The Nature of Professional Learning Needs of Rural Secondary School Teachers: Voices of Professionally Unqualified Teachers in Rural Zimbabwe

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Abstract
Recruitment of professionally unqualified teachers into teaching appears to be internationally acclaimed to address shortages in rural schools. Nevertheless, teachers with limited knowledge are linked to lower quality education and student achievements. Relatively little attention has been given to professional needs of unqualified teachers in rural schools. Qualitative interview data were analyzed to explore professional needs of six teachers completing postgraduate certificate in education, to identify their needs as they traversed rural school contexts in becoming professionals. Data revealed needs around general pedagogy and pedagogic content knowledge, resourcing, and recognition and identity. The article illustrates that teacher learning and curriculum delivery among unqualified teachers may be enhanced if their needs are given attention.

Keywords
Zimbabwe, professionally unqualified practicing teachers, postgraduate diploma in education, rural schools, professional learning needs

Introduction
Upon attainment of independence, most African countries embark on massification of educational provision across all levels (Kapfunde, 1999; Wolhuter, Lemmer, & de Wet, 2007), consequently creating severe teacher demand that exceeds supply. To address these teacher gaps, governments recruit professionally unqualified and under-qualified personnel into the teaching profession (Mukeredzi, 2009). Zimbabwe was not an exception to this practice. Professionally unqualified practicing teachers (PUPTs) in this study are understood as university graduates, practicing as teachers and experienced, but without a professional teaching qualification, hence professionally unqualified. Under-qualified teachers are those teachers who may have both academic and professional teaching qualifications, but their qualification may be viewed as inadequate at a given point due to curriculum or policy changes (Mukeredzi, 2009).

Recruitment of professionally unqualified and under-qualified teachers into teaching has become an internationally acclaimed strategy to address teacher shortage particularly in rural schools as the demand is often more severe in these contexts (Chikoko, 2006; Reddy, 2003; UNESCO, 2006). However, the use of teachers with limited professional education has been linked to lower quality education and poor student outcomes. It is unsurprising that poorly educated teachers often produce poorly educated students. Kruijer (2010) in Togo discovered that students taught by qualified teachers performed better than those taught by professionally unqualified personnel. From South Africa, Mitchell, de Lange, Balfour, and Islam (2011), Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC; 2005), and Moletsane (2012) concur that due to many unqualified teachers and other complexities in rural schools, rural children receive poorer education. Majongwe (2013) in Zimbabwe revealed that rural schools, mainly staffed with professionally unqualified teachers, performed badly in the 2011 and 2012 Ordinary- (4 years of secondary education post Grade 7) and Advanced- (6 years of secondary education post Grade 7) level examinations. Not much seems to be known about the professional learning needs of the PUPTs in these rural schools to enhance their growth and curriculum implementation and delivery.

This article draws data from a doctoral study that investigated professional development experiences of PUPTs in...
rural schools of South Africa and Zimbabwe. The teachers were enrolled in two higher education institutions in Zimbabwe and South Africa. They had an undergraduate degree and were studying part-time on initial teacher education (ITE) programs to become qualified: a postgraduate diploma in education (PGDE) and postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE). The decision to use two higher learning institutions was influenced by my involvement in these universities as lecturer and coordinator of these programs. Practicum supervision in rural schools where these PUPTs were practicing was one of my key responsibilities. Having been born and educated in rural schools and now a town dweller working with teacher-students, this contextual understanding amplified an awareness, knowledge, and sensitivity to some of the PUPTs’ experiences in rural secondary schools. This article focuses only on the Zimbabwean PUPTs’ professional learning needs outside the formal ITE program. As they were studying and practicing, this interaction of teaching, professional learning, and reflection is likely to have influenced their understandings (Mukeredzi, 2013) of their needs and how that affected their classroom practice. The study investigated the PUPTs’ professional learning needs in rural Zimbabwe secondary schools through two questions:

**Research Question 1:** What are the professional learning needs of the PUPTs in rural secondary schools?

**Research Question 2:** How do these needs affect their growth and practice?

In this article, following an exploration of the controversial notion of rurality that constitutes the location for the study, teacher qualifications and recruitment are discussed. Teacher professional learning, which provides the conceptual framework, is then explained. The specific data production strategies employed constitutes the next section. A close analysis of the PUPTs’ experiences as they navigate their professional journeys in rural settings reveals their professional learning needs. The conclusion summarizes the article.

