional development opportunities for Consumer Studies teachers

The concept of professional development was identified as crucial by Consumer Studies teachers. The teachers appreciated the collaboration outside the school for subject specific knowledge through developmental workshops, subject committees, moderation and conferences. These learning activities took various modes such as face-to-face and virtual but the most popular mode of learning was virtual since it was during COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has necessitated for the curriculum and assessments to be revised. Therefore, Consumer Studies teachers' meetings were aimed at equipping teachers with the latest curriculum changes such as restructuring of the curriculum from which the teachers benefitted as they were kept up to date with the changes. However, teachers complained that they are not offered constant follow-up workshops or visits in schools to cater for individual challenges and to assess if these changes were well implemented. The only individual visits made by the Subject Advisor were conducted during PAT moderation which occurred once a year of which teachers were uncertain if they met the required standard as they were not regularly visited. The fact that teachers were not frequently visited by their Subject Advisor at school resulted to the departmental heads with no subject expertise for Consumer Studies being solely responsible for supporting and monitoring the implementation of curriculum by the teachers. Given this, Consumer Studies teachers felt they were not adequately developed at the school level as they networked with the Sciences and Commerce departments which lacked the background content knowledge of Consumer Studies. Hence, the teachers' professional learning within their schools was inadequate as Consumer Studies was only taught by a single teacher at school which hindered sharing of the subject related matter knowledge. Teachers indicated that their learning was limited to the generic aspects such as developing lessons plans and classroom management.

There is need for teachers to be constantly developed to effectively teach the theory and practical aspects in Consumer Studies to meet with the 21st century skills. Consumer Studies teachers acknowledged that they learned from subject committee meetings; however, the shortfall was that it was once off as it was only for the day and those travelling from a distance arrived late and others missed these meetings. The concern expressed by teachers is that the subject committee meetings which were face-to-face and organised by the Subject Advisor at the level of the district

took time to happen. As a result, their challenges related to the subject matter knowledge were addressed after some time. This caused a challenge to teachers as they could not teach the content that they misunderstood which resulted in lack of confidence and poor learning outcomes.

8.3.3.4 Insufficient infrastructure and resources

Consumer Studies teachers acknowledged the fact that in their PAT mediation workshop there were barriers in terms of infrastructural deficiencies within the context in which they worked. The participants' view is that they are overwhelmed by several challenges in practical lessons. As a result, the challenges that hampered their successful delivery for practical lessons include load shedding, lack of water supply, shortage of equipment, ingredients and LTSM. In this regard, teachers were not able to manage their time effectively for practicals. Since South Africa is faced with a crisis of water shortages and electricity, it makes it difficult to conduct practical lessons. Teachers found engagement in the TLCs valuable in terms of devising strategies to curb and address challenges that hindered effective delivery of practical lessons. However, not all teachers seem to have been supported by their schools; in this regard as their schools differed in terms of their financial resources. This means teachers who taught in schools with a large enrolment were able to provide with the resources compared to the schools with a lower enrolment as they are considered as no-fee schools. Given the complexity of the subject, it is necessary for teachers to engage their learners in a process of discovery by incorporating lessons that are directly applicable to real-world situations.

The schools had to choose one practical option depending on the availability of the resources. However, this was not the case with some teachers, as the majority reported that they had inadequate infrastructure nor equipment in their schools. This means that teachers were unable to impart effectively entrepreneurial skills to their learners of which is the necessity for the subject to alleviate poverty and unemployment. The nature of the subject requires every practical lesson to have ingredients, equipment, and financial resources. The ongoing costs associated with acquiring ingredients, maintaining, replacing, and repairing equipment make Consumer Studies appear to be a costly subject. Therefore, Consumer Studies teachers believed that their collaborative engagements within the TLCs were beneficial because it created spaces for teachers to share strategies for raising funds for practical lessons.

The subject requires that teachers use supplementary teacher-learning materials such as food magazines and technology such as digital satellite television (DSTV) cooking channels to enable their learners make theory relevant to practical. The lack of adequate resources makes Consumer

Studies teachers fail to teach the practical aspect in the subject effectively and result in poor quality in learners' results especially those from the rural areas.

8.3.3.5 Lack of digital competency in teachers

The impact of lockdown due to COVID-19 resulted in Consumer Studies teachers transitioning to virtual teacher learning community programmes. Although appropriate and relevant computer skills play a major role in enabling teachers to continue to learn online, in this study there was a significant lack of digital literacy for Consumer Studies teachers.

The majority of Consumer Studies teachers could not attend or actively participate in online learning activities that were conducted on MS Teams due to lack of confidence in their computer skills. It was difficult for them to access learning resources uploaded by the Subject Advisor on One Drive and other online communication platforms. These challenges hindered teachers from engaging in Consumer Studies virtual learning communities. In spite of the technological challenges that teachers were faced with, they opted for WhatsApp platform to access their LTSM and collaborate with their peers. Since all teachers were familiar with WhatsApp and its features, they chose WhatsApp as the platform that they used to communicate and share materials. As a result, the district WhatsApp group was created for discussions, exchanging of information and sharing other teaching and learning materials.

