ENHANCING CONTENT, PEDAGOGY, AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT: AN EXAMINATION OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH THE LENS OF MIDDLE SCHOOL SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS

Presley Shilling

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ENHANCING CONTENT, PEDAGOGY, AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT: AN EXAMINATION OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH THE LENS OF MIDDLE SCHOOL SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS

by

Presley T. Shilling

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Abstract

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This study aimed to investigate middle school social studies teachers’ perceptions of professional development and its relation to the teacher's knowledge of the subject, teaching methods, and improving student outcomes. The primary questions addressed in this study focused on middle school social studies teachers perceptions of current professional development offerings, content-knowledge, pedagogy, and student achievement.

The participants of this study included nine middle school social studies teachers selected through nonrandom purposeful sampling. A qualitative case study method, utilizing semi-structured interviews, investigated four research questions: (a) What are middle school social studies teachers' perceptions of professional development? (b) What are middle school social studies teachers' perceptions regarding professional development and its relation to the subject? (c) What are middle school social studies teachers' perceptions regarding professional development concerning pedagogy? (d) What are middle school social studies teachers' perceptions regarding professional development in relation to student achievement?

Three themes were identified from data provided by middle school social studies teachers that participated in this study: a) effective professional development should be relevant and applicable to impact pedagogy and classroom practices; b) teachers seek professional development opportunities that strengthen their content knowledge and align with state-mandated standards; c) traditional professional development practices place a strong emphasis on the examination and interpretation of student data.
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

This study investigated middle school social studies teachers’ perceptions regarding professional development and its relation to the teacher’s knowledge of the subject, teaching methods, and improving student achievement. Over the past three decades, researchers have identified common features of effective professional development (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; De La Paz et al., 2011; Desimone, 2009). These common features encompass a focus on content, active learning, collaboration, effective practice models, coaching and expert support, feedback and reflection, and sustained duration. In the past 25 years, many studies have confirmed that engaging in high-quality professional development can result in positive changes in school improvement, teacher practices, and student outcomes (Baird & Clark, 2018; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Therefore, analyzing social studies teachers’ perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes toward professional development can significantly benefit educational research.

The early concept of professional development in the United States educational system can trace its origins to the 1830s with the introduction of common schools. The first common schools aimed to offer free education, provide teacher training, and establish state oversight of public schools (Church, 1976). Prominent leaders in the common school system, such as James Carter, Horace Mann, and Henry Barnard, strongly advocated for the importance of teacher education. As the number of new schools in the country increased, so did the need for a larger pool of well-educated teachers (Labaree, 2008; MacMullen, 1991). As the common school system emerged, there was an attempt to establish a formal teacher preparation system for these schools. Implementing a standardized and structured training program for all teachers was
deemed necessary, as many preservice teachers did not undergo formal training during their higher education. As a result, it was deemed advantageous to pursue professional development. With an established application of professional development implemented to produce highly qualified teachers, the evolution in public education from the common school to the one-room schoolhouse provided a new series of challenges for both educators and students.

Soon after, the inaugural state normal school, arguably one of the first formal efforts to provide public school teachers with professional development opportunities, was established in Lexington, Massachusetts, in 1839 (Harper, 1939). The state normal school was founded to provide high school graduates with the necessary training to become adequate teachers. The institution held a strong belief that teaching, like any other scientific discipline, could be taught effectively through modeling and observation (Tansil, 1929). Its core objective was to establish and uphold standardized teaching norms and standards. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, educational reformers believed that state normal schools were essential in enhancing public education in the United States by providing rigorous professional learning to aspiring teachers. Normal schools emphasized the importance of highly skilled teachers who served as role models across the country to improve the quality of teaching and student achievement (Labaree, 2008). As public education grew in the late 1800s, normal schools rapidly expanded throughout the United States, increasing from 39 in 1870 to 103 in 1890 to 180 in 1910 after its initial conception in 1839 (Ogren, 2005, pp. 1-2).

In the early 1900s, Northeastern normal schools in Massachusetts and New York were the first to offer teachers four years of college education and the opportunity to earn a bachelor's degree. This change allowed preservice teachers to pursue a post-secondary degree, which initiated the shift from the concept of “normal schools” to "teachers' colleges." In 1915, the
Missouri Governor in conjunction with the State Department of Education invited the Carnegie Foundation to conduct a study on the state's remaining normal schools. In 1920, the resulting study titled "The Professional Preparation of Teachers for American Public Schools: A Study Based Upon the Examination of Tax Supported Normal Schools in the State of Missouri" recommended that normal schools should give more importance to the professional growth of teachers by providing content-specific preparation and differentiated curriculum training. Soon after, the implementation of this report marked a significant turning point in the field of teacher preparation in the 1930s. This report was instrumental in professionalizing teaching by transforming normal schools into specialized institutions called teacher colleges. In doing so, colleges provided future educators with a standardized highly-specific educational curriculum.

During the pedagogical transition from the normal school concept to teacher colleges, the National Association of Directors of Supervised Student Teaching was formed in 1920 to foster a culture of diversity and inclusivity by providing professional development opportunities for all of its teacher members, enabling them to broaden their research agendas through networking and scholarly activities (Jenlink & Peace, 2012). In 1946, the organization's name changed to the Association for Student Teaching. The Association for Student Teaching played a significant role in guiding teachers' education through various means, such as organizing seminars, workshops, and conferences for preservice, graduate, and in-service teacher preparation (Chernay & Kaplan, 1994). This association ascended as the premier professional organization to provide ongoing support for teacher professional development to the early 1950s, when a series of international and national events, coupled with increased federal standards, led to a distinct transition in professional development.
Established in 1946, The National Commission on Teacher Education and Professional Standards (NCTEPS) aimed to provide uniform standards for teacher recruitment, training, and professional development (Klausmeier, 1990). In 1953, NCTEPS acknowledged that the teaching profession was facing a significant challenge due to its inability to attract and retain talented individuals. The organization proposed various methods to enhance the profession's appeal, such as extending scholarship opportunities and offering reasonable starting salaries and retirement benefits (Klausmeier, 1990). To improve retention, the NCTEPS advised prioritizing enhancing teacher training and professional development. The organization's recommendations included upgrading facilities for teacher education, improving the curriculum with a focus on subject-matter concentration, and promoting professional growth and interaction (Klausmeier, 1990). Furthermore, the organization encouraged the practice of experienced teachers visiting other classrooms and sharing their expertise with their colleagues. In 1956, Arthur Bestor, an educational reformer, proposed encouraging teachers to continue their professional development and continuing education. Bestor indicated the need to award additional certifications for completing further professional development to ensure that teachers continued their education post-degree(s) (Klausmeier, 1990). Compounding the need for professional development and continuing education was a series of events that subjected the United States to reexamine its educational system collectively.

During the late 1950s, American education shifted its focus toward academic learning goals focused on science and mathematics. In 1957, the Soviet Union launched Sputnik, the world's first artificial satellite to orbit Earth. This event caused the public and Congress to worry that American schools were not academically up to par with other nations. During that same year, two researchers from Purdue University conducted a public opinion poll that reinforced
concerns about the education system's failure to adequately serve its students. The Purdue Public Opinion Poll (1957) revealed that children have a restricted comprehension of their constitutional rights and are lacking in civics education. As a result of these events, there was a surge in funding for mathematics and science education, along with criticism of teachers and the school curriculum. Furthermore, legislative education reform acts like the National Defense Education Act of 1958 (NDEA) were enacted. This legislation increased federal aid for math, science, and foreign language programs (Byford & Russell, 2007). In addition, Title III of NDEA provided states with funds to improve mathematics, science, and foreign language instruction by presenting teachers with professional development opportunities (Jolly, 2009). Toward the end of the 1950s, teachers were heavily criticized and blamed for the education system's shortcomings. However, it became clear that improving teacher education was vital for enhancing student learning.

During the 1960s and 1970s, when public schools were updated and transformed in response to foreign and domestic circumstances, educators realized there was a chasm between the lack of collaboration between K-12 schools and universities' teacher training programs (Neapolitan & Levine, 2011). In 1965, President Lyndon Johnson implemented a key measure to enhance the American education system through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). As mandated in the legislation, critical funding was to be carried out over five years for educational resources, including professional development, instructional materials, and resources to support educational programs (ESEA, 1965; Gamson et al., 2015; Paul, 2016). The professional development opportunities that arose from the ESEA in the late 1960s and 1970s, such as conferences, workshops, keynote speakers, and seminars, were considered poor quality. The efficacy of the sessions was deemed inadequate due to their brevity, lack of relevance,
absence of engagement, and failure to provide sufficient reflection time (Newmann et al., 2000; Sparks & Hirsh, 1997; Speck & Knipe, 2001). Despite the misgivings of the initial attempts set forth by the ESEA to improve professional development opportunities for teachers, the 1980s saw a resurgence of interest among teacher organizations nationwide regarding effective professional development.

During the 1980s, teachers' associations recognized that the professional development programs they had in place were not effectively improving teaching and learning outcomes. As a result, they began to redefine the concept of professional development (Speck & Knipe, 2001). In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education published the report "A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform." This report raised concerns about the quality of education provided in K-12 schools, questioned the competency of the teaching staff in America, and encouraged the training of teachers in specific subjects (Guest, 1993; Hunzicker, 2018; Rutter, 2011). After the release of "A Nation at Risk," multiple reports were published with suggestions for improvement. One such report was "Teacher Development in Schools" by the Ford Foundation's Academy for Education Development in 1985, which proposed continuous professional development and varying duties for teachers (Guest, 1993; Rutter, 2011). The report emphasized the importance of teachers thoroughly understanding how learning occurs, regardless of their subject area expertise (Guest, 1993). Guest (1993) suggests that teachers knowledgeable about children, the subjects they teach, the process of learning, and the world around them are more likely to effectively assess comprehension, identify misunderstandings, and encourage critical thinking to promote genuine understanding. This expertise enables them to tailor their approaches and utilize various teaching methods to meet the unique needs of each student.
Of particular interest, the 1986 report, "A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century," was released by the Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a Profession. The report illustrated the need for teacher comprehension of subject matter, differentiated pedagogy, and cognitive growth (Guest, 1993). Additionally, teachers needed to be knowledgeable about their students' various needs and learning styles. The report recommended several changes to the U.S. educational system, such as higher professional standards and increased accountability (Rutter, 2011). A vital suggestion in the report was to create university teaching centers and clinical schools to assist in teacher education programs. The report's recommendation signaled the federal government's readiness to finance extensive and structured professional development programs, such as the creation of Professional Development Schools (PDSs) (Hunzicker, 2018).

Building on the proposed establishment of teaching and clinical schools to aid in teacher development, the 1986 report "Tomorrow's Teachers: A Report of the Holmes Group" linked teacher professionalization to improving student learning and outcomes. It stressed the value of professional learning communities and teacher leadership opportunities. (Guest, 1993; Rutter, 2011). The report outlined five objectives to enhance teaching: improving the intellectual foundation of teacher education, acknowledging variations in teachers' knowledge, skills, and dedication, establishing professional and intellectually sound standards for entry into the field, bridging the gap between educational institutions and schools, and enhancing the working and learning environments of teachers in schools (Holmes Group, 1986, p. 4). In 1989, the Project 30 Year One Report, “The Reform of Teacher Education for the 21st Century,” called for teachers to possess subject-matter understanding, general and liberal knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and multicultural, international, and human perspectives (Guest, 1993). Several reports, including “A Nation Prepared”, “Tomorrow's Teachers”, and “The Reform of Teacher
Education”, have consecutively emphasized the importance of improving educators’ content knowledge, teaching methods, and understanding of their students.

In 1990, the Holmes Group released a second report, "Tomorrow's Schools: Principles for the Design of Professional Development Schools," which enunciated the group’s vision for Professional Development Schools (PDSs). Professional Development Schools (PDSs), a specific type of school-university partnership, aimed to enhance the preparation of preservice teachers by placing them in real classroom settings where they could learn alongside experienced classroom teachers and gain practical knowledge (Rutter, 2006; Teitel, 1999). These schools were based on six principles: teaching and learning for understanding, creating a learning community, teaching and learning for all children, continuing education for teachers, thoughtful inquiry into teaching and learning, and inventing a new institution (Holmes, 1990, p. 7). Jointly, "Tomorrow's Teachers" and "Tomorrow's Schools" marked the beginning of the PDSs movement. This movement emphasized the importance of providing teachers with ongoing high-quality professional development opportunities throughout their careers (Hunzicker, 2018). Research has shown that PDSs initiatives have provided adequate training for preservice teachers and improved student performance through curriculum and teaching interventions (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2013).

In a comparable reform effort, John Goodlad and his colleagues founded the National Network for Educational Renewal (NNER) in 1990. This organization was formed with the noble objective of fostering a productive partnership between schools and universities to enhance the quality of teacher preparation, professionalism, and eventually, student achievement (Rutter, 2011). It was the belief of the NNER that the best way to achieve systemic change in the education system was through an effective collaboration between professional education and
school renewal (Neapolitan & Levine, 2011). The NNER identified four key areas for joint effort, namely, teacher preparation, professional development, curriculum development, and research/inquiry. It should be noted that leadership development was a significant component of this partnership at all stages of one's career. The NNER stressed the gravity of continuous professional growth at all stages of one's career (Neapolitan & Levine, 2011). The reports released in the years following "A Nation at Risk" regularly mentioned effective teacher professionalism and its connection to meaningful school reform.

During the Clinton Administration (1994), the Goals 2000: Educate America Act provided significant justification to the K-12 reform initiative. The Act enshrined the National Education Goals established by President Bush and Governor Clinton in 1990 into law. The legislation's primary objective was to motivate states to implement reforms that would enable all students to achieve challenging academic standards set by local education agencies and states. The Goals 2000 program aimed to motivate states to set higher standards, provide support to improve teacher training, and delegate decision-making power to the local level for high-quality education and meeting challenging standards. Darling-Hammond & Sykes (1999) stated that traditional professional development is the most pressing issue in American education policy and practice.

In 1996, following the implementation of the Goals 2000: Educate America Act, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future published a report recommending the creation of dependable and high-quality means for professional development by states, schools, and universities. The report suggested embedding professional development in teachers’ daily work through joint planning, study groups, peer coaching, and research. According to a recent study, math teachers who received curriculum-based professional development demonstrated
better teaching practices, leading to higher math achievement for students on state assessments (Yoon et al., 2007). Educational scholars and policymakers recognized the significance of teacher learning in enhancing student outcomes. Consequently, there was a surge in demand for professional development programs that can aid teachers in expanding their subject-knowledge and acquiring new teaching practices.