**Conceptual Frameworks: Teacher Professional Learning**

Teacher professional learning is understood as an ongoing process of inquiry into and reflection on practice, interspersed by activities that enhance knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Kelly (2006) views professional learning as a process in which teachers move from periphery toward expertise as they gain knowledge-in-practice and improve classroom engagements. Knowledge-in-practice is the tacit understanding gained from teaching experiences while knowledge-of-practice includes the knowledge of content and pedagogical approaches. This study focuses on the PUPTs’ needs for knowing-in-practice. The process of knowing-in-practice resides neither in the knower nor outside the knower; rather, knowing emerges from the recursive actions, negotiations, and re-negotiations of knowers and other contextual elements (Kelly, 2006; Pedder & Opfer, 2011). Such learning is distributed across teachers, students, and both conceptual (knowledge, experiences, language, etc.) and physical resources/artifacts (e.g., reading materials, computers, etc.), and situated within a larger physical and social environment (Brodie, 2005; Durning & Artino, 2011; Putnam & Borko, 2000). Emphasis is on the social setting and how interactions lead to professional learning and cognition. Systems must therefore promote interaction of individuals with each other and, with materials (Brodie, 2005). Putnam and Borko further point out that such interaction is both a process and a product of learning. Hence, learning can only be understood inclusive of its interactional systems as understanding is situated in contexts of intentions, social partners, and tools/artifacts. The distribution of learning and thinking across individuals and resources enables teachers to collectively accomplish cognitive tasks beyond the individual capabilities of members (Putnam & Borko, 1997). This socio-centric aspect of knowledge and learning claims that what teachers take as knowledge and how they think and express ideas are products of group interactions over time (Putnam & Borko, 2000). Thus, school settings provide cognitive tools (ideas, principles, propositions, concepts) that individual teachers can embrace and, through their personal efforts, try to make sense of these experiences. The belief is that through teaching and other engagements teachers can interrogate and extend their knowledge, subsequently becoming enculturated into acceptable ways of teaching cultures, and will uphold that throughout their professional lives (Putnam & Borko, 2000).

Putnam and Borko (1997) add that teacher learning is shaped by multiple perspectives: the personal, the social, the situated, and the distributed notions of cognition. Consequently, knowing-in-practice is a dynamic process emanating from the collaborative actions of all system elements and this makes it specific and unique to particular school practices (Brodie, 2005). Knowing-in-practice is thus a constructive process where teachers internalize their experiences and such internalized experiences form the basis of their subjective knowledge-in-practice, which they reflect on and reify to build onto their knowledge-of-practice (Kelly, 2006).

Contexts are therefore integral as knowledge and cognition are context-dependent (Durning & Artino, 2011). Putnam and Borko (2000) posit that how a teacher acquires particular professional knowledge and skills and the context in which they learn become a fundamental element of what is learned. However, school contextual norms, structures, and practices may enable or constrain teacher professional learning (Day & Gu, 2007; Putnam & Borko, 2000). Pedder and Opfer (2011) discovered that teachers encountered difficulties in implementing new learning in their classrooms.
because of unsupportive contextual conditions. Effective professional learning recognizes individual teacher needs, different learning motivations, and prior knowledge and experiences that affect their learning. Significant enablers of teacher professional knowing-in-practice are the ways in which contexts encourage teachers to think; regrettably, most schools do not adopt supportive and collaborative approaches to teacher professional learning (Day & Gu, 2007; Kelly, 2006).

As teachers move toward expertise in professional learning, they increasingly develop situated professional identities. Teacher identities are ways in which they see themselves in response to actions of colleagues toward them. Thus, identities are always in flux due to dynamic consequences of the iteration between how others construct them and how they construct themselves, within and outside social situations (Kelly, 2006). Day and Gu (2007) indicate that teacher identity comprises of interactions of three dimensions: professional (policy expectations of good teaching, teacher educational ideals, beliefs, attitudes), situated (specific school contextual/local conditions, for example, support), and personal (life outside school). When the dimensions are in balance with gentle or manageable fluctuations, teachers maintain commitment to their professional learning and their teaching. In the extreme, unmanageable (unbalanced) fluctuations within/between dimensions, commitment, and motivation for professional learning and classroom practice decline unless the teacher is resilient. Resilience is a quality connoting positive adaptation of teachers amid challenging circumstances (Day & Gu, 2007) dependent on the interaction between their professional assets (sense of vocation & efficacy) and their working and living contexts. Thus, if scenarios in which teachers’ work become complex, like in the case of rural/disadvantaged schools, to maintain commitment and effectiveness to professional learning and classroom practice, teachers would need to evoke resilience.

The Zimbabwean Rural Context

The concept “rural” remains complex and difficult to define. Coladarci (2007) comments that “there is no singular or multifaceted definition that can satisfy the research, programmatic and policy communities that employ the concept” (p. 2). Some scholars attribute this to the ambiguity of the term and the fallible distinctions from urban (Abd-Kadir & Hardman, 2007; Anaxagorou, 2007; Hlalele, 2012). Without a single definition of “rural,” consequently there is no clear definition for “rural education or rural school.” Carmichael (1995) defines rural education as “that education provided to the school-age children residing in rural areas” (p. 21). Dunne (1981) defines rural education by its characteristics:

A lack of distinction between what belongs in school and what belongs in the community; a kind of generalism which expects people to do whatever they are able without filling specialized roles or performing strictly age-graded functions; close and supportive ties between families and schools; a sense of comfort and cooperative spirit among school children and teachers; interdependence within schools and communities. (p. 4)

Rural schools are isolated learning centers that are prevalent in rural communities (Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], 2005). FAO’s three-dimensional approach to categorizing rural school spaces includes topography, population density, and community variables like district administrative structures, diverse ethnic groups, religious practices, community communication, a sense of belonging, and interdependence.