8.4 TOWARDS A THEORISATION OF CONSUMER STUDIES TEACHER LEARNING

Consumer Studies teachers were engaging in TLCs through departmental meetings, master teachers and peer observation within the school and outside school through developmental workshops, subject committees, conferences. Challenges encountered during learning limited the way learning was happening in these programmes. Context, the nature of the discipline of Consumer Studies, socio-economic conditions, technological challenges and a lack of digital competency, a shortage of adequate resources and relevant infrastructure, intensified the difficulties encountered by the Consumer Studies teachers during their development programmes.

Given the difficulties imposed by the circumstances in Consumer Studies on the effective face-to-face and virtual interactions among teachers in learning communities, this study noted that the participants adopted what I view as the supportive culture and interdependence mechanism that facilitate their learning community engagements. In this regard, the study finds that the Consumer Studies teachers, especially in rural schools, have developed a culture of supportive and

togetherness, respect, resilience and commitment towards the accomplishment of a common goal, which is succeeding in their learning communities despite challenges. In this regard, the participants are prioritising friendship and the value of community. This mutual support and value of communal learning led to interdependence among the teachers.

Furthermore, the study established that the interdependence and the supportive culture among the participants created the availability of excess resources and expertise that the Consumer Studies teachers could tap from. This was evident during departmental and master teachers' meetings. Although teachers were not learning or sharing specialist knowledge and materials they were sharing good practices with teachers from other disciplines. This attitude of the Consumer Studies teachers inspired their collaborative engagements despite the difficulties imposed by the nature of Consumer Studies which did not meet regularly in subject committees.

This study has also revealed that during lockdown due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Consumer Studies teachers were seen to be collaborating more virtually to share educational resources and insights that contribute to teacher professional learning. This has become possible through modern communication technology such as the WhatsApp group chats which enable integration of technology in sharing teaching and learning resources and ideas that advance teacher practice and learning outcomes.

Despite the challenges and complexities that Consumer Studies teachers encountered during TLCs, they nevertheless took accountability for their learning. Consequently, they were compelled to utilise social media platforms they were conversant with where they could simultaneously learn while fostering social interaction. This was evident in participants using WhatsApp to communicate with peers and to share learning materials among themselves. The purpose it served was to build a sense of community among the teachers while nurturing the social atmosphere. This learning platform sustained, to a limited extent, the notion of communal learning.

The Consumer Studies teachers in this study no longer have to always travel long distances to congregate at a particular venue before learning community programmes can take place. This has become an important development in that the Consumer Studies teachers can communicate with other specialists at any time when it comes to networking for professional learning. Social media created spaces for Consumer Studies to network with other teachers who share similar experiences and problems across the schools in the district.

This mode of learning allows teachers to connect with one another through collaborative engagements irrespective of the geographic location of schools. Such engagements created opportunities for communal sharing of ideas, insights and experiences that can capacitate Consumer Studies teachers to discover, create and negotiate new knowledge and experiences in their subject. In the process, opportunities for teacher development that produce improved learning outcomes and learner performance are nurtured.

8.4.1 Recommendations of the study

Based on the above, the study makes recommendations both to major educational stakeholders within the context of the study and other scholars who embark on studies that relate to how teachers learn in Consumer Studies TLCs in the future. Given the fact that the recommendations are mainly drawn from the Figure 8.1, the Figure is firstly presented on the next page and briefly explained after which the recommendations of the study follow.