Following the 1996 report, President Clinton encouraged states to take more responsibility by urging them to adopt standards for all K-12 students. President Clinton's ongoing efforts to implement Goals 2000: Educate America Act led to the establishment of standards for students in most states and the implementation of measures to meet these standards, resulting in an increase in student achievement. As an illustration, funds from Goals 2000 were used to create two educator development centers in Texas. These centers aimed to offer training and professional development in English language arts and social studies to help teachers, schools, and districts implement the new Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) standards (Schwartz et al., 2000). Additionally, the centers shared models for practical instructional strategies and effective staff development. By 1999, 45 states had established academic standards for English, Math, Science, and Social Studies during the Clinton administration (Schwartz et al., 2000). The forty-five states had already aligned their assessments with these standards, and most reported having already implemented them. Additionally, 17 states had policies for professional development that were in line with the standards being developed or already established (Schwartz et al., 2000). While the Goals 2000: Educate America Act had some successes, it ultimately did not fulfill its objective of delivering equitable educational opportunities for every student.
The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was a significant education reform President George W. Bush introduced in 2001. The NCLB overhauled the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and became the primary federal law governing K-12 education. The NCLB initiative grew out of the concern that the American education system was falling behind its international competitors by holding schools responsible for improving student achievement for all students through mandated standardized tests and minimum performance benchmarks. As per the legal requirements, third- to eighth-grade students were obligated to take reading and math assessments. Additionally, states were responsible for ensuring that all teachers met the highly qualified standard, meaning they hold a bachelor's degree and state certification in their subject. According to NCLB, schools must provide high-quality professional development for teachers to enhance their performance and boost student achievement. NCLB identified specific standards that professional development activities should meet, such as improving teachers’ knowledge in academic subjects, school-wide and district-wide educational plans, and skills to help students meet challenging state academic standards (NCLB, 2002). However, the act did not specify what high-quality professional development entails or how it should be made available to teachers (Borko, 2004). Regrettably, the No Child Left Behind era led to a decline in access to long-term professional development methods while short-term solutions increased due to high demand (Wei et al., 2010). However, this era of educational reform did demonstrate some promise.

In a national study on professional development, findings indicated that 59% of teachers participated in content-specific professional development in 2000 as compared to 87% in 2008 (Wei, et al. 2010). However, the study also found that 90% of U.S. teachers still attend traditional passive-learning professional development (PD) sessions, which have limited impact
on their teaching practices or student learning (Wei, et al. 2010). Additionally, the study revealed that most teachers receive short-duration PD in after-school workshops (Wei, et al. 2010). Research has shown that for professional development sessions to be effective, there should be active participation from attendees and the sessions should last for a sustained amount of time (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; De La Paz et al., 2011; Desimone, 2009; Wilson, 2009).

In 2015, The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) replaced the NCLB Act. The main goal of ESSA was to ensure that public schools offer high-quality education to all students. This legislation revised the definition of professional development to encompass ongoing and personalized job-embedded activities that are accessible to all school staff, including paraprofessionals (ESSA, 2015). The act mandated teacher residency programs to enhance clinical training opportunities and required regular evaluations of professional development (ESSA, 2015). Furthermore, professional development was now part of the broader school improvement plan and requires teacher, principal, and school leader academies to meet the needs of educators.

In the past 30 years, educational experts have discovered and incorporated impactful strategies to facilitate successful professional development sessions (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; De La Paz et al., 2011; Desimone, 2009) These strategies include a concentration on subject matter, hands-on participation, teamwork, practical techniques, guidance from mentors, constructive feedback, introspection, and long-term commitment. In order to enhance student learning, it is often necessary for teachers to improve their own skills and instructional methods. As such, their professional development is considered a crucial aspect of education reform (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999; Thacker, 2017).
Context of Problem

In 2000, the federal government established the Teaching American History Program (TAH), which provided millions of dollars to enhance teachers' understanding of U.S. history (De La Paz et al., 2011). This reform aimed to improve social studies teachers' expertise in both subject matter and teaching methods through effective professional development and learning opportunities (De La Paz et al., 2011). In 2011, education secretary Duncan emphasized the importance of social studies education in creating a balanced education. However, the funds for the Teaching American History grant were combined with the Effective Teaching and Learning for a Well-Rounded Education Grant in the same year (Duncan, 2011).

Social studies teachers often encounter the effects of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, which has created flawed incentives for states and school districts to prioritize English and math at the expense of other important subjects like social studies (Duffield et al., 2013; Duncan, 2011; Perrotta, 2021). This neglect can undermine the quality of a well-rounded education and limit funding opportunities for social studies educators. Funding for social studies professional development is seldom prioritized resulting in the marginalization of social studies teachers’ development compared to their colleagues (Hess & Zola, 2012; Swan & Griffin, 2013).

According to Grant (2003), most social studies teachers tend to view professional development with a negative attitude. Specifically, they believe that the current offerings are insufficient (Borko, 2004). Professional development sessions for social studies have typically been brief and condensed workshops, despite research showing that longer-term professional development is more effective (Duffield et al., 2013). In a study on secondary social studies teachers and their professional learning habits, it was observed that these teachers tend to opt for non-traditional, informal methods of learning over the traditional professional development.
programs (Thacker, 2017). One reason for this may be that school districts do not provide enough professional learning opportunities focused on social studies content and aligned pedagogical methods for teachers. Experts have emphasized the importance of enhancing content knowledge to improve teaching effectiveness, particularly in the area of social studies (Duffield et al., 2013). This highlights the necessity for specialized professional development sessions focused on social studies education and its implementation in the classroom. By studying the viewpoints of social studies teachers on professional development, schools can create more effective programs that lead to improved learning outcomes for teachers and, ultimately, better academic performance for students.

**Statement of the Problem**

In middle grades, social studies has often been overlooked as schools focused more on math and literacy, in line with federal education guidelines like the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015). Schools tend to emphasize subjects that affect their performance, accountability, and funding, leading to the marginalization of social studies. In Tennessee, social studies is specified less in the state's school and district accountability system compared to other tested subjects (TDOE, 2021). Consequently, both social studies and its educators often lack recognition and respect. The result often demonstrates a lack of pedagogical and content resources and effective professional development. In the past ten years, state laws have concentrated on enhancing schools, precisely teacher qualifications and training, as an essential element for improvement (Attard, 2017). In order to follow these regulations, states have prioritized creating effective learning opportunities for all teachers to develop their pedagogy and improve instruction for better student outcomes (Baird & Clark, 2018).

The Tennessee Department of Education introduced the “Best for All" strategic plan in
2019 to comply with new federal education guidelines (TDOE, 2019). One of the strategic
objectives was to implement actions that would lead to the professional development of teachers,
enhanced pedagogy, and improved student content retention and success. The “Best for All”
strategic plan provided various resources and professional development opportunities for
educators to enhance their teaching skills and knowledge, thereby providing an opportunity for
teachers to create a conducive learning environment for students. In Spring 2020, the Tennessee
Department of Education launched the “Best for All Central Hub” to offer free, online access to
high-quality resources for K-12 education stakeholders. However, the initiative only offers
resources and professional development for Science, Technology, Reading, Engineering, Arts,
and Math (STREAM) subjects. The lack of support for tested and less publicized content areas
like social studies is unfortunate as social studies teachers are undoubtedly held to the same
standards as their fellow colleagues on the state-produced accountability rubrics, the Tennessee
Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM) and Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System
(TVAAS). TEAM evaluations assess a teacher’s effectiveness and professionalism, whereas
TVAAS measures student achievement in relation to state-mandated testing. Studies indicate that
successful professional development for teachers requires an emphasis on content, active
learning, effective practice models, and sustained duration (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Darling-
Hammond et al., 2017; De La Paz et al., 2011; Desimone, 2009). Unfortunately, these crucial
elements are often absent from the professional development opportunities provided to social
studies teachers.

While there is ample research on the critical components of effective professional
development, it is essential also to consider teachers' perceptions of what works and how it leads
to better instruction and student achievement (Brendefur et al., 2016; Darling-Hammond, 1997;
Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; De La Paz et al., 2011; Desimone, 2009). The manner in which teachers approach and involve themselves in the educational process can significantly influence their pupils' academic success. Hence, school districts must consider the perceptions of their teaching staff and design initiatives that encourage effective teaching practices, which will lead to better academic outcomes for students (Pharis et al., 2019). Gaining insight into the viewpoints of social studies educators regarding professional development can significantly enhance the caliber and accessibility of programs and opportunities within this undervalued education sector. The inequitable distribution of professional development resources to social studies teachers compared to their counterparts teaching mathematics, science, or literacy necessitates the need to rectify this disparity.

**Purpose of the Study**

In the current study, the researcher investigated middle school social studies teachers' perceptions regarding professional development and its relation to subject content knowledge, pedagogy, and student achievement. This study aimed to provide insights into the attitudes of social studies teachers in a southeastern state towards professional development and how they perceive its effects. Recent studies indicate that teachers, school and district leaders and state stakeholders emphasize data and outcomes more due to new educational reforms (Behari, 2014; Pharis et al., 2019). Current research reinforces the notion that districts should prioritize professional development to meet the needs of teachers, ensure academic progress and student achievement, and cultivate effective educators (Brendefur et al., 2016; Schachter et al., 2019). According to Guskey, effective professional development should increase a teacher's content knowledge and pedagogy. However, these characteristics are often associated with mathematics and science, neglecting social studies (2003). Therefore, this study can aid policymakers, school
administrations, and professional development designers in creating preferable and more tailored professional learning experiences for social studies teachers to enhance teacher practice and student achievement. This research has the potential to illuminate social studies teachers' concerns about the lack of content-specific professional development opportunities and how it affects their teaching and students' academic performance.

**Research Methods**

To determine middle school social studies teachers' perceptions of professional development, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Nine middle school social studies teachers were sampled using nonrandom purposeful sampling from a Southeastern state’s western region. The investigation is qualitative, incorporating a case study methodology. Interview transcripts, field notes, and document analysis were triangulated for theme identification.

**Research Questions**

1. What are middle school social studies teachers' perceptions regarding professional development?
2. What are middle school social studies teachers' perceptions regarding professional development and its relation to the subject?
3. What are middle school social studies teachers' perceptions regarding professional development concerning pedagogy?
4. What are middle school social studies teachers' perceptions regarding professional development in relation to student achievement?
Scope and Limitations

In conducting the study, numerous efforts were made to ensure accuracy, reliability, and validity. Nevertheless, the study had several limitations. One limitation was the small number of participants asked to partake in the study. For the researcher's convenience, participants were selected only from one southeastern state, limiting the geographical range. In addition, only public middle school teachers were included as participants. As a result, it is possible that the findings of the study may not be generalizable to teachers in elementary and high schools. Another limitation of the study lies in scheduling interviews, which may have been difficult due to the conflicting schedules between participants and the researcher. Additionally, the study did not offer any concrete benefit to the participants, which may have led to some selected participants opting out of the study.

Definition of Terms

Several terms listed here were referenced throughout the study. Such terms were developed through the literature review (Chapter 2). These terms are listed below:

Professional Development - formal and informal learning that enhances teachers' knowledge and practices, improving student learning outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Content Knowledge - represents the accumulated knowledge, understanding, and skills teachers must possess and impart to students in a given subject or content area (Shulman, 1986).

Pedagogical Knowledge - involves a deep understanding of the subject matter and how to teach it effectively, including teaching practices, classroom management, lesson planning, or assessment methods (Garet et al., 2001; Shulman, 1986).

Student Achievement - student accomplishment of learning goals (Guskey, 2013).
Social Studies - an interdisciplinary subject that involves the study of individuals, communities, systems, and their interactions across time and place that prepares students for local, national, and global civic life. Including disciplines and courses such as history, geography, economics, government and citizenship, social sciences, ethnic studies, human rights and social justice, financial literacy, and contemporary issues (NCSS, 2023).
CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

This qualitative study investigated middle school social studies teachers' perceptions of professional development. The researcher employed a case study approach to examine how teachers perceived professional development concerning the subject, pedagogy, and student achievement through analysis of interview responses. The researcher hoped to elucidate social studies teachers' concerns regarding the inadequate provision of content-specific professional development and its impact on their teaching and students' academic performance. Based on the insights gathered from conducting the interviews, the researcher sought to propose practical and effective measures to augment the current literature on designing and implementing individualized professional learning experiences, catering specifically to the needs of social studies teachers to enhance the overall quality of teaching practice and elevate the levels of student achievement.

The literature review for this study begins by defining professional development. In section three of the literature review, the researcher examined the historiography of professional development related to social studies, covering the years 1900 to the present. This analysis aimed to track the evolution and progression of professional development in social studies education. In section four, the researcher provided a detailed analysis of the utilization of professional development, notating the types and uses of professional development in social studies. The fifth section explored data from past studies, highlighting issues, problems, and teachers' opinions of social studies professional development. In section six, the researcher concluded the chapter with a comprehensive literature review summary, synthesizing the key ideas and arguments presented in the previous sections.
Defining Professional Development

Professional development refers to formal and informal learning that enhances teachers' knowledge and practices, improving student learning outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Professional development opportunities can be broadly categorized into formal and informal. Formal opportunities include attending conferences, workshops, or seminars, enrolling in higher education courses, and participating in faculty, grade level, or departmental meetings. In contrast, informal opportunities encompass individual reading and research, observing a colleague's classroom, or conversing with peers and administration (Mizell, 2010). In public education, effective professional development affects student learning and achievement. Student outcomes improve when teachers engage in meaningful professional learning focused on the skills teachers need to address students' significant learning challenges and overall achievement (Mizell, 2010). According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), effective professional development must encompass active learning, content-specific teacher practices, a space for collaboration, coaching and expert support, feedback and reflection, and modeling to demonstrate best practices.

Effective professional development aims to bridge the gaps in the content knowledge of its participants, thereby helping them to enhance their teaching practices (Perrotta, 2021; van Hover, 2008). Professional development in social studies refers to formal and informal learning opportunities that allow teachers to develop content and pedagogical knowledge and enhance educator effectiveness (De La Paz et al., 2011; Duffield et al., 2013; Hess & Zola, 2012). In social studies, high-quality professional development includes knowledge that helps teachers grow in social studies subject matter and pedagogical strategies relevant to the content taught in the classroom to foster student achievement (Duffield et al., 2013).
The concept of professional development in social studies education has evolved since its inception in the early 20th century. Although the idea of professional development in the United States educational system dates back to the 1830s with the introduction of common schools, it was not until the late 19th century that the focus on professional development in social studies education began to gain momentum (Church, 1976; Labaree, 2008; MacMullen, 1991). In the United States' early years, history and social sciences like psychology, sociology, and political science were not taught as separate courses in primary or secondary grades. Instead, they were incorporated sporadically into reading and writing courses; only later, with the emergence of different subjects in American education, history, and social sciences, gained more recognition and support among professionals and historians (Smith et al., 1995). History became an independent subject in most upper-grade schools in the thirty years leading up to the Civil War, but it still lacked the same status as subjects like arithmetic and geography (Tryon, 1935).