Rural schools globally experience similar obstacles to improved student learning and quality education: poor funding and limited resources; “hard to staff, harder to stay” issues; schools remotely located and serving poverty-stricken localities; limited economic opportunities and a paucity of family, social, and cultural amenities; low population density, family and community remoteness and isolation; rural geographies shaping daily life patterns; and low education levels in communities (HSRC, 2005; Kline, White, & Lock, 2013; Lowe, 2006; Mukeredzi, 2013; Redding & Walberg, 2012). These challenges negatively affect the attainment of quality education (Balfour, Mitchell, & Moletsane, 2008; Hlalele, 2012; Islam, 2012; Johnson & Strange, 2007; Mitchell et al., 2011; Moletsane, 2012).

Rurality in Zimbabwe has not been adequately analyzed and tends to be conceptualized as physical space associated with various forms of exclusion, deficit, and needs. Balfour et al. (2008) define space as that which is inhabited and which is moved within. Constructs focus on the rural space rather than people, treating the space as homogeneous, ignoring the dynamic life in these communities and the work of teachers as they engage with and shape the education of rural children (Moletsane, 2012). Many stereotypes about what rurality and rural education entail exist with some views expressed about the unsophisticated, low-level intellectual capacity and rearward nature of rural learners and their lack of knowledge regarding technological gadgets (Myende & Chikoko, 2014). Land in Zimbabwe is delineated into three categories: (a) sparsely populated former White farming areas, with developed infrastructure, close to towns/cities and stretching along the watershed with fertile farming lands; (b) the Black-owned, sparsely populated, small-scale market gardening infertile farming lands, with limited infrastructure and located farther away from towns/cities; and (c) typical traditional village style sparsely inhabited remote, rural, communal lands known as “tribal trust lands” or “reserves” (Mlahleki, 1995; Mukeredzi, 2009, 2013; Nhundu & Makoni, 1999). Chikoko (2006) notes that these terms signify some derelict physical spaces assigned by the former government but not owned by the Black population and led by traditional leaders. In this study, “remote” denotes physical road distance to the nearest urban center where geographical distance...
exerts the highest restrictions (Kline et al., 2013). The spaces are marked by poor topography and other physical infrastructure and inadequate provision of resources, facilities, and other services (Hlalele, 2012; Mukeredzi, 2009). Rurality is understood from this perspective in Zimbabwe and in this study. These remote spaces stretch for several hundreds of kilometers away from towns and former White farming lands and have distinctive large expanses of infertile land for peasant farming and animal grazing (Nhundu & Makoni, 1999).

Rural secondary schools are situated within these traditional village-style remote spaces. Classes are relatively small and severe under-resourcing compels teachers to operate by having to “make-do,” which affects education quality negatively (Mlahlei, 1995). While education levels are high (UNICEF, 2013), economic levels in the surrounding communities are low, which undermines schools’ possibilities for pooling resources together to enhance educational quality (Hlalele, 2012; Mukeredzi, 2009). The schools are few and far apart, without communication facilities like telephone or broadband Internet, electricity, or piped water (see Table 1). The poor roads make transport unreliable; when available, the charges are beyond the reach of many parents forcing children to walk long distances to the nearest secondary school (Mukeredzi, 2013). Furthermore, problems of “hard to staff, harder to stay” are severe as competent and, experienced teachers shun postings in these areas, citing inter alia issues of geography, socio-economic conditions, and prevailing discourse of deficiency that views teaching in rural schools as low-grade (Arnold, Newman, Gaddy, & Dean, 2005; Balfour et al., 2008; Mitchell et al., 2011; Moletsane, 2012; Pennefather, 2011). Consequently, most teachers are either unqualified or under-qualified and often have very low levels of motivation that negatively affects education quality (Mahlomaholo, 2012; Majongwe, 2013). The PUPTs explored in this study were practicing within these rural spaces.

Education in Zimbabwean rural communities lags behind educational development in other parts of the country (Majongwe, 2013; Mlahlei, 1995) notwithstanding that the majority of school-age children live in rural spaces. Eighty percent of Black Zimbabweans live in rural settings (Chikoko, 2006); consequently, most schools are located in these. As such, researching rural education is vital to understand unqualified teacher professional learning needs as interventions may enhance their learning and provision of accessible, quality education to these communities.

**Teacher Qualifications and Recruitment in Zimbabwe**

Teacher training in Zimbabwe resides with the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE). The MoHE Action Plan (2010) indicates that the required minimum qualification for primary and lower secondary (Forms 1-4 or Grades 8-11) school teachers is an “Ordinary” level certificate plus a teachers’ diploma/certificate obtained after 3 or 4 years of teacher education in a teachers’ college. The majority of college student teachers have an O-level Certificate. They undertake a 3- or 4-year teacher training program. Upon completion, they teach in primary or at lower secondary level, depending on whether their college was primary- or secondary-school oriented. A significant number of these student teachers will have gone through A level but failed to attain the required points for entry to a university. Such students are offered a 2-year teacher training program and will teach senior secondary-level (Forms 5-6 or Grades 12-13) classes, supplemented by holders of undergraduate degree qualifications (Mukeredzi, 2013). So, for the senior secondary level, teachers must possess “Advanced” level certificate plus a teachers’ diploma/certificate obtained after 2 or 3 years of teacher education, or “Advanced” level certificate, a 3- or 4-year degree, plus a teachers’ diploma/certificate.