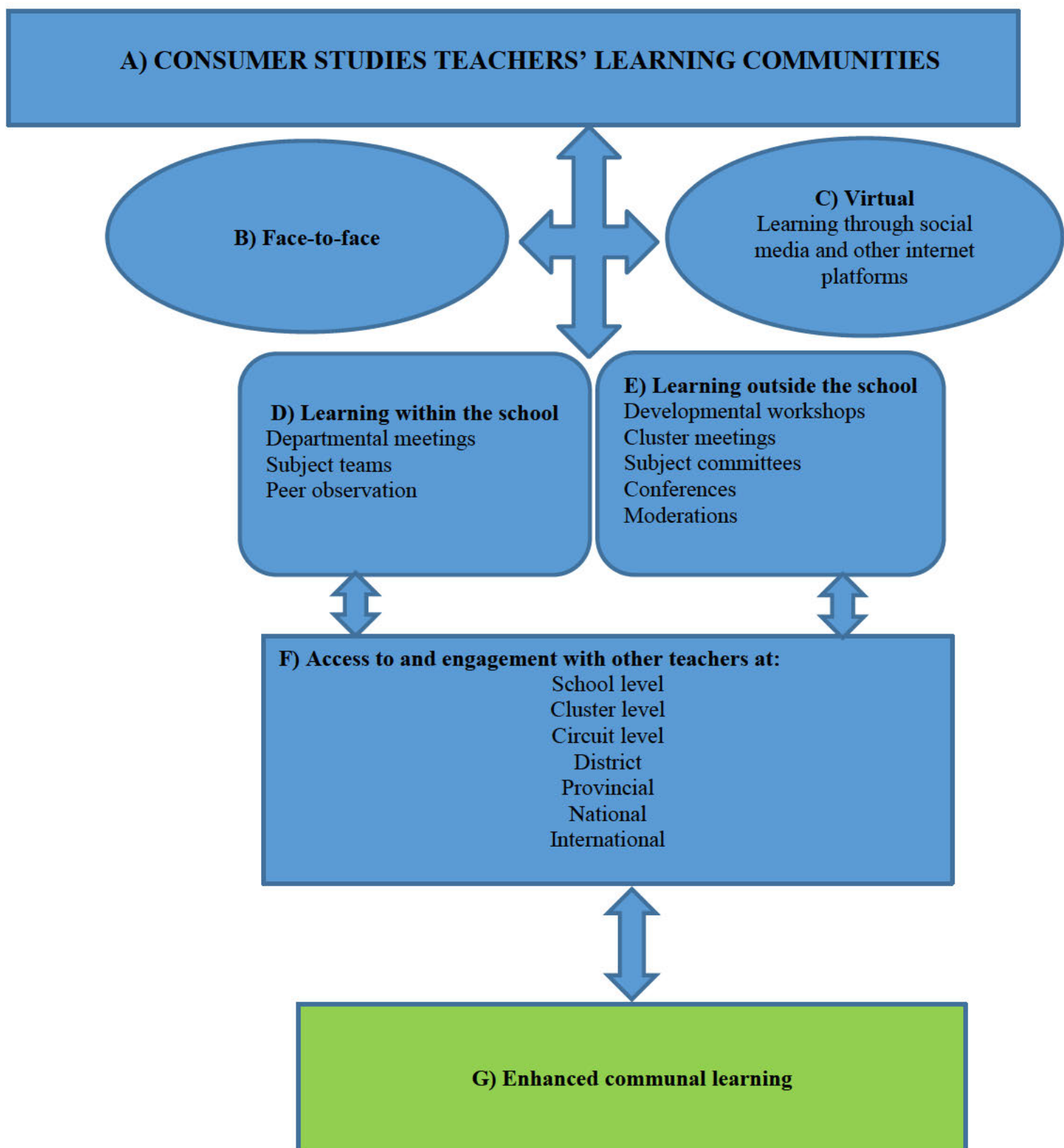


Figure 8.1 A model for communal learning in Consumer Studies

Within this study context are learning communities for Consumer Studies teachers represented in the diagram. The rectangle on the top is labelled as a letter “A” which depicts the study’s context of Consumer Studies Teachers’ Learning Communities. Below the rectangular shape are two oval shapes which indicate the platforms used by teachers during their learning engagements. These include face-to-face labelled as “B” and virtual platforms marked as “C”. “D” represents learning spaces used by teachers to learn within the school, “E” illustrates spaces utilised by teachers to learn outside school, “F” highlights the benefits for communal learning and “G” the positive result for teachers learning such as enhanced communal learning. Essentially, the virtual learning space became popular among the Consumer Studies teachers because of its convenience and ease of communication anywhere and at any time.

The study found that Consumer Studies teachers valued the collaborative practice of sharing expertise, ideas, and learning materials. The virtual learning community, particularly WhatsApp, has emerged as a popular platform for teachers to collaborate, support each other, and network in order to enhance their communal learning in their learning spaces. WhatsApp messages are the most popular mode of communication for teachers learning in various countries across the globe (Ajani & Khoalenyane, 2023; Ali *et al.*, 2023; Kapasia *et al.*, 2020; Mbolekwa, 2021; Pandey *et al.*, 2020; Thaba-Nkadimene, 2020).

Despite the fact that teachers within the school had different subject expertise from Consumer Studies and that their learning was limited within the school, it is evident that somehow there is subject integration as Consumer Studies teachers collaborated with the Commerce teachers where there was commonality of certain topics such as entrepreneurship. Therefore, they were able to share knowledge such as costing which Consumer Studies teachers found to be problematic. Also, they learned about growing crops in a vegetable garden for sustainability for their practical lessons from Agricultural Sciences teachers. What these teachers revealed is that their professional learning is lacking as the learning activities outside the school were irregular and no follow up visits were done to their schools by the district official to check if there was implementation of what was learned within their TLCs. Nonetheless, they used virtual communal learning as a strategy to enhance their subject matter and instructional knowledge in Consumer Studies TLCs. The virtual platform allowed them to share educational resources, knowledge and any other subject related matters at different levels such as school, cluster, circuit, district, provincial, national and international levels. Learning through all levels enhanced teachers communal learning in 21st century skills which meets the international standard. In light of this, recommendations within the study’s context are discussed below.

8.4.2 Recommendations to stakeholders within the study context

Recommendations in this section are directed to stakeholders in the study context which include staff management team, DBE officials, district officials, school governing bodies, community and businessmen.