As history courses became more prevalent in secondary education, historians began to express the importance of teaching social science disciplines and the need to develop new social science curricula in K-12 public schools (Reese, 2007). Consequently, the American Historical Association (AHA) was established in 1884 by university-trained historians to promote historical studies (Barr et al., 1977; Hertzberg, 1989). The AHA was one of the earliest professional organizations that allowed historians to influence the public school curriculum (Clyde & Clabough, 2021). Establishing the AHA marked a pivotal moment for social studies education, revolutionizing its classroom pedagogy (Hertzberg, 1989; Barr et al., 1977).

In 1898, the AHA released the Report of the Committee of Seven, 'The Study of History in Schools.' The AHA report (1898) stated, "The highly successful teacher in any field of work
needs to be a student as well as a teacher, to be in touch with the subject as a growing, developing, and enlarging field of human knowledge." This report sparked professional development in social studies by emphasizing the need for highly trained teachers and the importance of ongoing professional learning by teachers in social studies (AHA, 1898). Nevertheless, social studies remained novel at the beginning of the twentieth century.

In the early 20th century, the study of social sciences gained significant importance in education, leading to changes in social studies educators’ training and professional development. While the American Historical Association (AHA) focused primarily on curriculum development and social science teaching, selected historians with specific education and pedagogy concentrated on supporting teachers in the classroom (Saxe, 1992). One such historian and school-based initiative was the launch of The History Teacher's magazine in 1909, which provided relevant news, pedagogy, and experiments to history, civics, geography, and economics teachers across the country (Shryock, 1925). In 1914, the National Council of Geography Teachers founder spearheaded an initiative to enhance the quality of geography education in American schools (Miller, 1916). The organization aimed to connect the expertise of college professors with the teaching methods of K-12 geography teachers (Miller, 1916). As new endeavors and organizations like The History Teacher's magazine and the National Council of Geography Teachers advanced the preparation of social studies teachers, the American Historical Association (AHA) and the National Education Association (NEA) continued to publish national reports that encouraged and recommended specific methods for ongoing training of teachers to teach social studies, paving the way for social studies professional development.

In 1912, the AHA released the Report of the Committee of Five on teaching history in secondary schools. This report highlighted the importance of proficient teachers with the pedagogical and content knowledge to teach history effectively (AHA, 1912). The report noted
that history teachers often receive inadequate support and curriculum compared to their colleagues in science, math, reading, and writing (AHA, 1912). In the continuation of the importance of highly qualified social studies teachers, The National Education Association (NEA) in 1916 released a report on The Social Studies in Secondary Education, which defined social studies as "those whose subject matter relates directly to the organization and development of human society, and to man as a member of social groups" (Clyde & Clabough, 2021, p.46). This report is credited for ushering in social studies and pedagogy, emphasizing citizenship (Dunn, 1916; Larrabee, 1991; Lybarger, 1991; Krug, 1964; Ross et al., 2014; Saxe, 1992). The report suggested combining history, geography, political science, and economics to develop good citizenship, thereby merging the disciplines and developing social studies. The report concluded by adding four recommendations for teacher preparation, including the emphasis on teacher preparation in high schools, teacher-training schools, colleges and universities, and in service (NEA, 1916). The NEA’s recommendations on teacher preparation marked a turning point in the history of social studies education and social studies educators' professional development. For the first time, social studies teachers were incentivized to engage in ongoing professional learning and training while on the job. In the years to come, the AHA and NEA played a pivotal role in promoting the social studies curriculum and expanding opportunities for teaching social sciences.

1920-1950 Progressive Education

The origins of social studies are traced back to the publication of The Social Studies in Secondary Education report by the NEA in 1916. However, the most significant milestone in its early years was the establishment of the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) in 1921. This NCSS played a pivotal role in shaping the social studies domain and underscoring its importance in education while offering social sciences educators professional development.
opportunities to enhance social studies education in schools. The inception of the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) coincided with the ascent of progressive education, with Earle Rugg playing a significant role in the founding of NCSS.

In 1919, Earle Rugg, a high school teacher in a Chicago suburb, proactively contacted social scientists and teachers of history and social studies, inviting them to join the Northeastern Illinois Social Science Round Table (Nelson, 1995). This network served as a climactic foundation that would transform the landscape of social studies education. In the subsequent year, Rugg transitioned from his role as an educator to that of a graduate student at Teachers College. During this period, Rugg contacted preeminent social studies professionals, including his older brother Harold (Nelson, 1982). The involvement of distinguished scholars, professors, and advocates such as Montgomery Gambrill, Daniel C. Knowlton, and Roy Hatch led to the formation of the National Council of Teachers of Social Studies, subsequently renamed the National Council for the Social Studies (Murra, 1970; Nelson, 1995). The organization aimed to unite teachers of social studies, such as those teaching history, government, economics, and sociology, as well as administrators, supervisors, teachers of education, and others interested in enhancing education for citizenship through social studies ("A National Council for the Social Studies," 1921).

The establishment of the NCSS marked an influential moment in the history of social studies education in the United States, as it became the first organization to unite all educators of social sciences in America. The NCSS proved instrumental in empowering educators to champion and elevate social studies education. Through its pioneering efforts in organizing content-specific training sessions, conferences, and workshops, NCSS effectively boosted innovative teaching approaches and instructional techniques. During the 1930s and 1940s, NCSS remained at the forefront of social studies professional development. Teacher training and
learning opportunities took a backseat amidst ongoing curriculum reform within the social studies disciplines.

The release of the 1916 report by the National Education Association (NEA) resulted in significant events that had a lasting impact on social studies. The report also accelerated curricular reforms and created the National Council for the Social Studies. During the aftermath of World War I, education professionals held differing opinions on the optimal approach to teaching social studies in schools and the topics that should be included in the curriculum. While some historians and K-12 leaders believed in traditional teaching methods and curriculums, others, including historians and education theorists such as William Kilpatrick, Franklin Bobbitt, and George Counts, were advocating for a new student-centered learning approach (Evans, 2007; van Manen & Parsons, 1983). This unexplored approach emphasized active learning techniques and strategies instead of rote memorization of facts. Those who supported the student-centered approach believed in incorporating debate inquiry, providing a more challenging curriculum, and discussing social issues. It was a direct descendant of the progressive education movement (van Manen & Parsons, 1983). As a result, the social studies curriculum evolved rapidly. This controversy shaped social studies throughout the 1920s and 1930s, with progressivism remaining a prominent topic in the media and American society for the next two decades.

The progressive education movement, which emerged under the beliefs of John Dewey, an American philosopher, psychologist, and educational reformer, advocated for a departure from traditional curricula focused on memorization and mental discipline. Dewey's progressive educational ideology offered practical relevance by using a student-centered curriculum that promoted learning through hands-on activities, research, and critical thinking discussions (Dewey, 1944; Hopkins, 2017). He proposed that general education should be based on real-life experiences with current personal and social problems (Hopkins, 2017; Lattuca & Stark, 2011;
Lucas, 2006). Even though Dewey's unconventional pedagogical approaches challenged the
traditional method of teaching social studies, his teaching methods gained popularity among
prominent historians, social scientists, and K-12 educators.

In the late 1920s, Harold Rugg, an influential American educational reformer and the
older brother of Earle Rugg, expanded upon Dewey's concepts. Rugg firmly believed that social
studies education should prioritize relevant and current societal issues to nurture students' critical
comprehension of the world (Nelson, 1982). Rugg's educational philosophy was centered around
issues-based learning, which aimed to prepare students to become informed and engaged citizens
who could contribute effectively to the democratic process (Evans, 2006; Winters, 1967). He
maintained that social studies curricula should impart information and provide ample
opportunities for students to engage with the world and sharpen their critical thinking skills.
However, his approach to pedagogy and curriculum reform failed to focus on teacher training
and preparation, as he believed creating and enforcing new curricula would suffice to bring about
change and improvement in social studies (Evans, 2006; Nelson, 1978; Winters, 1967).

In 1921, Rugg emphasized the importance of a scientific methodology, developing a new
social studies curriculum (Nelson, 1978; Winters, 1967). Per his progressive ideals, Rugg sought
to reconstruct social studies education by emphasizing a curriculum that revolved around
studying society and social issues, resulting in informed and engaged student citizenship (Evans,
2007). Subsequently, Rugg wrote a series of social studies textbooks, including *Man and His
Changing Society* and *A History of American Civilization*. The textbooks drew on recent
scholarship from the "new" progressive historians and other "frontier thinkers" (Evans, 2006, p.
318). The textbooks were innovative and controversial since they combined history and social
sciences materials into an issues-oriented, unified field approach (Evans, 2006; Nelson, 1978).
Despite the innovative approach of Rugg's educational materials, the incorporation of issues-centered learning and the shift in the social studies curriculum failed to gain traction in classrooms due to staunch opposition from traditionalists, media, school boards, and retired military personnel (Nelson, 1982). Rugg's textbooks challenged the American societal structure and capitalist economy, which many viewed as "un-American" (Evans, 2006, p. 318). His curriculum emphasized social justice education and addressing America's problems, but it was often dismissed as Communist propaganda (Riley & Stern, 2004). Additionally, the lack of teacher involvement and preparation in delivering curriculum hindered progressivism's success in K-12 education (Winters, 1967). Though teachers were expected to implement the new issues-centered focus, they were given little guidance, and the support they received came in the form of written teacher guides and training manuals that aligned with the new textbooks (Winters, 1967). Social studies educators had to rely on organizations such as NCSS for professional learning as opportunities to improve their pedagogical practices were limited.

While the social studies curriculum in the 1920s transformed as progressives sought to foster intellectual thought and social consciousness, the 1930s met progressive educators with criticism surrounding social studies, textbooks, and pedagogy. This condemnation persisted throughout the following decade, with organizations such as The American Legion, established by retired military personnel, accusing groups such as the NCSS and the NEA of promoting subversive ideas that challenged American values, such as capitalism and patriotism, in public schools (Thornton, 2001). By the 1940s, there was a shift in focus towards a new curriculum that prioritized social order and patriotism in America, signaling the abandonment of progressive education ideals and the introduction of new expectations for social studies teachers.
1950-1960 Cold War Curricular Changes

In the aftermath of World War II, American education encountered a paradoxical situation where the principles of progressivism from the 1930s were at odds with the apprehension and worry associated with the onset of the Cold War. Amidst the growing fear of Communism, the federal government attempted to control teachers and the K-12 curriculum to maintain national security (Greenawald, 1995). In an attempt to nullify the perceived threat of Communism, the Commission on Life Adjustment was established by the U.S. Office of Education to equip American youth with the necessary skills and maturity to resist Communism, adapt to American life, and redefine progressive education (Hartman, 2008). The life adjustment movement accentuated four interrelated principles: relevance, instrumentalism, social order, and patriotism (Hartman, 2008). This novel emphasis on life skills and adjustment impacted all content disciplines, including social studies. However, some educationists, like Arthur Bestor (1952), criticized the avant-garde curriculum for being anti-intellectual and hindering the progress of American education (Hertzberg, 1981; Katz, 2007).

Despite the changes and critiques in the American education curriculum, organizations such as the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) and the American Historical Association (AHA) remained committed to advocating for teacher education and preparation in social studies. Throughout the 1950s, the NCSS endorsed a content-specific, academically rigorous education for teachers, which tightened certification requirements and engaged teachers with the latest disciplinary scholarship (Hertzberg, 1981). In an attempt to address certification requirements, the American Historical Association (AHA) 1957 founded the Service Center for Teachers of History to provide educational institutions with comprehensive historical services (Saxe, 1991). The Service Center's primary function was to disseminate the latest historical scholarship to educators through a pamphlet series and organize workshops and conferences to
provide teachers with a comprehensive understanding of the latest developments in social studies pedagogy (Hertzberg, 1981; Zangrando, 1968). Amid the ongoing debate over curriculum priorities, providing content-specific professional development opportunities for social studies teachers by organizations like the NCSS and AHA proved vital.

In 1957, the Soviet Union launched Sputnik, the world's inaugural artificial satellite, which incited a paradigm shift in American education towards more erudite learning goals. A greater emphasis was placed on science and math education in American schools to address concerns that they were falling behind academically (Jolly, 2009). As a result, mathematics, science, and foreign language education received a significant boost in funding, while social studies received comparatively less attention (Greenawald, 1995). Additionally, a public opinion poll conducted by researchers from Purdue University in 1957 found that the education system faced challenges in providing effective service to students. The Purdue Public Opinion Poll (1957) indicated that students lacked a solid understanding of their constitutional rights and were not adequately educated on civics, resulting in the evaluation and criticism of social studies education.

Moreover, several legislative education reform acts were enacted to improve the quality of education, including the National Defense Education Act of 1958 (NDEA). This legislation increased federal aid for math, science, and foreign language programs (Byford & Russell, 2007). Furthermore, Title III of NDEA provided financial assistance to the states for teacher professional development to enhance mathematics, science, and foreign language instruction (Jolly, 2009).

Despite the absence of funding from national initiatives such as the NDEA, alternative efforts promoted social studies education within the classroom during the late 1950s. For example, in 1958, a publication called "New Viewpoints in the Social Sciences" was released,
featuring essays by scholars in various fields, including history, geography, political science, economics, sociology, anthropology, and social psychology (Hertzberg, 1981). This publication provided support for social studies education and improved the quality of instruction by offering pedagogical techniques and practices with a specific focus on content. In the concluding remarks of this volume, Earl Johnson underscored the pivotal role of teacher education as he urged social studies teachers to remain active and engaged in their profession and to actively pursue continuing education while teaching (Hertzberg, 1981). Despite the mounting pressure for a reformed social studies curriculum and renewed emphasis on teacher education, the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) and the federal government remained indifferent to the subject until 1964, when the NCSS launched a strenuous effort to incorporate social studies into the funding provided by the NDEA. When the legislation was reauthorized, it included funds for history, geography, civics materials, and teacher training (Greenawald, 1995).