Teacher recruitment and deployment is centrally administered by the Ministry of Education Provincial Education Authority (MoHE, 2010). The provincial department can operate in a transparent manner and is often free from local pressures. However, a teacher’s employment contract may require deployment anywhere in the province (Mukeredzi, 2013). The PUPTs are employed before enrolling in ITE programs. Registration onto the PGDE program required at least 2 years teaching experience. As such, higher education institutions do not have any jurisdiction over the quality of schools, their cultures, and practices.

**Method**

**Research Design**

The study draws on interpretive and qualitative perspectives given that it aimed at understanding the nature of professional learning needs from the perspective of the PUPTs in rural secondary schools. The interpretive (or social constructivist) approach lends itself to the collection of subjective accounts of the participants’ experiences that explain how the world is experienced and constructed by the people who live in it (Henning, 2005). In other words, it aims to explain the subjective experiences, as well as perceptions, meanings, and understandings behind these experiences. Qualitative methodology is an inquiry approach for exploring and understanding a central phenomenon (Cresswell, 2008). To understand the phenomenon, the researcher collects the detailed subjective views of participants through interaction and analyzes the information for description and themes. The researcher then interprets the meaning of the information, drawing on personal reflections and past research, and produces a flexible final report (Cresswell, 2008). As this study aimed at exploring the phenomenon, professional learning needs from the perspective of the participants, the interpretive and qualitative methodology was appropriate. These orientations view reality as constructed inter-subjectively through the meanings and understandings developed socially.
and experientially by individuals (Cohen, Morrison, & Manion, 2011; Cresswell, 2008). The perspectives rely heavily on naturalistic methods (interviewing, observation, text analysis), which ensure adequate dialogue between the researcher and the researched during the social and collaborative construction of meaningful reality (Cohen et al., 2011). This study employed interviews and photo elicitation to generate subjective data from participants.

Research Sites

The research was conducted in six rural schools where the PUPTs were practicing. The Zimbabwe Amendment of Education Act (9.1) classifies school governance into two broad categories: government and non-government (Chikoko, 2006; Nhundu & Makoni, 1999; Zvobgo, 2007). Government schools are state-owned and run while non-government schools are owned and run by authorities like town/city councils and rural district councils (RDC), mission agencies, farmers, and education trusts. They are identified as Responsible Authorities. Of the six schools in this study, two were government, two mission and two RDC (see Table 1).

Participants

Six purposively selected participants who were in the final year of their ITE program participated in the study. Bhengu (2005) states that “. . . the researcher must ensure that informants are information-rich” (p. 58). Denzin and Lincoln (2008) add that purposive sampling extracts groups, settings, and individuals where the processes under exploration are likely to occur. Participants fitted within the definitions as elucidated by Bhengu as well as Denzin and Lincoln. Stones (1988) gives three criteria for selection of participants for qualitative research: they must have experienced the phenomenon under exploration; possess verbal fluency for communicating thoughts, feelings, and perceptions; and should have some sense of commitment to the research. I convinced myself that the first criteria was fulfilled as participants were in the second year of study and were practicing; they were thus aware of their professional learning needs. Verbal fluency was pivotal as the face-to-face interview was the main data generation instrument. Verbal fluency in this study implies ability to speak with ease and choosing and using words appropriately and effortlessly when responding to questions and probes. These participants were university graduates (two had a master’s degree) and interviews sought simple, narrated stories of their professional learning needs in a rural school, not sophisticated levels of interaction (Mukeredzi, 2009). Participants were required to capture my language as drawing out of thoughts, feelings, and perceptions depends, in the main, on the skill of the researcher who should capture the needs relevant and connected to the phenomenon, and be able to probe them further. Regarding commitment, I derived confidence from the fact that participants understood their involvement as voluntary. Accepting to work with me and warmly welcoming me during my interim familiarization visits to their schools pointed toward commitment to my study.

Participants were identified from biographical data records that included geographical location and distance from town. Their biographical data showed diversity in teaching experience, teaching specialization, age, and gender. The mean age was 36 years while the actual ages ranged from 30 to 43 years. Detailed biographical information is provided in Table 2.

Data Generation

Informed by Seidman (1998) that interview data should involve more than one interview, a series of three in-depth semi-structured interviews (following an interview guide) were conducted with each participant. Central to qualitative research design is its flexibility, which enables adjustment of the direction of inquiry from ongoing experiences during generation and reflection on the data (Henning, 2005). This enabled modifications to the data generation instrument after the first interview. Qualitative researchers value multi-modal approaches to data generation (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Thus, interviews were complemented by photo elicitation (Warren, 2005). Each interview lasted approximately 90 min and all were audio recorded. Through a consent form, participants sanctioned taking notes, tape-recording all interviews and using photographs for the research.