From the findings of the study, it is recommended that the SMTs should motivate all teachers to participate in collaborative learning activities within their schools and outside their schools. The DBE and KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education should encourage communal learning within the district, across districts within the province and up to the national level to foster effective collaboration among Consumer Studies teachers in TLCs in South Africa. The study recommendations are listed below.

8.4.2.1 Equipping teachers with digital competencies

This study highlights the popularity of modern communication technology among Consumer Studies teachers. With the ongoing Fourth Industrial Revolution, the emphasis is on virtual modes of teachers learning. It is crucial for Consumer Studies teachers to have the skills to integrate this into their actual practical and theoretical lessons. However, some teachers exhibit technophobia and would not be receptive to a technologically-driven system, especially those who have been in the education system for a long time and have limited exposure to technology. Therefore, it is highly recommended that the school management team, school governing body, DBE and KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education officials conduct workshops with a focus on digital training so that Consumer Studies teachers are equipped with skills and become competent in the use of virtual learning in social media and MS teams. Also, provision of necessary resources such as computers or laptops and data bundles should be made to enable Consumer Studies teachers meet the needs of the curriculum that is relevant to the 21st century in order to allow learners to participate in the global knowledge as required in the subject policy.

8.4.2.2 Adoption of social media as modes of learning

Incorporating social media into Consumer Studies Teachers' Learning Community programmes is necessary. Using social media platforms where there is exchange of experiences and knowledge allows Consumer Studies teachers to collaborate, share their concerns, challenges and successes in the subject at any time. Furthermore, it will allow Consumer Studies teachers to be kept abreast

with the latest developments in the subject through using social media for teaching and learning. Social media platforms also promote the dissemination of videos rather than textual information (Dutta, 2020). Since this study was conducted during COVID-19, there was a need for facilitation through the use of social media. The effective use of social media permits Consumer Studies teachers to collaborate by exchanging and disseminating knowledge in a cost-effective manner since travel costs to the central venue for TLCs are minimised. In this regard, it is recommended that the school management team, DBE officials and KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education officials motivate and support teachers in utilising social media platforms for learning since it is the most popular and teachers can network with peers from national and international.

8.4.2.3 Continuous professional development

Teacher professional development programmes should prioritise enhancing teachers' understanding of the curriculum they are implementing. Therefore, the DBE and KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education officials should establish more professional development programmes and follow-up sessions to enhance teachers' understanding of curriculum implementation. Consumer Studies teachers are expected to be lifelong learners, eager to learn new things in view of the vast technological changes and other immense changes occurring in the Hospitality discipline. Teachers should be encouraged to attend conferences that will enlighten them more about the developments in the subject. The DBE should allocate funds for teachers to attend Consumer Studies conferences annually and equip teachers with up-to-date global and local consumer product trends. Supplement resources should be provided to teachers to offer opportunities to learn and develop entrepreneurial skills relevant to the 21st century. This means more time should be allocated to the learning activities of Consumer Studies teachers.

Since the subject has shifted from the needs of the “family” to the needs of the “consumer” and there is an introduction of entrepreneurship in the curriculum, more emphasis should be on product development on a small scale by learners. It is recommended that Consumer Studies teachers be constantly developed by the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education in entrepreneurial learning so that learners become self-sufficient. Entrepreneurial knowledge and skills development is particularly relevant in the South African context, where the unemployment rate is mounting (Du Toit, 2023, 2021; Ngwenya & Shange, 2019; Umalusi, 2014). The study found that most teachers faced challenges in conducting practicals due to inadequate resources. It is recommended that school management teams enlighten all the relevant stakeholders on the nature and requirements of the subject. The other recommendation is fundraising by partnering

with businessmen and utilising the school garden for growing crops supported by the community. In addition, the need for teachers to be oriented vocationally in their TLCs must be stressed so that all stakeholders provide the necessary support. The importance of Consumer Studies in reducing unemployment and alleviating poverty in South Africa must be addressed. Additionally, the value of the subject in the community in equipping learners with the skills needed to start a business should be promoted in order to increase support from local businesses and parents. This will dispel the incorrect perception of the subject to show its full potential as a creator of business and work opportunities.

Teachers should always be aware of the extent to which other subjects contribute to the practical and theoretical experience of Consumer Studies education. Ideally, the subject teachers at each level should work together when planning each subject syllabus so that related fields can be taught concurrently, either on an individual subject basis or through a team-teaching approach. This would enable teachers to inter-relate and use the knowledge acquired simultaneously in other subject areas to make the school experience meaningful.

In light of the above recommendations, I further draw on the study findings for the lessons learned to make the recommendations that may guide future studies in relation to Consumer Studies TLCs.