1960-1980 New Social Studies and Back to the Basics

Throughout the 1960s, there was a significant push to reform the K-12 social studies curriculum, which came to be known as the "New Social Studies." This movement was fueled by critiques of the life adjustment curricula of the 1950s and a growing interest in modernizing and enhancing social studies education (Bestor, 1953; Fenton, 1991). In the wake of the launch of Sputnik and the enactment of the National Defense Education Act (NDEA), the growth of research and development for curriculum improvement in technical disciplines such as mathematics and science gradually culminated in an expansion to encompass social studies. In September 1959, the Woods Hole Conference in Massachusetts emerged as the foremost gathering for curriculum reform in the 1960s. Esteemed scholars like Jerome Bruner and Jerold Zacharias convened to deliberate on the latest advancements in science and mathematics teaching (Scheurman & Evans, 2018). The conference paved the way for the formulation of clear
and concise principles of curriculum development that were widely adopted in the ensuing movement.

In June 1962, the Endicott House meeting was the first comprehensive gathering to emerge from the innovative curriculum and learning theory presented at the Woods Hole Conference. This led to a collective reassessment of the social studies curriculum and pedagogy (Scheurman & Evans, 2018). The meetings held at Woods Hole and Endicott House culminated in disciplinary projects that shared three fundamental traits: a focus on inquiry, values, and using games and simulations to encourage active involvement and participation (Byford & Russell, 2007). The social studies projects of the era were primarily content-centered and resulted from the censure of progressive social studies education. The 1960s witnessed the emergence of several social studies curriculum projects, including the High School Geography Project, Anthropology Curriculum Study Project, and Man: A Course of Study (Byford & Russell, 2007; Scheurman & Evans, 2018).

Introducing content-specific curriculum projects presented social studies teachers with innovative and occasionally confounding pedagogical concepts and practices for their social studies classrooms (Barr et al., 1977). To optimize student learning, professional development, and training were required for teachers to incorporate the projects into their classrooms effectively. The United States Office of Education launched Project Social Studies in 1962 to enhance various aspects of the field, such as research, instruction, teacher education, and student learning (Evans, 2004). The initiative provided funding for content-specific research projects, curriculum study centers, and professional development opportunities, including conferences and seminars (Francis, 2014; Lester et al., 1969). Project Social Studies provided professional development through teacher training guides and manuals, instructional strategy videos, project-specific training programs, and in-service training packages (Lester et al., 1969).
In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), a landmark legislation to improve educational opportunities for all students in the United States. The ESEA mandated critical funding for educational resources, including professional development, instructional materials, and resources to support educational programs over an initial period of five years (ESEA, 1965; Gamson et al., 2015; Paul, 2016). Such funding was intended to address the educational needs of disadvantaged students and provide students and teachers with the necessary tools and resources to succeed academically and professionally. The ESEA of 1965 included the four core subjects of social studies: civics, geography, history, and economics. The legislation mentioned social studies only once under Section 4101 - State Use of Funds, which required states to use funds allocated under the ESEA to support educational programs and professional development in social studies (ESEA, 1965).

In the late 1960s and the early 1970s, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) provided copious professional development opportunities, including conferences, workshops, keynote speakers, and seminars. Nonetheless, the efficacy of professional development lacked several factors (King et al., 2000; Sparks & Hirsh, 1997; Speck & Knipe, 2001). Firstly, the sessions lacked the depth of discovery and discussion of designated topics. Secondly, many professional development workshops and seminars lacked classroom relevance and teachers’ needs. Thirdly, the sessions failed to encourage interaction, discussion, and engagement with new information and pedagogical advancements. Finally, the lack of practice and support for new pedagogical concepts and curricula prevented teachers from fully integrating the knowledge and skills gained in professional development into their teaching practices. As a result, despite the availability of professional development opportunities, many teachers felt that these experiences did not adequately support their professional growth (Speck & Knipe, 2001).
In 1981, a Project SPAN report titled "Social Studies in the 1980s" was published. The report found that despite the sanguine sentiments of social studies teachers concerning their qualifications and training in their retrospective subject areas, pundits deliberated for years that the subject-matter preparation of social studies teachers was insufficient (Wiley, 1977). The report expounded that social studies teachers participated in a comparatively meager number of professional in-service programs, such as curriculum development and teaching methods, compared to their peers in other subjects (Wright, 1977). During the early 1980s, policymakers, school districts, and teachers' associations recognized that their extant professional development programs could not effectively enhance teaching and learning outcomes. Consequently, there was an endeavor to reexamine the concept of professional development (Speck & Knipe, 2001).

The National Commission on Excellence in Education published a landmark report titled "A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform" in 1983, emphasizing the need to reform professional development in education. The report brought to the fore the issue of inadequate education quality in K-12 schools, raising concerns regarding the competence of teaching staff in the United States (Guest, 1993; Rutter, 2011). Furthermore, the report underscored the pressing need for specialized training of teachers in specific subjects to enhance the overall quality of education (Guest, 1993; Hunzicker, 2018; Rutter, 2011). The report was instrumental in drawing attention to the state of education in the United States and catalyzed several vital reforms in the education sector.

The emergence of A Nation at Risk (1983) signified a seminal event in the annals of social studies education, as it exhorted policymakers and educators to reestablish subject-based instruction and return to teaching essential content with accountability measures. The authors of A Nation at Risk criticized the diluted and diffused curriculum in social studies, which caused
the rising mediocrity in education (Saxe, 2004). They called for improved teaching and learning in history, geography, and economics to address this issue (Saxe, 2004). The release of this report was regarded as a potent affront to the eclectic nature of social studies. It engendered considerable discourse regarding the optimal strategies for conveying knowledge and competencies of learners in social studies classes.

Following the release of "A Nation at Risk," multiple reports advanced teacher education and training improvements. The Ford Foundation's Academy for Education Development, titled "Teacher Development in Schools," proposed that teachers engage in continuous professional development. It emphasized the importance of thoroughly understanding how learning occurs, regardless of the subject area expertise (Guest, 1993; Rutter, 2011). In 1986, the Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a Profession published "A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century," highlighting the need for content knowledge, differentiated pedagogy, and knowledge of diverse learners (Guest, 1993; Rutter, 2011). The report's (1986) recommendations included the establishment of university teaching centers and clinics to facilitate teacher training and professional development. Continuing university-based teacher centers and differentiated professional development, the "Tomorrow's Teachers: A Report of the Holmes Group" report emphasized teacher professionalization's importance in enhancing student learning and outcomes (Guest, 1993; Rutter, 2011). It outlined five objectives: improving teacher education, acknowledging teacher variations, establishing professional standards, bridging the gap between institutions and schools, and enhancing teachers' working and learning environments (Holmes Group, 1986, p. 4).

In 1989, policymakers convened at the Education Summit in Charlottesville to address non-standardized education policies. They recognized the need for more effective programs in public education, which they believed were weakening the economy and hindering America's
competitiveness on the global stage (Klein, 2014). At the summit, President George H.W. Bush and the nation's governors pinpointed proficiencies in the traditional subjects of history, geography, English, math, and science as crucial national education objectives (Saxe, 2004). However, what came as a surprise was the complete absence of social studies from the discussion. Even though A Nation at Risk (1983) encouraged an examination of the social studies curriculum, the exclusion of it as a subject from the Charlottesville summit was a critical turning point in its status compared to other subjects (Saxe, 2004).

In 1994, the Goals 2000: Educate America Act, authorized during the Clinton Administration, sought to legitimize the K-12 reform initiative through the incentivization by states to establish stricter education standards, teacher training, and curriculum authority in school districts. This initiative developed state content standards, including social studies (Saxe, 2004; Schwartz et al., 2000). Professional development components were integrated into the National Education Goals, offering educators programs that enhanced their professional skills and access to resources (Goals 2000, 1994).

In response to the enforcement of emerging content standards, the National Council for Social Studies (NCSS) demonstrated astute foresight by devising and financing its content standards (Laughlin, 1995). Recognizing that standards in history, geography, civics, government, and economics were developed without their contributions, NCSS leadership developed Curriculum Standards for Social Studies in 1994. The standards were designed to unify the four major common subject areas of history, geography, civics, and government with other areas such as sociology and psychology (Saxe, 2004). This strategic move transformed the once broad-based social studies field into a more standardized subject area during the era of accountability.
2000-Present No Child Left Behind, Accountability, and High-Stakes Testing

In 2000, the federal government initiated the Teaching American History Program (TAH) to enhance U.S. history teachers' understanding of American history by funding effective professional development and learning opportunities (De La Paz et al., 2011). Congress authorized $250 million for teaching traditional American history, and the first grants were awarded in 2001 (De La Paz et al., 2011). The program sought to improve teachers' expertise in subject matter and pedagogy. However, the Teaching American History grant funds did not last. They were combined with the Effective Teaching and Learning for a Well-Rounded Education Grant in 2011, which included funding for fine arts, foreign languages, environmental literacy, and economic and financial literacy (Duncan, 2011).

The advent of high-stakes testing, and accountability measures has directly affected social studies education, particularly concerning the availability of funding and professional development opportunities for educators in this domain compared to math and English Language Arts. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was a consequential education reform introduced by President George W. Bush in 2001, becoming the primary federal legislation governing K-12 education. No Child Left Behind was introduced due to concerns that the American education system was lagging behind its international competitors. The legislation required student achievement for all students through the implementation of standardized tests and performance benchmarks. As per the legal requirements, all third and eighth-grade students must take and pass assessments in reading and math (NCLB, 2002).

The outcome of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) resulted in fallacious incentives for states and school districts, which prioritized English and math over social studies in their daily schedule (Duffield et al., 2013; Duncan, 2011; Knighton et al., 2003; Perrotta, 2021). This phenomenon led to a neglect of social studies education, resulting in limited funding.
opportunities for social studies teachers' professional development and curriculum reform (O'Connor et al., 2007). As a result, social studies teachers often lack practical pedagogical training and curriculum. Social studies organizations, such as the NCSS, criticized the NCLB Act for its narrow focus on standardized testing and its failure to provide adequate funding and inclusion of social studies education (Social Studies in the era of No Child Left Behind, 2007).

Furthermore, No Child Left Behind required school districts to provide professional development to refresh pedagogy and content knowledge to facilitate student achievement better. According to the NCLB (2002), professional development activities should meet specific standards, such as improving teacher's knowledge of content, district-wide educational plans, and skills to assist students in meeting challenging state academic standards. However, social studies offerings were insufficient, brief, and lacked social studies content and aligned pedagogical methods for teachers (Borko, 2004; Duffield et al., 2013).

In a continuation of No Child Left Behind, in 2015, the Federal Government introduced the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The ESSA revised the definition of professional development to encompass ongoing and personalized job-embedded activities accessible to all school staff (ESSA, 2015). Additionally, professional development was integrated into a broader school improvement plan, and teacher, principal, and school leader academies were established to meet the needs of educators from all content areas (ESSA, 2015). Despite perceived improvements, schools continued to emphasize subjects that impacted their performance, accountability, and funding, often leading to the prioritization of math and English in line with federal education guidelines and the marginalization of social studies education and teacher training.

In the last 30 years, social studies education has witnessed an upsurge in the availability of professional development opportunities at both the national and state levels. These
opportunities typically focus on content alignment and pedagogical practices that align with the goals of social studies education. Notable among these opportunities are the National Council for Social Studies (NCSS) Conference, National Council for Geographic Education (NCGE) Conference, National Council for History Education (NCHE) Conference, and National Social Science Association (NSSA) Conference. Furthermore, state organizations affiliated with NCSS, such as the Tennessee Council for Social Studies and Arizona Council for Social Studies, offer state-wide conferences that provide workshops, seminars, and presentations on content that aligns with state standards and pedagogical practices. Despite past neglect, social studies advocates, educators, and organizations have endeavored to advance and provide content-relevant professional development opportunities that foster teachers' professional learning in social studies. However, the dearth of content-specific professional development opportunities for social studies teachers at the school and district level remains a persistent concern (Thacker, 2017).

**Professional Development in Social Studies – What Do Teachers Utilize?**

Professional development is a crucial aspect of a social studies teacher's career, as it allows opportunities to continually enhance their knowledge, skills, and expertise, ultimately leading to improved teaching practices and better student learning outcomes (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Cohen & Hill, 2000; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Thacker, 2017). Social studies teachers at all levels undertake professional development to stay current with social studies' latest research, methodologies, and technologies, equipping them to provide the highest quality education to their students. Professional development encompasses a range of modalities, spanning professional learning communities (PLCs), workshops and seminars, online courses and modules, classroom and peer observations, and professional organizations' learning opportunities. Regardless of the delivery mode, educational researchers widely acknowledge
professional development to enhance the quality of teaching and contribute to improved student learning outcomes in the classroom (Avidov-Ungar, 2016; Ball & Cohen, 1999; Thacker, 2017).

**Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)**

A professional learning community (PLC) refers to a group of educators who convene at regular intervals to exchange knowledge, skills, and insights (DuFour, 2004; Fullan, 1991; Lieberman & Miller, 1990; McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993; Secada & Adajian, 1997; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). The primary objective of a PLC is to enhance teaching practices and to improve student academic performance. Generally, a PLC comprises a group of teachers who teach the same grade level and subject area. For instance, a social studies professional learning community (PLC) would include a small team of educators working together through discussions on topics such as lesson planning, content standards, pacing, and addressing student misconceptions. The extant literature posits that PLCs are the most identified and efficacious form of professional development for social studies educators (Salmon, 2019).

Synchronous collaborative professional learning communities (PLCs) represent a traditional yet practical approach to social studies professional development (Guskey, 2014). Empirical studies demonstrate that PLCs positively affect social studies teachers' attitudes toward professional development and their impact on student achievement (Copur & Demirel, 2022; Phillips, 2003; Thacker, 2017). The literature suggests that effective PLCs enhance the quality of social studies instruction, leading to better student outcomes and improving schools' overall effectiveness (Lomos et al., 2011; Jones et al., 2013; Hofman et al., 2015). Furthermore, research by DuFour and Eaker (1998) indicates that PLCs contribute to participants' pedagogical practices by providing opportunities for teacher collaboration. Consequently, the evidence supports a positive relationship between social studies teacher participation in PLCs and student achievement (Copur & Demirel, 2022).
Seminars and Workshops

The conventional approach of seminars and workshops is a frequent method for professional development in social studies (Borko, 2004; Humphrey et al., 2005; Wilson & Berne, 1999). Despite the growing interest in alternative methods, traditional seminars and workshops continue to enhance social studies educators' knowledge and skills (Borko, 2004; Humphrey et al., 2005; Ball & Cohen, 1999). Seminars are professional development sessions that offer a structured learning experience to participants. As Guskey and Yoon (2009) noted, seminars allow teachers to benefit from specialized knowledge directly from content experts, network with colleagues from different schools, and gain inspiration to explore innovative teaching approaches in their classrooms. For social studies educators, seminars provide a valuable opportunity to gain in-depth pedagogical knowledge, insights, and updates on relevant topics in social studies education (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009).