Interview 1 addressed the first research question and participants discussed details of their teaching within rural settings to contextualize their professional learning needs and connect them to events that answered the question of what they needed to help them to grow. The second interview, photo elicitation, was based on photographs that participants had taken portraying their professional learning needs. Photo elicitation involves using a photograph or other forms of visual representations in a research interview to promote more direct participant involvement (Warren, 2005), which stimulates data collection. Photographs taken included various stages of lesson delivery, storerooms, textbooks, lesson preparation, and staff room working spaces. Participants used these images as prompts to reflect, further examine, and discuss their learning needs. Interview 3, which addressed the second research question, was meant to promote critical reflection. Participants carefully examined their teaching experiences within the rural school context and how their professional learning needs affected teaching.

I expanded field notes immediately following each interview. I then transcribed the interviews verbatim to ensure accuracy in revealing participants’ views and cross-verified data from different interviews and across different participants. I further verified interview data by checking field notes and taking transcriptions back to participants for “member checking” (Cresswell, 2008).
Table 1. Profiles of School Sites Where Participants Were Teaching.

| School | Distance from town | Road | Facilities | Level and enrollment | Class size | Staff | Resources | Responsible authority | Established before or after independence |
|--------|--------------------|------|------------|----------------------|------------|-------|-----------|-----------------------|----------------------------------------|
| 1      | 90                 | Tarred except 9 km | No telephone No cell network Piped water Electrified | A level 1,200 +/- | 40-45 | 28 | Resourced | Missionary (boarding school) | Before |
| 2      | 60                 | Tarred | No telephone No cell network Piped water Not electrified | O level 700 +/- | 40 +/- | 17 | Under-resourced | Rural district council (rural day school) | After |
| 3      | 77                 | Very bad gravel; only foot access to the last 1-2 km to the school | No telephone No cell network No piped water Not electrified | A level 1,700 +/- | 58 +/- | 29 | Under-resourced | Government (rural day school) | After |
| 4      | 93                 | Tarred except 11 km | No telephone No cell network No piped water Electrified | A level 800 +/- | 40-45 | 19 | Under-resourced | Rural district council day school | After |
| 5      | 66                 | Tarred except 1 km | No telephone No cell network Piped water Not electrified | A level 1,500 +/- | 45-50 | 31 | Resourced | Missionary (boarding school) | After |
| 6      | 113                | Very bad gravel; only foot access to the last 2 km to the school | No telephone No cell network No piped water Not electrified | A level 1,900 +/- | 55-60 | 31 | Under-resourced | Government (rural day school) | After |
Table 2. Biographical Details of Participants.

| No. | Age | Gender | Qualifications            | Subjects taught                | Teaching experience before ITE program | Average class size taught |
|-----|-----|--------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1   | 35  | Male   | Bachelor of arts           | History and geography         | 9                                      | 40-45                    |
| 2   | 43  | Female | Bachelor of arts           | English, religious education   | 7                                      | 38-40                    |
| 3   | 37  | Female | Bachelor of commerce       | Accounting and economics      | 9                                      | 58-60                    |
| 4   | 38  | Male   | Bachelor of arts           | English, Shona                | 7                                      | 40-45                    |
| 5   | 30  | Female | Master of commerce         | Business studies and accounting| 17                                     | 45-50                    |
| 6   | 34  | Male   | Master of arts             | Geography and history         | 6                                      | 45-55                    |

Note. ITE = initial teacher education.

Data Analysis

Data analysis employed qualitative procedures of content analysis, which Plunkett and Dyson (2011) define as “a careful, detailed, systematic examination and interpretation of a particular body of material in an effort to identify patterns, themes, biases and meanings” (p. 37). The process involved reading through transcripts over and over to establish themes, comparing and contrasting them and repeating the process with all transcriptions. I then re-examined the data to ensure appropriate categorization of all the information. At this stage, Cohen et al. (2011) recommend involvement of independent judges to confirm categories of relevant meaning. I therefore sent the data set to my mentor to obtain a critical friend viewpoint to identify errors and omissions and also enhance credibility and trustworthiness. This was followed by re-examining the data and selecting quotes representative of each theme and ensuring appropriate representation across the participants. The quotes would enhance description of the PUPTs’ professional learning needs in their words, which Singleton and Straits (1999) describe as “... capturing in their language and letting them speak for themselves” (p. 349).

Findings

The study investigated the professional learning needs of PUPTs in rural secondary schools. Findings from face-to-face interviews and photo elicitation are pooled and presented together. Data analysis, revealed one overarching theme around general pedagogical and pedagogical content knowledge, resources, and recognition and identity.