8.5. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

The following recommendations may help guide future studies aiming to narrow the gap in consumer studies research within the secondary education sector. In South Africa, Consumer Studies is the subject in which learners do not perform with outstanding results in the NSC examination administered by DBE. It appears that within the South African and international contexts, there is a dearth of research in Consumer Studies, particularly on how teachers learn in TLCs. The literature presented in Chapter Two indicated that countries worldwide recognise the importance of teacher support for teachers to successfully implement reforms at the school level. Additionally, the issue of continuing professional development is scarce among Consumer Studies teachers owing to the evolution of Consumer Studies in the South African school context. This study sought to explore how Consumer Studies teachers learned, various forms of learning spaces used in TLCs, and the kind of learning that occurred in TLCs in one district in KwaZulu-Natal. Given the findings of this study and the limited literature, this study recommends the need for more research to be directed into Consumer Studies TLCs that will cover the whole of

KwaZulu-Natal province to make scholarly contributions that enhance effective teaching and learning of the subject. Such a holistic picture can easily influence education policy in improving CPTD through TLCs.

Moreover, this study was only based on the views of ten Consumer Studies teachers in one district in KwaZulu-Natal because it is qualitative. Therefore, it is recommended that future studies may adopt quantitative research. Future studies could increase the number of research participants by raising the number of districts in KwaZulu-Natal to enable a more comprehensive understanding of Consumer Studies teachers' learning in TLCs. Mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative approach) studies may provide further insights that might not have been captured in the present study. The findings indicate a need for comprehensive research to understand how ICT can promote and facilitate teachers' learning in TLCs after the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, findings revealed that challenges encountered during lockdown compelled teachers to utilise WhatsApp to share information, learning and teaching materials. This study recommends that more research be directed into Consumer Studies teachers' engagement in TLCs through social media.

8.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

While the study has succeeded in contributing to knowledge on TLCs, it is essential to highlight some of its limitations. This study had several limitations based on the nature of the study and the time this research was conducted. Since the study was a qualitative case study, it was only based on the experiences of ten Consumer Studies teachers in one district. In light of this, the study was limited in sample size. The study used semi-structured, Focus group interviews and reflective journals to collect data. The means used to evaluate the data were solely the researcher herself and the evaluation of the data based on her views. This could have weakened the validity of this study.

Another limitation of the study was that only one district was involved. While the contexts of other districts in the province of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa may not differ significantly from the one under study, this methodological limitation makes it difficult to generalise the research findings to other contexts, especially those entirely urban.

The data generation phase of the study coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic. This resulted in restrictions in collecting data face-to-face for semi-structured and Focus group interviews at this point in time. However, other methods were reliant such as individual telephonic and WhatsApp-

based Focus group interviews. Since this virtual method for collecting data was newly introduced to me and the participants, I was sceptical that the participants would be actively involved. Nonetheless, they showed interest and willingness to participate fully throughout the research. Because these interviews were conducted online, some participants experienced network coverage issues in their areas, especially those teaching in rural areas, necessitating rescheduling with those participants. The duration of the interviews was brief because they were conducted mostly through WhatsApp, so I attempted to be as quick as possible so that participants would not run out of data bundles. There was a delay in returning reflective journals because they were submitted to me through WhatsApp after completion, so I had to remind the teachers to submit them constantly.

8.7 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This research study investigated how Consumer Studies teachers learned in TLCs in one district in KwaZulu-Natal. Collaborative learning activities with mutual support are imperative in TLCs to improve teachers' professional development. The study findings suggest that the teachers learned within their schools where they learned through departmental meetings, master teachers and peer observation. The learning activities outside their schools were initiated by the Department of Education District official (Subject Advisor). These learning spaces established by TLCs aimed to improve CPTD. The findings have shown that the Consumer Studies teachers could sustain and promote teacher learning mostly outside their schools, where they were engaged in developmental workshops, conferences, subject committees, and moderation as they shared similar interests and met with other subject experts for Consumer Studies. Teachers' participation in TLCs has helped them improve their professional development; the study further found a supportive relationship among Consumer Studies teachers in TLCs. Teachers highlighted several benefits of working as a team. Consumer Studies teachers' collaboration and mutual support enabled teachers to gain and acquire growth in their content knowledge, learn new instructional practices and new skills, and improve their methodologies.

Although the findings of the study cannot be generalised, the findings suggest that Consumer Studies teacher learning in TLCs might be possible when the DBE, school management teams, community and businessmen play a meaningful role, as shown in the above section 8.4.1 to achieve best results in the teaching and learning.

The study used a CoP theoretical framework (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Lave and Wenger (1991) were used to describe Consumer Studies teachers' socialisation process

as legitimate peripheral participation. Wenger (1998) showed that through Consumer Studies of teachers' mutual collaborative engagements, they met for a specific purpose, which is regarded as a joint enterprise where teachers negotiate, share and exchange knowledge to improve practice. The findings show that during Consumer Studies teacher learning, they learned managing curriculum reforms, sustainability issues in Consumer Studies, personal entrepreneurial skills, pedagogical content knowledge as well as managing and nurturing personal growth.

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APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



01 October 2020

Miss Lulama Nomfundo Londiwe Shange (208510474)
School Of Education
Edgewood Campus

Dear Miss Shange,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00001566/2020

Project title: Teacher learning through Teacher Learning Communities (TLCs): A case of Consumer Studies teachers in one district in KwaZulu-Natal.