Social studies educators attend workshops for hands-on learning experiences emphasizing practical skills, strategies, and instructional techniques. These interactive sessions are led by content and pedagogical specialists and are tailored to instructional needs or topics that align with teachers' interests or areas of improvement. In general, it is customary for educational institutions and districts to sponsor learning workshops focused on disseminating knowledge and best practices in social studies. According to Risinger (1986), in-service workshops for social studies teachers serve six primary purposes. These purposes include developing the curriculum, disseminating social studies materials and strategies, evaluating curriculum and instructional impact, assessing student progress, implementing specific materials or strategies, and establishing local sharing programs (Risinger, 1986, p. 3).
Online Courses and Modules

Online learning provides social studies teachers the flexibility and accessibility needed to develop professionally at their own pace and convenience (Blanchard et al., 2016; Duffy et al., 2006; Ross, 2011). Online professional development opportunities can be classified as synchronous and asynchronous learning. Synchronous opportunities occur in real-time, including university courses, webinars, and conferences (Bates et al., 2016). Asynchronous opportunities are not simultaneous and allow teachers to learn via online training and self-paced modules (Bates et al., 2016). Organizations such as Facing History and Ourselves, Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, and the Library of Congress offer webinars, courses, and asynchronous modules to enhance teacher effectiveness in social studies practices. Social studies teachers may prefer online professional development for its convenience, individualized approach, and self-directed learning opportunities (Bates et al., 2016).

Synchronous and asynchronous graduate courses and degrees offered by universities and colleges allow social studies teachers to improve their pedagogical content knowledge and teaching practices (Harris & Sass, 2011; Sahlberg, 2015). Participation in degree and certification programs allows teachers to delve deeply into educational topics, specialize in content areas, and contribute to broader academic research (Bound, 2011). This long-term professional development presents a pathway for career progression, educational leadership roles, and augmented salary (National Center for Teacher Quality, 2017).

Classroom and Peer Observations

Classroom observation is a widely used approach to collaborative professional development. It is a process that involves observing teachers in their classroom settings to provide feedback that can help them enhance their instructional practices (Cosh, 1998). This form of professional development is a valuable tool for improving social studies teaching
effectiveness and student learning outcomes. Its effectiveness stems from allowing teachers to receive direct feedback on their teaching practices and reflect on their teaching strategies in a supportive environment (Beigy & Woodin, 1999). It also allows social studies teachers to learn from each other, share best practices, and offer additional support (Borich, 1999; Richards & Farrell, 2005).

**Professional Organizations**

Professional and scholarly organizations offer social studies teachers an additional route for professional development. These organizations, such as the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS), National Council of Geographic Education (NCGE), Center for Civic Education (CCE), and National Council for History Education (NCHE), focus on fields including history, political science, economics, sociology, geography, and education. Social studies teachers can significantly enhance their teaching skills and knowledge by engaging in professional development activities through reading scholarly journals, attending national and state conferences, and participating in summer institutes organized by specialized organizations (Waters & Hensley, 2020).

National and state conferences serve as a platform for educators to convene and engage with peers from across the country in the social studies profession. These conferences provide opportunities to share best practices, explore effective instructional strategies that engage students, advocate for pressing issues in social studies education, and establish professional networks for ongoing support (Lawrence & Wilson, 2014). Waters and Hensley (2020) state that the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) conference has the highest national participation of social studies teachers. Similarly, sponsored affiliated institutes provide comprehensive one-to-four-week professional development programs for K-12 educators to
enrich their understanding of significant topics in social studies and enhance their capacity for effective pedagogical techniques and practices.

**Benefits of Utilizing Professional Development in the Social Studies**

In K-12 public schools, high-quality teacher professional development is considered a critical aspect of educational reform that can contribute to effective teacher pedagogy and improved student achievement (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Elmore, 2002; Guskey, 1995). According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), professional development refers to organized and structured learning opportunities for teachers that change their teaching practices and improve student achievement. Over the past 30 years, researchers have identified standard features of effective professional development, which include content focus, active learning, collaboration, effective practice models, coaching and expert support, feedback and reflection, and sustained duration (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone, 2009; Elmore, 2002; Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999). Effective utilization of professional development can benefit social studies teachers beyond their initial pre-service training. Professional development allows social studies teachers to gain new content knowledge, develop pedagogical skills, and enhance student learning and academic achievement. (OECD, 1998; Mizell, 2010).

**Content-Knowledge**

According to Shulman's (1986) framework, content knowledge represents the accumulated knowledge, understanding, and skills teachers must possess and impart to students in a given subject or content area. It is a fundamental component of effective teaching and learning, as it enables teachers to design and implement instruction that promotes student understanding and achievement. In the past 20 years, research has emphasized the significance of enhanced content knowledge to achieve more effective teaching (National Staff Development Council, 2001; Progressive Policy Institute, 2005; Walker et al., 2006). The National Council for
Social Studies (2008) further affirmed that continuous professional development designed to enhance content expertise can facilitate social studies teachers' learning within their classrooms and enhance their subject knowledge, thereby enabling improved student outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

The content knowledge possessed by social studies educators primarily derives from their post-secondary education background. Nonetheless, research substantiates the advantages of their continued engagement in subject-matter-based professional development. According to Wayne et al. (2016), long-term, job-embedded professional development concentrated on the subject's content tends to enhance teachers' knowledge and skills, classroom instruction, and student achievement. Research further suggests that to improve student learning, most teachers must acquire content knowledge and pedagogical techniques specific to their content area (Blank et al., 2008; Heller et al., 2012). Over the last decade, studies have shown the advantages of content-specific professional development opportunities for K-12 social studies teachers. In 2013, Duffield et al. studied high school U.S. history teachers and found that attending content-specific professional development sessions enhanced teacher knowledge, student engagement, and achievement.

**Classroom and Pedagogical Knowledge**

Some professional development opportunities aim to improve teachers' subject-matter knowledge, while others focus on improving pedagogical knowledge, such as teaching practices, classroom management, lesson planning, or assessment methods (Garet et al., 2001). According to Shulman (1986), pedagogical knowledge involves a deep understanding of the subject matter and how to teach it effectively. Pedagogical knowledge involves understanding the learning process, using effective teaching methods, and having knowledge of students' needs. Professional development is one of the critical mediators in providing teachers with valuable
information on new pedagogical methods and curricula and managing student behavior (Desimone et al., 2007; Desimone et al., 2005).

It is highly beneficial for social studies educators to attend professional development sessions that focus on classroom and pedagogical knowledge (Thomas-Brown et al., 2016; Wayne et al., 2016). Sessions provide applicable information that assists teachers in delivering effective instruction, managing their classrooms, and fostering the diverse learning needs of their students. Professional development programs focusing on improving teachers' knowledge of teaching and students and how to manage their classrooms can achieve positive educational outcomes for all students (Wayne et al., 2016). According to Desimone's (2009) research, extended professional development programs increase teachers' likelihood of adopting adequate instructional practices that directly impact their students' growth and achievement. In combination with the focus on pedagogy, long-term professional development benefits social studies teachers by providing information on diverse learners and how to appropriately provide a more equitable education for students in the social studies classroom (O'Brien, 2011).

**Student Achievement**

Over the past three decades, research has continued to highlight the crucial role of teacher development and learning in enhancing the quality of education and boosting student achievement (Borko & Putnam, 1995; Darling-Hammond, 1993; Thompson & Zueli, 1999; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Professional development is crucial in enhancing student achievement as a three-fold process that enhances teacher knowledge and skills, improves classroom teaching, and raises student achievement (Yoon et al., 2007). Research by Strong et al. (2004) and Serpell & Bozeman (1999) has demonstrated that teachers who received intensive professional development significantly impacted student achievement in under two years. Additionally, studies have shown that schools with effective professional learning communities
exhibited a greater capacity to provide authentic pedagogy and were more successful in improving student achievement (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Louis et al., 1996; Vescio et al., 2008).

In the last decade, from 2010-2020, numerous empirical studies demonstrated a positive correlation between social studies teachers' participation in ongoing professional development and increased student achievement (Duffield et al., 2013; De La Paz et al., 2011). A study on American History teachers demonstrated that investing in professional development improved student performance (De La Paz et al., 2011). The research proved that sustained investment in professional development activities allowed teachers to modify their instructional practices, resulting in better student achievement. Consistent with other studies, this research established a positive relationship between professional development, teacher knowledge, and student achievement (Yoon et al., 2007). Therefore, the time and effort invested in professional development activities can provide social studies teachers with opportunities to enhance their classroom teaching, increasing student achievement (Thomas-Brown et al., 2016).

**Problems and Issues Utilizing Professional Development for Classroom Implications**

As there are various perceived benefits of professional development in aiding social studies teachers' pedagogical practices, there are challenges and issues associated with implementing professional development. A significant portion of professional development offerings for social studies teachers remains the traditional, lectured-based workshops or seminars, which provide limited teacher engagement and participation (Grant, 2003; van Hover, 2008; Adler, 1991). Moreover, some school systems encounter significant equity challenges related to the potential impact of professional development on student learning, such as inadequate resources, poor leadership, or conflicting school or district requirements (Buczynski & Hansen, 2010; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).
Effectively implementing professional development programs requires keen responsiveness to the unique needs of educators and learners and the contextual factors that influence teaching and learning. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017, p. 24) identified five critical barriers to be considered when implementing and practicing professional development: 1) inadequate resources, including necessary curriculum materials; 2) lack of a shared vision of what constitutes high-quality instruction; 3) insufficient time for planning and implementing new instructional approaches; 4) conflicting requirements, such as scripted curriculum or pacing guides; and 5) inadequate foundational knowledge on the part of teachers. Several significant problems and issues encumber the utilization of professional development in social studies. These include inadequate resources and funding, a lack of teacher voice in decision-making, and insufficient time for proper implementation, feedback, and reflection.

**Lack of Resources and Funding**

The dearth of resources and funding presents significant obstacles for social studies teachers seeking meaningful professional development opportunities. As a result, social studies professional development funding is seldom prioritized, resulting in teachers receiving less support for their growth and development than their colleagues (Hess & Zola, 2012; Swan & Griffin, 2013). The enactment of educational policies such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) resulted in flawed incentives for states and school districts, leading to a prioritization of English and math over social studies, resulting in the neglect of social studies education and funding opportunities for the professional development (Duffield et al., 2013; Duncan, 2011; Perrotta, 2021; O’Connor et al., 2007).

In light of insufficient funding for formal professional development programs for social studies teachers and the prevailing emphasis on literacy and mathematics in the national discourse on school reform, social studies teachers likely receive comparatively less curricular
support and resources through their professional development activities (Grant et al., 2012; Rock et al., 2006). While investing in expensive professional development does not guarantee effectiveness, choosing cheap options will likely lead to little or no impact on social studies teachers' pedagogical practices and student outcomes (Jacob & Lefgren, 2002).

Teacher Reticent

Professional development is a necessary component of the teaching profession, often imposed by state and district-level authorities. Despite the crucial role that professional development plays in enriching teachers' content knowledge and pedagogical practices, teachers are frequently deprived of the autonomy to plan and organize such sessions. In professional development for educators, it is a convention to entrust the task of designing and executing training programs to district officials rather than the teachers who are the ultimate beneficiaries of the resulting initiatives (Choy et al., 2016; Colbert et al., 2008). This lack of autonomy can lead to an inadequate and unfulfilling professional learning experience, which may not meet individual teachers' unique needs and interests (Sparks, 2004).

According to Long (2006), teachers reported dissatisfaction with the professional development sessions provided by the Teaching American History (TAH) grant, as the external instructors were deemed inept in adapting the course material to the appropriate grade level, integrating state-mandated standards, and catering to the specific needs of the teachers. Including social studies teachers in professional development and planning can ensure its effectiveness and benefits. Research studies by Choy et al. (2016), Colbert et al. (2008), and Gregson & Sturko (2007) indicate that the empowerment of teachers to plan their professional development enhances their engagement and induces changes in their teaching practices.
A crucial aspect of effective professional development entails providing teachers ample time to learn, practice, implement, and reflect upon new strategies that can facilitate changes in their pedagogical practices (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone, 2009; Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999). Therefore, constructive professional development programs generally involve teachers learning over a sustained duration, established by the needs of the district, school, and participants (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Studies have shown that for teachers to master new skills, they require effective professional development programs that provide between 30 to 80 hours of instruction, practice, and coaching (French, 1997; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Yoon et al., 2007).

Despite the need for peculiarity for professional development participants, historically, most teachers receive less than eight hours of training (Wei et al., 2010). Moreover, during the No Child Left Behind Era, teachers experienced a decline in long-term content-focused training and an increase in short-term workshops (Wei et al., 2010). The current emphasis on short-term learning opportunities for teachers does not align with research supporting sustained professional development, which should include ample support and feedback for implementing new practices (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone, 2009; Elmore, 2002; Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999). Scholarly research has revealed that teachers often encounter challenges in enforcing new teaching methods in their classrooms, limiting the overall effectiveness of professional development (Robb, 2000). One of the primary reasons for this is the lack of support, including insufficient encouragement and guidance when introducing new approaches in the classroom (Germuth, 2018).
Educators' Opinions on Professional Development

Studies conducted over the past two decades indicate that many teachers express dissatisfaction with their professional development sessions and perceive the workshop approach to be of little benefit (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2014; Leming et al., 2006; Hong, 2016). According to research conducted by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (2014), teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the current professional development offerings, stating that they are not relevant, effective, or connected to their work of helping students learn. According to a survey of 1,600 teachers, a mere 29% expressed high satisfaction with the currently available professional development opportunities (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2014). The results also revealed that many teachers reported having limited options when choosing their professional development initiatives, ultimately contributing to their dissatisfaction.

In a study conducted by Hong (2016), it was found that the three least preferred professional development sessions were lectures without hands-on activities, in-district professional development, and any published lesson plan. The study participants expressed their belief that in-district professional development sessions usually involve too many teachers with varying levels of knowledge from different settings and, hence, do not provide adequate training. Furthermore, Leming et al. (2006) conducted a study that revealed that social studies teachers prioritize the development of their presentation skills and subject matter knowledge as the most significant areas for their professional advancement. The findings suggest that teachers acknowledge the inadequacies of their teacher education programs in these domains and perceive a need to address their shortcomings (Leming et al., 2006).