General Pedagogical and Pedagogical Content knowledge (GPK, PCK)

GPK comprises segments of pedagogy that enable teachers to draw on principles of child development and the respective teaching approaches, classroom management, and student control (Shulman, 1987). PCK, however, is an amalgam of content and pedagogy to make learning concepts comprehensible for students. All participants highlighted needs around GPK and PCK, as illustrated by the following comments:

I always felt I have the knowledge but imparting it, to impart that knowledge, to dish out the knowledge is my problem. I need knowledge on approaches and methods in order to help students in a professional manner. I know my stuff but lack methodology for teaching I don’t know the techniques of giving that stuff to students. (Teacher 5)

I still get confused as to which method to use, for which content; it’s a big challenge. You also find in my classes, there are very bright students and others very slow; it becomes hard to pitch content at suitable levels for all learners. Another thing, which concept to start with, to proceed with my lesson not too fast, not too slow; I need help with these things ... you are never sure of what you are doing. (Teacher 6)

The evidence above concurs with observations by Yorke and Knight (2006) that disciplinary knowledge alone is insufficient without generic skills to apply and communicate that disciplinary knowledge effectively for student benefit. These PUPTs had content knowledge from their undergraduate degrees but lacked GPK and PCK, specifically knowledge and skills around classroom strategies, sequencing lessons, and an ability to align instructional materials with diverse learner capabilities and methods. Shulman (1987) says PCK is a knowledge domain transcending subject matter per se to the dimension of subject matter knowledge for practice, which is uniquely the province of teachers. Putnam and Borko (2000) emphasize that teachers’ own classrooms are powerful spaces for professional learning. Engaging learners in creative and critical thinking, enabling active learner participation and engaging them in analytical discussions are often challenging to both qualified and unqualified teachers alike. As these PUPTs had gone through professional modules and were nearing completion of their program, it raises questions regarding the adequacy of their program professional modules in preparing teachers for classroom practice. This also challenges the practice of employing unqualified personnel into teaching.
**Resources**

Most teaching resources enhance cognition and have the potential to transform teacher learning in schools and classrooms (Putnam & Borko, 2000). Cognition is not solely an individual asset, but rather, transcends the individual to other people and various material and psychological artifacts of practice (Putnam & Borko, 1997). Putnam and Borko distinguish between performance resources that enhance/change how teachers can accomplish teaching tasks (e.g., overhead projector) and pedagogical resources that focus primarily on transforming the teacher’s competencies (e.g., reading materials). While performance resources assist teachers in doing what they already do, there is little prospect for renovating the teachers’ work or the nature of their classroom practice. Pedagogical artifacts can transform teaching tasks and support teacher learning in ways that strengthen beliefs about the social, situated, and distributed nature of cognition (Putnam & Borko, 2000). Multimedia resources, for instance, can enable teachers to question and explore unfamiliar pedagogical practices and various complexities of pedagogy thereby extending their knowledge in various domains. Moreover, from reading and considering other materials, teachers can start viewing their practice from pedagogical and psychological lenses and investigate classroom landscapes like teaching strategies, classroom relations, and student participation, simultaneously becoming more familiar with these aspects.

Study findings indicate that PUPTs’ professional learning and classroom engagements were severely hampered by lack of both performance and pedagogical resources as they were always forced into “making-do.” Participants expressed in strong terms the need for resources. To illustrate, Teacher 2 lamented,

I have to be open: our school is very poor. We have no reading materials for teachers, even students’ textbooks. There is no library or other resources for us teachers. Without reading resources, it limits what you can learn as a teacher and what you can do with students, all you worry about is making the little resources produce a lesson.

All participants voiced strongly that the limited performance and pedagogical resources (Putnam & Borko, 1997) were the most difficult aspect of rural school teaching. Rather than a constant and iterative engagement and exploration of opportunities to construct and reconstruct professional knowledge-in-practice (Kelly, 2006) within their particular situated dimensions (Day & Gu, 2007), such engagement was impaired by lack of these artifacts of practice. PUPTs viewed their classroom practice as driven by having to “make-do.” Teacher 4 explained,

It’s teaching by “making-do,” continuously searching for resources without actually getting much learning from it. It’s all improvisation; at the end of the day you find that you have not really learnt anything or professionally developed because you have nothing to read . . . you cannot experiment with other teaching methods like project work, there are no books for students to read . . . you are always joining bits and pieces to produce a lesson.

Reading resources make effective vehicles for professional learning as they provide teachers with visions of what innovative teaching might look like (Putnam & Borko, 2000). “Making-do” implies using whatever available performance artifacts of practice to assist teachers in doing what they already do (produce a lesson), albeit not necessarily transforming their practice. This raises questions about the appropriateness of the curriculum for these rural schools. It appears, teachers had to adapt the curriculum and draw performance artifacts from the situated rural context to present lessons. Hence, the limited artifacts of practice in this study restrained the process of professional learning.

**Recognition and Identity**

Recognition and identity appeared to be significant in the PUPTs’ learning and classroom practice. Ideally, teachers’ professional learning should be self-regulated and self-motivated, involving both intellectual and emotional processes to enrich their knowledge base and enhance classroom practice and self-efficacy (Day & Gu, 2007). However, the conditions in which these PUPTs operated did not always promote these important emotional aspects. Five of the six participants highlighted a need for recognition and appreciation. Teacher 5 commented,

I need encouragement, recognition for a job well done after producing good results. Acknowledging my efforts motivates me to do more and in the process I get to experience more learning and job satisfaction. You then want to try more improvisation and experimentation and that develops you.