Degree: PhD

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 01 June 2020 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL** on the following condition:

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.

This approval is valid until 01 October 2021.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Urmilla Bob
(University Dean of Research)

/dd

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0)31 2608350/4557/3587 Email: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics>

Founding Campuses:  Edgewood  Howard College  Medical School  Pietermaritzburg  Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

APPENDIX B: DoE PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH



KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE
EDUCATION
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DIRECTORATE:

Private Bag X9137, PIETERMARITZBURG, 3200 Office of the Head of Department
Anton Lembede Building, 247 Burger Street, Pietermaritzburg, 3201
Tel: 033 392 1063 / 4 Fax: 033 392 1203

Enquiries: Phindile Duma

Tel: 033 392 1063

Ref.:2/4/8/4500

Ms I NI Shange

3887

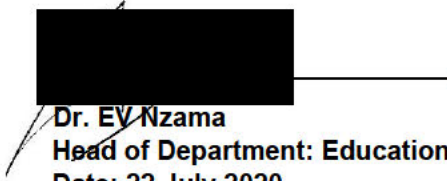
Dear Ms Shange

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **“TEACHER LEARNING THROUGH TEACHER LEARNING COMMUNITIES (TLCs): A CASE OF CONSUMER STUDIES TEACHERS IN ONE DISTRICT IN KWAZULU- NATAL”**, 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, Teachers, 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 22 July 2020 to 03 January 2023.
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, Teachers, 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.

KING CETSHWAYO DISTRICT


Dr. EV Nzama
Head of Department: Education
Date: 22 July 2020

GROWING KWAZULU-NATAL TOGETHER

APPENDIX C: LETTER TO THE PRINCIPAL



Social Sciences, College of Humanities
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Edgewood Campus

The Principal

APPLICATION FOR CONDUCTING RESEARCH

I am currently registered as a PhD learner at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. I hereby request permission to carry out my research at your school. The research is entitled: Teacher learning through Teacher Learning Communities (TLCs): A case of Consumer Studies Teachers in one district in Kwazulu-Natal.

The purpose of the study is to explore professional development strategies of Consumer Studies teachers in KwaZulu-Natal. The study will be limited to Consumer Studies teachers in the King Cetshwayo district.

The study will examine this further by exploring how Consumer Studies teachers learn through TLCs, how Consumer Studies teachers experience learning in TLCs and determine why do Consumer Studies teachers learn the way they do through TLCs in one district in KwaZulu-Natal. Because I intend to get in-depth information about your school's Consumer Studies Teachers', multiple methods will be used for collection of data.

In understanding Consumer Studies teachers learning in TLCs, teachers' will be interviewed in WhatsApp-based focus group interviews interviews and telephonic semi-structured individual interviews whereby they will be audio taped. Teachers will also fill a reflective journal after each session whereby they reflect and give evaluation for that particular day.

The period anticipated for data collection is between August to October 2020. May I be allowed to audiotape the interviews.

Throughout the research process as well as in the reporting of the findings:

- Teachers' participation in the research is voluntary.

- Teachers' can withdraw from the research process at any time and the decision will not disadvantage the participant.
- Their identity will not be disclosed in the dissertation.
- Their names and the school will not be disclosed at any point during or after the study. Throughout the research process as well as in the reporting of the findings their anonymity and confidentiality is secured.

The researcher will use any information from teachers' in a way that will assure their continued respect among their colleagues. The information obtained will strictly be used for research purposes and will be used with stringent confidentiality. The data will only be used for research purposes and will be securely stored in a lock-up cabinet.

After submission of the thesis, data will be stored with the university for a period of five years, after which the documents will be shredded and audio tapes will be destroyed.

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact me at:

Email: shangenomfundo@yahoo.com/ 208510474@stu.ukzn.ac.za

██████████

or

My supervisor is Dr. J.C Ngwenya, Edgewood campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Contact details: email: Ngwenyaj@ukzn.ac.za

Phone number: 0312603621

UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001

Durban

4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Thank you so much for your co-operation in this study.

Lulama Nomfundo Londiwe Shange

APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT LETTER FOR CONSUMER STUDIES TEACHERS



Social Sciences, College of Humanities
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Edgewood Campus

Dear Participant

I am a PhD learner at the University of KwaZulu-Natal conducting a research project titled, “Teacher learning through Teacher Learning Communities (TLCs): A case of Consumer Studies Teachers in one district in Kwazulu-Natal.”

I will be visiting your school as part of a research project, the purpose of the study is to explore professional development strategies of Consumer Studies teachers in KwaZulu-Natal. Because I intend to get in depth information about the school’s Consumer Studies Teachers’ learning and experiences through TLCs, multiple methods will be used for collection of data.

In understanding Consumer Studies teachers learning in TLCs, teachers will be interviewed in WhatsApp-based focus group interviews and telephonic semi-structured individual interviews whereby they will be audio taped. Teachers will also complete a reflective journal after each session whereby they reflect and do evaluation on that specific day.