Summary

The literature review has been categorized to examine the evolution of professional development in social studies education. The review encompassed a comprehensive analysis of
the purpose, utilization, and pertinent professional development issues. *Professional development* was defined as formal and informal learning that enhances teachers' knowledge and practices, improving student learning outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). The review traced the evolution of professional development in social studies education from its inception in the late 19th century to its current state in the era of accountability and high-stakes testing. After the enactment of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act and its subsequent successor, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), social studies education in K-12 schools received less emphasis and funding due to the increased emphasis on English language arts and mathematics. Social studies teachers engage in professional development through various means, such as learning communities (PLCs), workshops, online courses, and professional organizations. Researchers have recognized standard professional development features, including content focus, active learning, collaboration, effective practice models, coaching and expert support, feedback and reflection, and sustained duration. Professional development can significantly change a teacher's content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and student achievement when planned and implemented effectively. However, the literature review reveals that professional development opportunities in social studies education are frequently undermined due to insufficient funding and resources. Despite research supporting professional development with sustained duration and additional time for feedback and reflection, social studies education typically follows a short-term workshop approach for professional development sessions.

Chapter three will discuss the conceptual framework, research objectives, and methodology used to study middle school social studies teachers' perceptions of professional development and its relation to content, pedagogy, and student achievement.
CHAPTER THREE

Conceptual Framework of Model and Methodology

Analogical Abduction

Analogical abduction was the conceptual framework used to study middle school social studies teachers' perceptions of professional development and its relation to the content area, pedagogy, and student achievement. This section presents a definition and central themes of the framework.

Analogical abduction is a form of reasoning that integrates analogical and abductive reasoning, which enables researchers to generate hypotheses based on analogies and determine their plausibility through abductive reasoning (Thagard, 1993). Through analogical abduction, researchers can provisionally arrive at conjectures and courses of action aimed at remediation (Sergeeva et al., 2021). Explanatory theories are often developed using analogical abduction, "if one finds a similar set of phenomena in another field that is better understood, then one can 'borrow' explanatory principles from that field to inform one's own" (Borsboom et al., 2021, p.761). Four central components or attributes embedded in analogical abduction with professional development in education are insight, goals, techniques, and practical support. The effectiveness of professional development in bringing about sustained improvements in teaching practice and student achievement was explored through these four components.

Insight refers to the process by which teachers gain an enhanced understanding and knowledge of teaching and learning, resulting in improved instructional practices. Research studies have shed light on how teachers' knowledge impacts their teaching practice and effectiveness (Franke et al., 2001; Hill et al., 2008; Hill & Chin, 2018). Scholarly studies reveal that one of the plausible reasons behind the inability of professional development programs to augment teaching and learning outcomes is the ineffectiveness in providing accurate and relevant
training, which fails to bring about significant changes in teachers' knowledge and comprehension (Arzi & White, 2008; Liu & Phelps, 2020). Sims et al. (2020) state that two mechanisms help transform teaching practices and learning through insight. The first pertains to managing cognitive load during professional development sessions, which can be achieved by reducing the complexity of the information presented to educators. The second mechanism is revisiting material, which can be achieved through techniques such as reteaching, which involves repeating the material to oneself or others and prompting the recall of essential ideas.

Secondly, the term *goals* in the context of teaching refers to the motivating factors that prompt educators to strive for specific change in their pedagogical practices. Therefore, it is plausible that professional development would prove ineffective in enhancing teaching abilities if it fails to motivate teachers to adopt goals centered around modifying their instructional practices. According to Michie et al. (2013), three mechanisms help improve teaching and learning practices through goals. The primary mechanism involves a deliberate goal-setting process, wherein teachers deliberately agree to attain specific objectives related to changing certain aspects of their teaching practice. The second mechanism for inducing change is to provide credible empirical evidence from reputable sources to support the proposed alteration in practice. The third mechanism concerning goals is reinforcement, which can be accomplished through praise or by reiterating the value of practice.

The third component of analogical abduction is *technique*, which involves assisting a teacher in implementing a new teaching method. Michie (2013) and Sims et al. (2022) identified five mechanisms of technique: instruction, practical social support, modeling, feedback, and rehearsal. Instruction refers to providing clear and concise guidance on implementing a particular practice. The facilitation of advice on implementing a particular practice from a teacher's colleagues can exemplify practical social support. The modeling process provides an observable
instance of the target teaching practice, which serves as a visual guide for subsequent practice sessions (Renkl, 2014). Feedback refers to providing evaluative guidance based on prior observation of an individual's performance or practice to facilitate improvement. Lastly, rehearsal denotes structured practice sessions outside of a formal classroom environment.

Finally, practical support is defined as supporting a teacher in using some techniques in the classroom. Research indicates that while professional development may initially bring about change in practice, sustaining that change over time can be challenging (Copur-Gencturk & Papakonstantinou, 2016; Boston & Smith, 2001; Hanno, 2021). Michie (2013) identifies four mechanisms relating to practical support: action planning, context-specific repetition, prompts/cues, and self-monitoring. Action planning requires specifying when and how changes will be made in prospective lessons. Context-specific repetition involves practicing the target skill in a real-life classroom environment. Prompts/cues involve presenting environmental motivations to encourage the desired practice. Lastly, self-monitoring involves recording and reviewing one's practices.

**Research Design and Methodology**

This research study was designed to investigate middle school social studies teachers' perceptions regarding professional development and its relation to the teacher's knowledge of the subject, pedagogy, and improving student achievement. In the current era of high-stakes testing, social studies teachers often find themselves at a disadvantage as schools prioritize subjects that directly impact their performance, accountability, and funding. Due to the long-lasting effects of federal education policies such as the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), social studies is often overlooked in middle grades in favor of math, science, and literacy. As a result, middle school social studies teachers frequently face the
challenge of inadequate funding and support, which limits their access to adequate professional development opportunities. In light of the extensive research on the components that constitute effective professional development, it is imperative to consider social studies teachers' perspectives on what works and how it translates to improved instruction and enhanced student achievement. Acquiring a comprehensive understanding of social studies educators' perspectives on professional development can substantially enhance the quality and accessibility of programs, thereby contributing directly to developing effective policies, practices, and future research.

Professional development programs designed for social studies teachers have the potential to improve their content knowledge, pedagogical practices, and student achievement. Such programs can have a positive impact on both the teachers and the field of social studies education. The National Council for Social Studies (NCSS) has influenced social studies education and emphasized the significance of social studies teacher development. The NCSS offers a range of professional development opportunities to social science educators to enhance their teaching skills and improve social studies education in schools. Furthermore, the Tennessee Council for the Social Studies (TCSS) is a state-level professional association committed to offering comprehensive resources and professional development for social studies educators. It serves as a sister organization to NCSS and strives to provide teachers with the necessary tools and information to enrich their classroom experiences further. The study will explore the perceptions of middle school social studies teachers regarding professional development.

**Research Methods**

A qualitative case study was used to conduct the study. Case studies provide a comprehensive approach to studying a process, program, or individual, allowing for a deep understanding of the topic (Merriam, 1998). Becker (1968) illustrates the objectives of a case
study as twofold, that is, "to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the groups under study" and "to develop general theoretical statements about regularities in social structure and process" (p. 233). The nature of this investigation necessitates the employment of case study methodology, given the focus on examining the participants' perceptions of their experiences as middle school social studies teachers and their engagement in professional development. Additionally, Creswell (2002) defines a case study as "an in-depth exploration of a bounded system (e.g., an activity, event, process, or individuals) based on extensive data collection" (p. 485). Creswell (2002) recommends a case study as a methodology if the problem to be studied "relates to developing an in-depth understanding of a 'case' or bounded system" (p. 496) and if the purpose is to understand "an event, activity, process, or one or more individuals" (p. 496). This study utilized the collective case study approach among the various case studies identified by Merriam (1998). The study involved interviews with nine teachers, each from a different school district in a southeastern state.

Case studies with different sample sizes are suitable for research. In the current study, with a sample size of nine ($N = 9$), a collective case study will be used in which more than one case is selected "in order to investigate a phenomenon, population, or general condition" (Stake, 2000, p. 437). The researcher can conduct an in-depth analysis of a particular topic or phenomenon by delimiting the study's boundaries to a restricted number of case units (Creswell, 2007). A case study methodology is a research approach employed to gain an in-depth and detailed analysis of a particular issue by investigating one or more cases within a specific context. The case study approach is suitable for investigating a single issue, such as middle school social studies teachers' perceptions regarding professional development and its relation to content, pedagogy, and student achievement. Furthermore, Merriam (1998) elucidates how case
study insights can directly contribute to developing policies, practices, and future research. The case study utilized three methods: (a) semi-structured interviews, (b) field notes, and (c) document analysis of previous research in professional development.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions will guide the current study:

1. What are middle school social studies teachers’ perceptions regarding professional development?
2. What are middle school social studies teachers’ perceptions regarding professional development and its relation to the subject?
3. What are middle school social studies teachers’ perceptions regarding professional development concerning pedagogy?
4. What are middle school social studies teachers’ perceptions regarding professional development in relation to student achievement?

Eight semi-structured interview questions were formulated based on the four research questions to investigate the participants’ perceptions. Each research question is accompanied by two sub-questions aligned with the research question, allowing participants to express their views and opinions. The questioning categories proposed by Strauss, Schatzman, Butcher, and Sabshin (1981) were employed to encourage participants to provide comprehensive and detailed responses. These categories encompassed hypothetical, devil's advocate, ideal position, and interpretative questions.

*Hypothetical* questions utilize scenarios or situations to elicit responses from respondents. These questions typically prompt participants to envision their potential actions or behaviors in hypothetical scenarios, drawing upon their personal experiences and beliefs as a basis for
response. *Devil's advocate* questions can be beneficial when the topic under discussion is contentious, as these questions can elicit a wide range of opinions and emotions from respondents. By presenting an opposing viewpoint, devil's advocate questions can encourage participants to think critically and deeply about their beliefs and values, leading to a more nuanced and thoughtful discussion. *Ideal position* questions can gather opinions and information on any topic, encouraging participants to describe their ideal situation. Finally, *interpretive* questions serve as a way to confirm the participants' understanding and allow additional information, opinions, and sentiments to be expressed. This type of question builds upon a preliminary interpretation of what the participant has communicated and solicits a response. Table 1 displays eight interview questions aligned with the research questions.
### Table 1: Research and Interview Questions

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<td>Some teachers say that professional development has little impact on their pedagogy. What would you say to them? (DEVIL’S ADVOCATE)</td>
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<td>Suppose you attended a professional development session designed to improve student learning and learning outcomes. What would it be like? (IDEAL)</td>
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<td>Some administrators say teachers who invest more time in professional development tend to have higher test scores. What would you say to them? (DEVIL’S ADVOCATE)</td>
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Sites of Research

The study was conducted at nine middle schools in the western region of a southeastern state in the United States. The schools were selected using a non-random purposeful sampling method to explore how social studies teachers in middle schools perceive professional development within their school and how it is related to their subject knowledge, teaching methods, and improvement of student achievement (Table 2). Purposeful sampling is a well-established technique in qualitative research that involves carefully selecting cases or individuals with information-rich characteristics relevant to the research question (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Patton, 2002). This approach is beneficial when resources are limited, and a more targeted and efficient approach to data collection is necessary (Patton, 2002). The sampling technique has been widely recognized as an effective means of enhancing the credibility and validity of qualitative research findings (Patton, 2002).

The selection of schools was based on various factors, including geographic location, grade level, state report card, and community type (i.e., rural, suburban, urban). The state report card was utilized to gather data and evaluate each school's student success rates, including growth and achievement. Nine schools were chosen, with three representing each community type. The selected schools received varying letter grades, ranging from A to F, highlighting the differences in growth, achievement, and student success rates. Each school provided a distinct perspective on academic success rates, teacher professional development, and the relationship between content, pedagogy, and student achievement. Notably, there was a significant variation in teacher knowledge, teacher preparation, professional development, and perspectives in the identified schools. More detailed descriptions of each site are provided below.
Middle School A is a public middle school located within a rural county school district within the western region of the southeastern state that serves grades 6-8. In 2023, 405 students were enrolled in the school, of which 91% are White, 6% are Black or African American, and less than 5% are classified as other. Of the student body at Middle School A, 31% of students enrolled in this school are considered economically disadvantaged. The school currently does not receive Federal Title 1 funding. The school received a per-pupil expenditure of $11,351.96 in the 2021-22 academic year. According to the Southeastern State’s Department of Education, Middle School A received a letter grade of an A on the state’s 2022-23 report card. In 2023, Middle School A had a success rate of 50.2%. Measure by subject included a 39.6% success rate in ELA, 51.2% success rate in math, 59.8% success rate in science, and 62.9% rate in social studies. Middle School A received an overall schoolwide TVAAS ranking of Level 5, regarding
a Level 5 ranking in achievement and growth. The school has 28 full-time teachers with a 14:1 student-teacher ratio. According to the Southeastern state’s Department of Education, Middle School A retained 87.1% of its instructional staff from the 2020-21 to the 2021-22 academic year.

**Middle School B** is a public middle school located within a rural county school district within the western region of the southeastern state that serves grades 5-8. In 2023, 370 students were enrolled in the school, of which 76% are White, 14% are Black or African American, 8% are Hispanic, and less than 5% are classified as other. Of the student body at Middle School B, 28% of students enrolled in this school are considered economically disadvantaged. The school currently receives Federal Title 1 funding. The school received a per-pupil expenditure of $9,268.79 in the 2021-22 academic year. According to the Southeastern State’s Department of Education, Middle School B received a letter grade of a C on the state’s 2022-23 report card. In 2023, Middle School B had a success rate of 42.5%. Measure by subject included a 33.5% success rate in ELA, 47.1% success rate in math, 45.8% success rate in science, and 48.7% rate in social studies. Middle School B received an overall schoolwide TVAAS ranking of Level 2, with regard to a Level 4 ranking in achievement and a Level 1 ranking in growth. The school has 24 full-time teachers with a 15:1 student-teacher ratio. According to the Southeastern state’s Department of Education, Middle School B retained 100% of its instructional staff from the 2020-21 to the 2021-22 academic year.

**Middle School C** is a public middle school located within a rural county school district within the western region of the southeastern state that serves grades 6-8. In 2023, 526 students were enrolled in the school, of which 57% are Black or African American, 39% are White, and less than 5% are classified as other. Of the student body at Middle School C, 51% of students
enrolled in this school are considered economically disadvantaged. The school currently receives Federal Title 1 funding. The school received a per-pupil expenditure of $11,745.28 in the 2021-22 academic year. According to the Southeastern State’s Department of Education, Middle School C received a letter grade of an D on the state’s 2022-23 report card. In 2023, Middle School C had a success rate of 18.7%. Measure by subject included a 18.1% success rate in ELA, 17.7% success rate in math, 23.5% success rate in science, and 17.6% rate in social studies. Middle School C received an overall schoolwide TVAAS ranking of Level 1, with regard to a Level 2 ranking in achievement and a Level 1 ranking in growth. The school has 41 full-time teachers with a 13:1 student-teacher ratio. According to the Southeastern state’s Department of Education, Middle School C retained 63.8% of its instructional staff from the 2020-21 to the 2021-22 academic year.