Recognition generally refers to acknowledgment and affirmation within a given setting, in this context, within the school. These teachers saw this as vital for their motivation and commitment to professional learning and classroom delivery. Day and Gu (2007), Durning and Artino (2011), Kelly (2006), and Putnam and Borko (1997, 2000) emphasize the social nature of professional learning and the central role of school contexts as the primary sites for teacher learning that can either diminish or advance teachers’ motivation and commitment to professional learning and practice. Sentiments expressed above portray unfavorable school contexts and fluctuations between the personal and situated dimensions, which weaken commitment to professional learning and practice. Recognition would motivate them to keep going even when things seem to be going downhill. Schools need to establish communication cultures that promote teacher learning and teacher practice, maintaining a balance between encouraging individual members and critically analyzing issues in their practice.
Data also indicate that these teachers had the desire to enhance their “self” in the eyes of colleagues, as illustrated in the following comments:

I feel this void in my career, I am hurting! I have no confidence; they call us temporary teachers and look down upon us. In the staff room, they reserve a different table for us. You become demotivated to do anything, you can’t think of learning, you are dealing with these issues . . . want to remain in your cocoon. (Teacher 4)

You see yourself as deficient, inadequate . . . seeing younger ones coming from teachers’ colleges heading on to being promoted HOD is painful . . . they don’t promote you no matter how good you are or your transcript is . . . these things affect your dedication to learning and even teaching, you just do the bare minimum . . . (Teacher 1)

A temporary teacher in the Zimbabwean context referred to somebody who was acting, teaching in the interim, or assuming the duties of a permanent qualified teacher for the time being pending the return of the professional. This position was often assumed by “O” level or “A” level graduates without other qualification. Often, they would take up these positions as convenient spin-offs while waiting or scouting around for something more lasting to engage in.

Teachers professionally learn and teach better when they care about, not cared for). Caring about involves expressions of professional beliefs and emotional commitment and support that transcend the contractual obligation of caring for (Day & Gu, 2007, p. 428). Scorning and labeling them temporary teacher were neither expressions of caring about nor caring for. These extreme fluctuations between the personal, situated, and professional dimensions caused loss of self-esteem, anxiety, and demotivation. Moreover, teachers’ sense of well-being is closely attached to how they define themselves as professionals and how they see their professionalism being defined by others. Any differences create tensions that may obstruct commitment to learning and classroom performance. Stephenson (1998) contends that status, competence, and relationships within institutional settings are strong factors for shaping teacher identity, learning, and classroom delivery. Competence implies academic and professional capabilities and qualifications, executing, strategizing, and managing their teaching activities. Moreover, knowing and learning are constructed through participation in the discourse and practices of communities and are shaped by the physical, professional, and social dimensions in which they occur (Durning & Artino, 2011; Putnam & Borko, 2000). Conversely, the way these PUPTs perceived their space in the situated dimension and the way they were perceived within this dimension negatively affected their commitment to professional learning, professional identity, and professional performance.

Teacher 1 also raised promotional issues that may imply professional learning needs related to promotional aspirations. Day and Gu (2007) in analyzing professional life phases (number of years teachers have been teaching) contend that promotion is a significant factor for teacher motivation and commitment to professional learning and classroom effectiveness from 4 years onwards. Five participants were in the 6- to 9-year professional life phase (see Table 2). Teachers’ capacities for professional learning and classroom practice are influenced mainly by their commitment, mediated by positive professional identity, professional and situated factors in their work, and their professional life phases (Day & Gu, 2007). Apparently, these PUPTs had limited resilience; hence, the extreme fluctuations within the situated and professional dimensions negatively affected their commitment to professional learning and classroom practice. Thus, being valued and supported professionally and personally by school colleagues would promote and sustain high levels of commitment to learning. Retrospectively, one also questions the motives behind enrolling on the ITE program, whether indeed it was for gaining professional knowledge and skills or for fulfilling other motives.

Discussion and Implications

This study investigated professional learning needs from the perspective of the PUPTs in rural secondary schools and how that affected their practice as they traversed and negotiated their contexts in becoming teaching professionals. Findings indicate that, overall, PUPTs’ professional learning needs were around GPK and PCK, resources, and recognition and identity.

The PUPTs professionally needed GPK and PCK. GPK represents aspects of pedagogy that apply to teachers, regardless of their specialized subject matter knowledge, which encompasses knowledge of generic principles of classroom teaching, organization, and management (Shulman, 1987). PCK enables the teacher to transform subject knowledge into sequenced and graded developmental tasks for learning and assessment. Regardless of the PUPTs’ program level of study, they still needed guidance on these critical pedagogical aspects. One wonders whether the university professional modules to which the teacher-students were exposed were adequate and appropriate for preparing these PUPTs for classroom practice. It may also be that their perceptions of their professional learning needs were influenced by their schooling experiences as what teachers do or do not do is in response to their prior learning experiences as students (Allender & Allender, 2006). Judging by the ages of these participants (see Table 2), it is likely that they experienced teacher-centered pedagogies, as opposed to the interactive student-centered pedagogies upon which modules on this program were built (Zimbabwe Open University Regulations, 2000).