Throughout the research process as well as in the reporting of the findings:

➤Your participation in the research is voluntary.

- You can withdraw from the research process at any time and the decision will not disadvantage the participant.
 - Your identity will not be disclosed in the dissertation.
 - Your names and the school will not be disclosed at any point during or after the study.
- Throughout the research process as well as in the reporting of the findings their anonymity and confidentiality is secured.

The researcher will use any information from participants' in a way that will assure their continued respect among their colleagues. The information obtained will strictly be used for research purposes and will be used with stringent confidentiality. The data will only be used for research purposes and will be securely stored in a lock-up cabinet.

After submission of the thesis, data will be stored with the university for a period of five years, after which the documents will be shredded and audio tapes will be destroyed.

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact me at:

Email: shangenomfundo@yahoo.com/ 208510474@stu.ukzn.ac.za



or

My supervisor is Dr. J.C Ngwenya, Edgewood campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Contact details: email: Ngwenyaj@ukzn.ac.za

Phone number: 0312603621

UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001

Durban

4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Thank you so much for your co-operation in this study.

Lulama Nomfundo Londiwe Shange

CONSENT / DECLARATION (To be completed by Consumer Studies teachers)

I.....(Name)

have been informed about the study entitled: “Teacher learning through Teacher Learning Communities (TLCs): A case of Consumer Studies Teachers in one district in Kwazulu-Natal.” by Nomfundo Shange

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.

I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits that I usually am entitled to.

I have been informed about any available compensation or medical treatment if injury occurs to me as a result of study-related procedures.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study, I understand that I may contact the researcher at 0735420496

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers then I may contact:

UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001

Durban

4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

I hereby provide consent to:

	Willing	Not willing
Audio-record my interview / face-to-face interviews		
Audio-record my interview / focus group interviews		

Signature of Participant

Date

APPENDIX E: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS SCHEDULE FOR CONSUMER STUDIES TEACHERS

TOPIC: Teacher learning through Teacher Learning Communities (TLCs): A case of Consumer Studies teachers in one district in Kwazulu-Natal.

My name is Nomfundo Shange. I am a PhD candidate studying at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood campus, South Africa.

The purpose of the study is to explore how Consumer Studies teachers learn through TLCs and how Consumer Studies teachers experience learning in TLCs and determine why Consumer Studies teachers learn the way they do through TLCs in one district in KwaZulu-Natal.

Your involvement is purely for academic purposes only, and there are no financial benefits involved. Your participation will be voluntary and will remain confidential.

This interview is about your views on your learning in Consumer Studies. The duration of the interview will be about 60 minutes. Audio recordings will be made, and will be transcribed and coded for study. Your transcribed interview will remain confidential at all times, and your anonymity is guaranteed. This will be achieved through the use of pseudonyms.

QUESTIONS

General:

Aim: To get to know the participants better

1. What is the name of your school?
2. Kindly introduce yourself?
3. What class are you teaching Consumer Studies?
4. What is/are your qualification/s?
5. How many years of experience do you have?
6. Do you enjoy teaching the subject?

Professional:

Aims:

- To understand the nature of teacher support they receive and nature of collaboration in schools
- To understand how teachers experience TLCs
- To get a sense of what type of development teachers are looking for in Consumer Studies.

1. Which aspect of the subject do you enjoy teaching most? Is it practical or theoretical lessons?
2. Can you share the experiences of your learners about your method of teaching the subject?
3. What is the target pass rate of your learners this year?
4. Have you attended any training related to Consumer Studies before? If yes please explain where the programme took place and what happened there?
5. Did you attend the programme on self-sponsorship? If otherwise kindly state who sponsored you?
6. How do you learn through Teacher Learning Communities(TLC's) in your district?
7. Has your school organised any professional development programmes for the Consumer Studies teachers?
8. What are your views on TLCs for teachers of Consumer Studies? Kindly share
9. Do you share your experiences with your colleagues about the outcome of professional development you have attended?
10. Do you think attending TLCs will be of benefit to you? Kindly give your reason
11. Do you have various learning opportunities as related to professional development of teachers of Consumer Studies in your school?
12. What are various strategies that need to be employed by Consumer Studies teachers in providing opportunity for themselves about professional development?
13. What are various professional developments in which you think Consumer Studies teachers can use to develop themselves?
14. Kindly tell me how often do you engage in professional development activities?
15. Kindly explain the attitude of your professional colleagues toward engaging themselves in professional development programmes?
16. Please elucidate more on how Consumer Studies teachers engage themselves in professional development?
17. In your view what are your most preferred ways of engaging Consumer Studies teachers in professional development?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTRIBUTION TO THIS RESEARCH.

APPENDIX F: FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS SCHEDULE FOR CONSUMER STUDIES TEACHERS

TOPIC: Teacher learning through Teacher Learning Communities (TLCs): A case of Consumer Studies teachers in one district in Kwazulu-Natal.