Middle School D is a public middle school located within a suburban county school district within the western region of the southeastern state that serves grades 6-8. In 2023, 1,143 students were enrolled in the school, of which 74% are White, 12% are Black or African American, 7% are Asian, 6% are Hispanic, and less than 5% are classified as other. Of the student body at Middle School D, less than 5% of students enrolled in this school are considered economically disadvantaged. The school currently does not receive Federal Title 1 funding. The school received a per-pupil expenditure of $12,069.15 in the 2021-22 academic year. According to the Southeastern State’s Department of Education, Middle School D received a letter grade of a A on the state’s 2022-23 report card. In 2023, Middle School D had a success rate of 67.4%. Measure by subject included a 55.7% success rate in ELA, 65.5% success rate in math, 61% success rate in science, and 64.9% rate in social studies. Middle School D received an overall schoolwide TVAAS ranking of Level 5, with regard to a Level 5 ranking in achievement and
growth. The school has 83 full-time teachers with a 14:1 student-teacher ratio. According to the Southeastern state’s Department of Education, Middle School D retained 79.6% of its instructional staff from the 2020-21 to the 2021-22 academic year.

Middle School E is a public middle school located within a suburban county school district within the western region of the southeastern state that serves grades 6-8. In 2023, 773 students were enrolled in the school, of which 56% are White, 25% are Black or African American, 10% are Asian, 9% are Hispanic, and less than 5% are classified as other. Of the student body at Middle School E, 5% of students enrolled in this school are considered economically disadvantaged. The school currently receives Federal Title 1 funding. The school received a per-pupil expenditure of $12,763.22 in the 2021-22 academic year. According to the Southeastern State’s Department of Education, Middle School E received a letter grade of a B on the state’s 2022-23 report card. In 2023, Middle School E had a success rate of 57.3%. Measure by subject included a 50.5% success rate in ELA, 58% success rate in math, 63% success rate in science, and 66.1% rate in social studies. Middle School E received an overall schoolwide TVAAS ranking of Level 3, with regard to a Level 5 ranking in achievement and a Level 3 ranking in growth. The school has 54 full-time teachers with a 14:1 student-teacher ratio. According to the Southeastern state’s Department of Education, Middle School E retained 74.6% of its instructional staff from the 2020-21 to the 2021-22 academic year.

Middle School F is a public middle school located within a suburban county school district within the western region of the southeastern state that serves grades 6-8. In 2023, 1,094 students were enrolled in the school, of which 64% are White, 16% are Black or African American, 12% are Hispanic, 8% are Asian, and less than 5% are classified as other. Of the student body at Middle School F, 6% of students enrolled in this school are considered
economically disadvantaged. The school currently receives Federal Title 1 funding. The school received a per-pupil expenditure of $10,606.47 in the 2021-22 academic year. According to the Southeastern State’s Department of Education, Middle School F received a letter grade of a C on the state’s 2022-23 report card. In 2023, Middle School F had a success rate of 59.6%. Measure by subject included a 51.6% success rate in ELA, 60.6% success rate in math, 59.5% success rate in science, and 67.1% rate in social studies. Middle School F received an overall schoolwide TVAAS ranking of Level 2, with regard to a Level 5 ranking in achievement and a Level 2 ranking in growth. The school has 74 full-time teachers with a 15:1 student-teacher ratio. According to the Southeastern state’s Department of Education, Middle School F did not have data on its instructional staff retention rates from the 2020-21 to the 2021-22 academic year.

Middle School G is a public middle school located within an urban county school district within the western region of the southeastern state that serves grades 6-8. In 2023, 271 students were enrolled in the school, of which 51% are White, 39% are Black or African American, 6% are Hispanic, and less than 6% are classified as other. Of the student body at Middle School G, 10% of students enrolled in this school are considered economically disadvantaged. The school currently does not receive Federal Title 1 funding. The school received a per-pupil expenditure of $4,515.41 in the 2021-22 academic year. According to the Southeastern State’s Department of Education, Middle School G received a letter grade of an A on the state’s 2022-23 report card. In 2023, Middle School E had a success rate of 64.7%. Measure by subject included a 63.4% success rate in ELA, 56.5% success rate in math, 73% success rate in science, and 78.4% rate in social studies. Middle School G received an overall schoolwide TVAAS ranking of Level 5, with regard to a Level 5 ranking in achievement and growth. The school has 20 full-time teachers with a 12:1 student-teacher ratio. According to the Southeastern state’s Department of Education,
Middle School G retained 71.4% of its instructional staff from the 2020-21 to the 2021-22 academic year.

Middle School H is a public middle school located within an urban county school district within the western region of the southeastern state that serves grades 6-8. In 2023, 364 students were enrolled in the school, of which 60% are Black or African American, 30% are White, 7% are Hispanic, and less than 5% are classified as other. Of the student body at Middle School H, 11% of students enrolled in this school are considered economically disadvantaged. The school currently receives Federal Title I funding. The school received a per-pupil expenditure of $6,616.99 in the 2021-22 academic year. According to the Southeastern State’s Department of Education, Middle School H received a letter grade of a B on the state’s 2022-23 report card. In 2023, Middle School H had a success rate of 75.5%. Measure by subject included a 75.5% success rate in ELA, 72.1% success rate in math, 77.3% success rate in science, and 81.5% rate in social studies. Middle School H received an overall schoolwide TVAAS ranking of Level 3, with regard to a Level 5 ranking in achievement and a Level 3 ranking in growth. The school has 22 full-time teachers with a 17:1 student-teacher ratio. According to the Southeastern state’s Department of Education, Middle School H retained 63.2% of its instructional staff from the 2020-21 to the 2021-22 academic year.

Middle School I is a public middle school located within an urban county school district within the western region of the southeastern state that serves grades 6-8. In 2023, 621 students were enrolled in the school, of which 54% are Hispanic, 38% are Black or African American, 6% are White and less than 5% are classified as other. Of the student body at Middle School I, 56% of students enrolled in this school are considered economically disadvantaged. The school currently receives Federal Title I funding. The school received a per-pupil expenditure of
$13,701.13 in the 2021-22 academic year. According to the Southeastern State’s Department of Education, Middle School I received a letter grade of an F on the state’s 2022-23 report card. In 2023, Middle School I had a success rate of 14.1%. Measure by subject included a 13.1% success rate in ELA, 8.2% success rate in math, 20.7% success rate in science, and 23.7% rate in social studies. Middle School I received an overall schoolwide TVAAS ranking of Level 1, with regard to a Level 1 ranking in achievement and growth. The school has 39 full-time teachers with a 26:1 student-teacher ratio. According to the Southeastern state’s Department of Education, Middle School I retained 77.3% of its instructional staff from the 2020-21 to the 2021-22 academic year.

**Description of Teacher Participants**

**School A Participant**

Emily (pseudonym) is a 7th-grade social studies teacher at a rural middle school. The school she teaches at received an A rating from the State Department of Education for its excellent performance. Emily has been teaching for 24 years and has taught social studies at her current school for the past eight years. She followed the traditional path to becoming a teacher and earned an undergraduate degree in education. Before her current role, she taught English Language Arts and social studies at the elementary school level.

**School B Participant**

Mike (pseudonym) is an 8th-grade social studies teacher at a rural middle school. The school he teaches at received a C rating from the State Department of Education. Mike pursued an alternative route to education and earned an undergraduate degree in agriculture, followed by a master's degree in teaching. He started his teaching career at a high school, where he taught agricultural science courses. Later, he left that position and accepted a middle school social
studies position in the district where he graduated from as a student. Before becoming a teacher, Mike (pseudonym) served in the military.

**School C Participant**

Megan (pseudonym) is an 8th-grade social studies teacher at a rural middle school. The school she teaches at received a D rating from the State Department of Education. Megan pursued an alternative route to education and earned an undergraduate degree in History, followed by a master’s degree in curriculum and instruction and an education specialist degree in educational leadership. During her summers, she spends her time working as a teacher park ranger at a national park.

**School D Participant**

Luke (pseudonym) is a 7th-grade social studies teacher at a suburban middle school. The school he teaches at received an A rating from the State Department of Education for its excellent performance. Luke (pseudonym) pursued an alternative route to education and earned an undergraduate degree in History, followed by a master’s degree in curriculum and instruction and a doctoral degree in educational leadership. In the past, he was involved with a program that utilized a residency model to train teachers. The objective of the program was to create restored communities that live with dignity and peace.

**School E Participant**

Bailey (pseudonym) is a 6th-grade social studies teacher at a suburban middle school. The school she teaches at received a B rating from the State Department of Education. Bailey (pseudonym) followed the traditional path to becoming a teacher and obtained an undergraduate degree in elementary education (K-8). She has been teaching the same grade level at the same
school for the past 24 years. Additionally, she dedicates two days a week offering social studies tutoring to her students.

**School F Participant**

Kate (pseudonym) is a social studies teacher who teaches 7th grade at a suburban middle school. The school she teaches at has received a C-rating from the State Department of Education. Kate (pseudonym) pursued an alternative route to education and earned an undergraduate degree in History with a minor in English, followed by a master’s degree in education. She did not start teaching until she was 30 years old. In addition to teaching 7th-grade social studies, she also teaches a MAPS computer course for 5th graders and a Bible course for 9th graders.

**School G Participant**

Tracy (pseudonym) is an 8th-grade social studies at an all-optional urban middle school. The school she teaches at received an A rating from the State Department of Education for its excellent performance. Tracy (pseudonym) pursued an alternative route to education and earned an undergraduate degree in History, followed by a master’s degree in education. Her school is considered a lab school, which means it serves as a model for experimentation and innovation in education. Tracy (pseudonym) has attended national fellowships and presented locally and nationally at social studies conferences.

**School H Participant**

Paul (pseudonym) is an 8th-grade social studies teacher at an all-optional urban middle school. The school he teaches at received a B rating from the State Department of Education. Paul (pseudonym) pursued an alternative route to education and earned undergraduate degrees in History and Anthropology, followed by a master’s degree in instruction and curriculum. In
addition to teaching 8th-grade social studies, he also teaches one section of 7th-grade social studies.

**School 1 Participant**

Sarah (pseudonym) is a 6th-grade social studies teacher at an urban middle school. The school she teaches at received an F rating from the State Department of Education. Sarah (pseudonym) pursued an alternative route to education and earned an undergraduate degree in Theatre, followed by a master’s degree in instruction and curriculum. In addition to teaching 6th-grade social studies, she also teaches two sections of 7th-grade social studies. Her school has a large population of English Language Learners. In the past, she was involved with a program that utilized a residency model to train teachers. The objective of the program was to create restored communities that live with dignity and peace.

**Participant Selection**

This study was designed to investigate the perceptions of professional development among nine middle school social studies teachers. The research explored how professional development may have affected the teachers' content knowledge, pedagogy, and student achievement. Nine teachers were purposefully selected, each from a different school, based on their knowledge or experience of the research topic. The study focused on the teachers' perceptions of professional development related to social studies.

The research design compared public middle school teachers' perceptions in the same geographic area but with varying community types and student success rates. The schools were selected to provide a basis for comparison, and the teacher participants were chosen based on the subject area they taught. The school selection process was focused on public middle schools located in the western region of a southeastern state. The nine selected schools catered to grades
In order to collect comprehensive feedback regarding professional development, the researcher selected one teacher from each of the nine schools. This approach ensured that the feedback received was representative of the various perspectives and experiences across all schools.

The selection was based on community type and letter grade assigned by the state's education department, which depended on the students' success rates in standardized testing. The study included three rural schools with letter grades ranging from A to F, three suburban schools with letter grades ranging from A to C, and three urban schools with letter grades ranging from A to F. The study used non-random purposeful sampling, and as a result, the nine teacher samples chosen represented a considerable degree of variability in school characteristics. The research design involved deliberately selecting participants based on their experience and comparing public middle schools with varying community types and student success rates to contribute to developing effective professional development programs for middle school social studies teachers. More detailed descriptions of each participant are provided below.

**Methods of Data Collection and Analysis**

A collective case study approach was utilized to evaluate the perceptions of nine middle school social studies teachers. The study consisted of nine face-to-face interviews with teachers from various school districts located in suburban, rural, and urban areas. According to Crowe et al. (2007), a collective case study involves "studying multiple cases simultaneously or sequentially in an attempt to generate a still broader appreciation of a particular issue" (p. 2). Employing a collective case study approach can potentially enhance the accuracy and reliability of the interpretation (Stake, 2000). By analyzing multiple cases, researchers can identify patterns and variations, which can help to generate new hypotheses and theories. Therefore, using a
collective case study approach with a small number of cases can be a valuable research method for enhancing the rigor and validity of qualitative research (Yin, 2003). This study interviewed middle school social studies teachers regarding their perceptions of professional development. Each of the nine interviews was conducted in the participants' respective classrooms located within their schools, ensuring privacy during the interview process. The interviews were recorded using a digital audio recorder and transcribed by a professional transcription service. The interview transcriptions and accompanying field notes were coded to ensure anonymity.

In order to establish the credibility of the interview process and the research questions, the researcher conducted a pilot study with one participant. This study not only offered the opportunity to identify the potential issues with the questioning process but also ensured that the interview and research questions were strongly aligned with the research topic. The Institutional Review Board at the University of Memphis granted the necessary permission to conduct the interviews (Appendix A). Additionally, the participants were required to provide their informed consent by signing a release form (Appendix B) prior to the commencement of the interviews.

Methodical triangulation is the technique utilized to enhance the validity and reliability of a research study. According to Merriam (1998), triangulation is "using multiple investigators, multiple sources of data, or multiple methods to confirm the emerging findings" (p. 204). By triangulating data from multiple sources and using different methods, conclusions can be strengthened, and the risk of reaching biased or subjective conclusions is minimized. Triangulation can help achieve data convergence and verify or refute emerging themes and categories (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The current study achieved triangulation through interviews, field notes, and document analysis.
Interviews

Nine interviews were carried out over two months, commencing in March 2023 and concluding in April 2023. The interviews were scheduled at the most convenient times for the participants, with all interviews conducted after school hours. A pilot interview was conducted to ensure the interview process was appropriately designed and structured. The researcher opted for a semi-structured interview format to conduct the recorded interviews. The interview questions (Table 1) are formulated based on the study's research questions. Two interview questions were created for each research question, based on the four categories of questions identified by Strauss et al. (1981): hypothetical, ideal, devil's advocate, and interpretive.