The weak level of teaching resources in rural schools remains an objective reality that constrains teacher learning and curriculum delivery, imposing the most difficulties in
rural school teaching (Hlalele, 2012; Lowe, 2006; Mitchell et al., 2011; Mukeredzi, 2009; Pennefather, 2011; Plunkett & Dyson, 2011; Redding & Walberg, 2012). Teacher learning often succeeds in settings that support it. The PUPTs blamed lack of performance and pedagogical resources for inhibiting professional learning and classroom effectiveness as “making-do” only assisted them in doing what “they already do” (Putnam & Borko, 2000). Effective teacher learning is promoted in settings that acknowledge their schools routinely and typically as sites for both teachers’ and students’ learning and where teacher professional learning is entrenched in each teacher’s daily teaching habits. The focus should be to embed professional learning in the practices and attitudes of all teachers in every school given the “stretched over” nature of teacher learning (Kelly, 2006; Putnam & Borko, 1997, 2000). It needs to be understood that success in cognitive functions is an organizational achievement, built with contributions of all participants, along with artifacts. Without adequate artifacts as reported in this study, PUPTs’ classroom experiences may not offer much exploration of the wealth, depth, and complexity of authentic pedagogical issues to enhance consideration and understanding of other perspectives (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1989). Besides, teaching should provide multiple knowing-in-practice opportunities through trial and error and experimentation with novel teaching strategies different from their prior experiences as students (Cavanagh & Garvey, 2012; Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1989). Furthermore, flexibility, inventions, and strategic judgment required to handle classroom complexities (Zeichner, 2010) were minimal as development of these skills is effective with adequate psychological and material mediational artifact support. The “making-do” inventions in this study did not promote meta-cognition and more differentiated multi-dimensional and specific problem solving abilities to make strategic judgments (Cavanagh & Garvey, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2006). These contextual realities about under-resourcing are complex issues that require collaborative effort. School resourcing should involve all stakeholders in education: local-, national-, and provincial-level policy makers, principals, teachers, and parents. Barriers between stakeholders should be broken and collaborative goal setting undertaken to develop and supply rural school resources (Mukeredzi, 2013). In addition, new knowledge from research and reflection should be introduced to teacher-students during professional courses to prepare them for managing these fluctuations in their situated dimensions (Day & Gu, 2007) in rural schools and classrooms. This implies that topics around teaching in marginalized contexts should be factored into teacher education curriculum.

Findings also indicate that PUPTs had needs relating to expectations of acknowledgment and identity. It should be borne in mind that “dented” emotional aspects (confidence, motivation, commitment) and the label “temporary teacher” negatively affect the PUPTs’ professional learning and classroom delivery as recognition/misrecognition makes a powerful weapon for teacher social and professional identity (Zehava & Salman, 2008). In the event of misrecognition, unqualified teachers are often daunted with stress from feelings of vulnerability and isolation and conflicts between personal and professional identities. Consequently, they lose motivation and commitment to both their learning and their practice as reflected in this study. Teaching is not merely a cognitive or technical engagement but a complex, personal, social, and often elusive set of embedded processes and practices that concern the “whole person” (personal, social, and professional being; Bell & Gilbert, 1996; Putnam & Borko, 1997).

Given the power of the context (Durning & Artino, 2011; Kelly, 2006; Putnam & Borko, 2000), PUPTs need recognition and identity within their situated dimensions to enhance their learning and teaching commitment as they work through both the personal and the professional ramifications of teaching, navigating their way through the evolutionary stages in the “process of becoming” (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1989). The loss of confidence and the struggles to develop the “work ego” to help them make sense of the profession hindered the PUPTs’ professional learning as school contexts typically did not emphasize sharing of learning and cognitive performance, but rather, fore-grounded individual competencies. There is need to embrace and value collaborative critical reflective practice. Approaches to teacher professional learning, which support the development of robust reflective, discursive, collaborative teacher engagements that foster recognition of identity and so be more deliberate in their actions and in the stances they take in their working lives need to be promoted (Kelly, 2006). This can provide space for learning with and from each other, creating, reflecting on, and sharing teacher knowledge. Schools as primary sites for teacher learning (Cavanagh & Garvey, 2012; Kelly, 2006) should provide favorable environments to enhance teachers’ sense of space and energy to learn, their identity, efficacy, and effectiveness to uphold their motivation and commitment to effective learning and practice in a range of circumstances (Day & Gu, 2007). Provision of favorable conditions for professional learning demands understanding and consideration of the various positive and negative scenarios that affect teachers’ professional identities and, consequently, their sense of commitment to professional learning and classroom effectiveness.

**Conclusion**

The study explored professional learning needs of the PUPTs in rural secondary schools and how that affected their practice during their journeys to becoming teaching professionals. From the findings, PUPTs’ professional learning needs related to GPK and PCK, resources, and recognition and identity. However, this study also raises questions regarding the adequacy and appropriateness of the professional
modules that participants were exposed to in the professional program. While challenges reported in this may be experienced in any setting, they tend to be more aggravated in rural spaces due to issues of geography among others. This small investigation explored only six Zimbabwean PUPTs, but given the strong link between teacher professional learning and classroom practice, these insights need more comprehensive investigation.

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