My name is Nomfundo Shange. I am a PhD candidate studying at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood campus, South Africa.

The purpose of the study is to explore how Consumer Studies teachers learn through TLCs and how Consumer Studies teachers experience learning in TLCs and determine why Consumer Studies teachers learn the way they do through TLCs in one district in KwaZulu-Natal.

Your involvement is purely for academic purposes only, and there are no financial benefits involved. Your participation will be voluntary and will remain confidential.

This interview is about your views on your learning in Consumer Studies. The duration of the interview will be about 30 minutes. Audio recordings will be made, and will be transcribed and coded for study. Your transcribed interview will remain confidential at all times, and your anonymity is guaranteed. This will be achieved through the use of pseudonyms.

QUESTIONS:

1. Tell me about your experiences with TLCs.
2. How do the TLC team come together to learn?
3. How do team members determine what they want to learn?
4. What is the desired number of team members needed for the meeting to take place and why is this important?
5. How do team members transfer learning into their classrooms and how can this be proven?
6. What challenges does the team face during the academic school year?
7. What structures supports collective learning?
8. How do you communicate with each other?
9. How do you communicate ideas, results, strategies to the school community?
10. What motivates you to be part of TLC and Why?
11. How does the team support new members?
12. Do teachers work together to examine learners' work? Explain

13. What is the least amount of time you spend in your meetings? Explain
14. How is TLC evaluated to see if its adding value?
15. Is there anything regarding your experience with TLC that you would like to add?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTRIBUTION TO THIS RESEARCH

APPENDIX G: REFLECTIVE JOURNAL FOR CONSUMER STUDIES TEACHERS

Topic: Teacher learning through TLCs (TLCs): A case of Consumer Studies teachers in one district in Kwazulu-Natal.

The purpose of the study is to explore how Consumer Studies teachers learn through TLCs and how Consumer Studies teachers experience learning in TLCs and determine why Consumer Studies teachers learn the way they do through TLCs in one district in KwaZulu-Natal. You are asked to reflect on the questions to follow below. Your involvement is purely for academic purposes only, and there are no financial benefits involved. Your participation will be voluntary and will remain confidential. This will be achieved by using pseudonyms.

Date: _____

Place: _____

Theme: _____

These questions serve as a guide for you to reflect upon:

1. How do you incorporate community into your planning?
2. Which forms of teacher learning do you find useful in learning new content?
3. Based on the above: How do you think they contribute in learning new content in Consumer Studies and Why?
4. Are there any challenges you encounter in TLCs in Consumer Studies?
5. If there are challenges, how do you overcome those challenges?
6. Do you find working in TLCs with your peer teachers beneficial to you? If so, Why?
7. Do content or orientation workshops capacitate and empower you? Briefly state the reason for your answer.
8. Are there opportunities for teachers to apply their new knowledge relevant to the content during workshops?
9. Is communication among the teachers promoted? If so, How?
10. Is there anything you wish to add on your experiences of TLCs in Consumer Studies?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTRIBUTION TO THIS RESEARCH

APPENDIX H: TURNIT IN REPORT

Turnitin Originality Report

- Processed on: 24-May-2024 6:37 PM CAT
- ID: 2386566944
- Word Count: 92881
- Submitted: 4

NOMFUNDO TURNIT IN THESIS NEW.docx By Lulama Shange

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[Ndemuweda, Vistorina Vapanawa Ndapandula.. "An exploration of the learning experiences of Life Science teachers through professional development initiatives : a case study of the Ohangwena region, Namibia.", 2011](#)

< 1% match ()

[Graven, Mellony Holm. "Mathematics teacher learning, communities of practice and the centrality of confidence", 2015](#)

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https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13803611.2016.1247726?utm_source=Tr en

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[Bongani D. Bantwini. "Developing a culture of collaboration and learning among natural science teachers as a continuous professional development approach in a province in South Africa", Teacher Development, 2018](#)

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[Jabulisile C. Ngwenya, Nomfundo L. Shange. "Learners' views on challenges encountered during practical work in Consumer Studies: A case of one school in KwaZulu-Natal.", African Journal of Hospitality Tourism and Leisure, 2019](#)

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APPENDIX I: CERTIFICATE FROM THE EDITOR

from the desk of
Editing & critical reading services

Wednesday, August 14, 24

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

To whom it may concern

This is to confirm that I have edited the following PhD thesis:
**TEACHER LEARNING THROUGH TEACHER LEARNING COMMUNITIES (TLCs):
A CASE OF CONSUMER STUDIES TEACHERS IN ONE DISTRICT IN KWAZULU-
NATAL** by **Lulama Nomfundo Londiwe Shange** for language use. The page layout
of the document remains the responsibility of the author.

[REDACTED]

Eleanor M Lemmer (Professor Emeritus, UNISA) D Ed (Comparative Education),
UNISA

[REDACTED]

Contact

864 Justice Mohamet St, Brooklyn mobile (084) 7004676 lemmeem@icloud.com