There are four categories of questions used to elicit responses from participants. The first category is hypothetical questions. These questions present a situation or scenario, asking participants to envision their actions or behaviors. The second category is devil's advocate questions, which can be helpful in contentious discussions. These questions allow participants to consider opposing viewpoints, encouraging critical thinking and a more thoughtful discussion. The third category is ideal position questions, which ask participants to describe their ideal situation or opinion on a topic. Finally, interpretive questions help to confirm participants' understanding and allow them to express additional opinions or sentiments.

All of the participants were asked the following interview questions:

1. Suppose you were to develop a professional development session for faculty. What would it look like?

2. Would you say that professional development is beneficial?

3. What do you think the ideal social studies professional development session would look like?
4. Would you say that professional development helps advance your primary subject content knowledge?

5. What do you think the ideal professional development for acquiring differentiated instructional strategies would be like?

6. Some teachers say that professional development has little impact on their pedagogy. What would you say to them?

7. Suppose you attended a professional development session designed to improve student learning and learning outcomes. What would it be like?

8. Some administrators say teachers who invest more time in professional development tend to have higher test scores. What would you say to them?

Field Notes

Field notes were employed to augment the interview experience and furnish a detailed narration to bolster the interview process. Creswell (2006) posits that field notes are an essential instrument in qualitative research, providing researchers with a rich and detailed context for data analysis. Field notes facilitate thorough descriptions of the research setting, offering a contemplative view of the researcher's thoughts, questions, and concerns from interviews and observations. As Phillippi and Lauderdale (2018) observed, using field notes ensures a more comprehensive understanding of the research setting and its context. Following the interviews, meticulous information was appended to the notes, substantially enhancing the interview. The field notes were instrumental in capturing the essence of the interview, including the nonverbal cues and insights that were not expressly communicated by the participant, thus providing a more comprehensive understanding of the interview. Following each interview, the gathered field notes were coded and reviewed. Upon completing this process, analytical memos were
generated, focusing on identified themes from the field notes, thereby serving as an effective triangulation source.

**Document Analysis**

Apart from conducting interviews and taking field notes, this study used document analysis as a research method, explicitly focusing on previous research concerning professional development. Document analysis is well-suited for qualitative case studies that produce detailed descriptions of a single phenomenon, event, organization, or program (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994). According to Merriam (1988), documents can assist researchers in "uncovering meaning, developing understanding, and discovering insights relevant to the research problem" (p. 118). During the analysis of documents, identified themes were compared to interview data to identify teacher perceptions of professional development trends. Themes from the interviews and field notes were compared with previous research on professional development to determine teacher perceptions' consistency with existing literature.

**Ethical and Political Considerations**

The researcher took great care during the study to obtain informed consent and protect confidentiality while strictly adhering to the guidelines of the International Research Bureau (IRB) (Appendix A). Before conducting the interviews, participants signed a consent form (Appendix B). All participants in the research provided informed consent to partake in the study and were allowed to withdraw from the interview process at any time. The study did not involve any vulnerable populations or individuals under 18. Prior to the data collection process, the participants were provided with a guarantee of confidentiality and anonymity. Specifically, they were assured that their identities and ideas would remain protected throughout the study. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant to ensure anonymity. All data and transcripts
gathered during the study were kept in a secure location and destroyed upon the research's conclusion.
CHAPTER FOUR

Results

The investigation aimed to understand middle school social studies teachers' perceptions of professional development and its relation to content knowledge, pedagogy, and student achievement. In addition, the study sought to understand the current state of professional development offerings presented to middle school social studies teachers. Nine middle school social studies teachers from nine different middle schools were selected to participate in the study. All nine schools were identified as catering to grades 6-8; however, they were diverse, ranging in community type (e.g., rural, suburban, urban) and letter grade assigned by the state's education department (e.g., A-F). Based on the state report card, school performance varied from low-performing to high-performing. All nine schools were located in the Western region of a Southeastern state. The study utilized a qualitative case study design and gathered data through semi-structured interviews.

Eight semi-structured interview questions were formulated to discern the participants' perceptions concerning the four research questions. Two interview questions were developed for each research question, categorized into four questioning categories based on Strauss et al.'s (1981) framework. The four questioning categories consisted of (a) hypothetical questions, (b) devil's advocate questions, (c) posing the ideal questions, and (d) interpretive questions. The hypothetical questions present a situation or scenario and ask participants to envision their actions or behaviors in response. The devil's advocate questions encourage critical thinking by asking the participant to consider opposing viewpoints. The ideal questions prompt participants to express their situation or opinion on a topic. The interpretive questions confirm participant understanding and encourage further expressing opinions and sentiments.
The qualitative case study involved triangulation with three sources of data: (a) semi-structured interviews, (b) field notes, and (c) a document analysis of previous research concerning professional development. Noble and Heale (2019) suggested that research triangulation is the process that helps to increase the credibility and validity of research. Further, Bans-Akutey and Tiimub (2021) highlighted three benefits of methodical triangulation in research. Firstly, it helps to confirm the accuracy of research findings. Secondly, when a researcher uses a variety of sources or procedures in a study, the strengths of one method can compensate for the weaknesses of another method. Lastly, using multiple research methods can provide additional insights that help the researcher explain a phenomenon better. Multiple data sources strengthened the reliability of data.

For this study, nine formal interviews were conducted in March and April of 2024. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. The nine participants were asked eight interview questions in a structured format. To ensure consistency, the researcher asked the interview questions in the same order for all participants. There were two interview questions aligned with each of the four research questions. Interview questions were designed based on Strauss, Schatzman, Bucher, and Sabshin’s (1981) four categories of interview questions, which included (a) hypothetical questions, (b) devil’s advocate questions, (c) ideal questions, and (d) interpretive questions. Additionally, follow-up and clarifying questions were asked to encourage detailed responses.

The study utilized field notes as the second form of data collection. These notes were taken during the interview process and documented nonverbal communication or any actions that could emphasize or enhance the participants’ responses. According to Creswell (2006), field
notes are an indispensable tool in qualitative research as they offer researchers a detailed and rich context for data analysis.

Interviews and field notes were conducted as part of the study. In addition, document analysis was used as the third research method, explicitly focusing on previous research related to professional development. According to Merriam (1988), documents can help researchers develop, understand, and discover insights relevant to the research problem. During the document analysis, identified themes were compared to interview data to understand the perceptions of middle school social studies teachers on professional development trends. The themes derived from the interviews and field notes were then compared with the existing literature on professional development to determine their consistency.

Research Questions and Responses

Research Question One

Interview Question One. The first research question was, “What are middle school social studies teachers' perceptions regarding professional development?” The first corresponding interview question was, “Suppose you were to develop a professional development session for faculty. What would it look like?”

Each of the nine teachers held a unique perspective on the planning and designing of professional development sessions for faculty, reflecting the diverse range of modalities and topics that professional development encompasses. Tracy, a 14-year 8th-grade United States history teacher from an all Optional urban school confidently voiced that she would create a professional development that was applicable and implementable for teachers of all contents. She stated:

So, I have led a significant amount of PD at the National, State, and kind of local district level. I would say that when I lead a PD session in general, no matter what it's on,
whether it's assessment or questioning or development of aligned content to standard aligned content, whatever it is, I want it to be applicable and implementable. So even if it is something that most teachers will find monotonous, I want to bring an ability to take something back with teachers that they can use literally the next day. So when I approach what my PD is going to look like, I definitely focus on how the PD can be usable immediately regardless of what it is. So I would want it to be something that any teacher in any subject can take a strategy or a tool and utilize it in their classrooms.

Like Tracy, Paul, an 8th-grade United States history teacher, necessitated the need for professional development to be usable and relevant. He reported:

So I would definitely try and include all of whatever technology they're trying to focus on, whatever platforms, whatever systems that we are going to be utilizing. I need to make it as relevant to that as possible so that it makes sense. So if we're going to do a virtual component for us, it would be Microsoft Teams and not Schoology or something like that. So I have to make sure it would match to the platforms that we use. Sometimes that doesn't happen And I think relevance is the key there, making sure it's relevant to the people that are actually attending the PD, which happens a lot where the information you're learning isn't the most relevant.

Luke, an alternative-route educator with a history degree, echoed the need for professional development sessions presented to faculty to be applicable by implementing additional time for modeling and practice.

Well, I am a big believer in role-playing and practicing skills. So our development should incorporate introducing an idea, but also actually practicing that idea. So doing the thing that you're talking about instead of just talking about it. Yeah. So it would factor in that practice time and that time to internalize what it is we're talking about.

Luke explained his personal experience with professional development and documented why he supports role-playing and practice time as a practical feature of professional development. He explained:

Well, I've had a variety of professional developments. Some of them online, some of them in person, some of them like conferences, out-of-town conferences, and stuff. So sometimes it's a big room and it's just like a speech or a TED talk or something. Sometimes even in a smaller setting, it's the same way and you're just sitting and getting, even though those can be really interesting, they can also get really boring, especially when it's one after the other. And sometimes with those, they'll be like a sit-and-get part and then a practice part where you just kind of play around. I remember doing something like that for learning about map skills, using map tools on Google and stuff like that. But
the best ones I've been to were put together with a lot of thought, and I'm thinking of when I taught over at my previous school. So those professional developments were fine-tuned. So they would have almost like a lesson plan more so than just a speech prepared. And you would actually, I mean, if you're learning about behavior management, you would actually role-play it. You would get up out of your seat, practice it, you be the student, you be the teacher, or if it's a social studies skill, and I actually led some of those even. It's like you're literally giving them an assignment, working through it, because that's the best way to figure out what the heck this new skill is.

Like Tracy and Luke, Megan, an 8th-grade United States history teacher, stated she would want the professional development she designed to emphasize relevant teaching practices and strategies that could be implemented seamlessly in the classroom. She passionately shared:

Okay. I actually have done that with the respect for my EdS., I had to do a professional development that I just talked about, hands-on learning. And for me, that's one that I would like to hear about all the time, or at least an interactive learning environment for students. And I think there are so many teachers, I know I've been guilty of it in the past. I learned by lecture, so that's what I'm supposed to do with a student. And so I think there is that go-to moment, and unless you expose teachers to those other things that might happen, they don't know. And I think that from even my educational classes for my masters, I didn't get a lot of those, Hey, here's a Socratic seminar, here's this, here's this. So anytime that professional development can open up teaching strategies to somebody, especially for social studies because I feel like that's where we get gypped. I say it all the time and everybody just laughs at me and I'm like, stop laughing. It's not really that funny where I'm like, we're the redhead stepchild. Nobody cares about social studies until the world's coming apart. And then you're like, what? They know, what have you done? So if professional development is directed if I was coming up with it, it is what can I bring that could open up experiences for both the teachers and the students and more focused on students obviously, but it is like virtual field trips. I mean, I could go on forever. So it's that kind of thing because it's too many times of that.

Sarah, a Level-5 designated teacher at an urban school with a student success rate of 14.1%, further echoed her experience as a social studies teacher presenting professional development.

I have done this before. It's kind of how I say this. It's like a positive thing. I guess. People are like, oh, you have it enough together, we expect we know that you can plan this. But also it's kind of terrifying because, and I know it's related to social studies, but I'll be real with you. Being a social studies teacher, nine times out of 10, I'm not a part of the conversation. So when I try to present information, a lot of times there's a lot of pushback from especially math and ELA about what we're delivering. Just an example, we have a huge ESL population at our school and myself, and my other social studies teacher were the only teachers in our school to get a Level 5 TVAAS, if you will. It was because we have been purposefully working with ESL strategies and we presented our
data and what we did in the classroom and it was rough. Let me just say. So I would be nervous to present and also honored, but I always expect pushback because it's me and I'm a social studies girl.

Mike, an alternative-route teacher with a military background, took a different approach and detailed the topic he would focus on as a professional development presenter. He shared his views on the significance of parent and community involvement.

If I were going to create a general ed, overall faculty PD, one thing that I think that I would try to focus on would be community and parent interaction and how to do that in a professional manner with parents. Everybody from the straight-A student that you don't really need to necessarily see their parent every day to that very difficult student where you're constantly having to have parent contact. I believe that if you have a good support system in the community and the parents, that makes your job as an educator that much easier. So developing that positive relationship with both the community and the parent or guardian, I think that will generate great things for the teacher and the students.

Mike went on to further explain what topic he would want to present as a content-specific professional development session to social studies teachers. He stated:

Yeah. I personally, the way that I teach history, I teach it from a storytelling perspective rather than just say, here's the dates, here's the main events of it, and just remember it type mentality. I try to get really involved and try to draw my students into creating a story that in their mind they can visually pretend that they're there and see these events unfolding. And that teaching method I think would be worth looking at for other teachers as well.

Over the last 30 years, researchers have identified key elements that make professional development effective. These elements include focusing on content, active learning, collaboration, effective practice models, coaching and expert support, feedback and reflection, and sustained duration (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; De La Paz et al., 2011; Desimone, 2009). Many of these elements were mentioned when teachers were asked what they would want their professional development session to appear. Luke recommended the inclusion of role-playing and practice time for faculty members to enhance their behavior management and teaching strategies, underscoring the importance of effective practice models,
feedback, and reflection. Additionally, Megan emphasized the value of incorporating hands-on learning opportunities, which aligns with the research-based element of active learning. While individual responses varied, many participants emphasized the need for practical, relevant, and applicable content in professional development sessions tailored to their audience.

**Interview Question Two.** The second corresponding interview question was, “Would you say professional development is beneficial?”

The participants were divided on this question. Six out of nine teachers stated that professional development is beneficial if quality and practical. However, three teachers saw professional development as not beneficial and a waste of time. During her interview, Megan, a teacher at a rural public school, previously shared her frustration with the lack of social studies content-specific professional development opportunities offered to her within her district. She further explains how this affects her viewpoint on the benefits of professional development.

No. I mean, most of the time, no, because the professional developments that I have to go to in my district are largely ELA-based, and they're ELA-focused. And so it's just kind of like a, oh, we need something to do with the social studies teachers go with ELA people. And I'm sitting here going, come on, bring us in. Some people who can talk about social studies. I mean, we've got US history teachers here, bring in somebody who can talk to us about events that we might need to learn more about or about, Hey, we've got this State Park down the road, bring these guys up here to talk about what they have that maybe we can go down there for a field trip for or that they can bring to us, that kind of stuff. So there’s a lot of times that when I go to professional development, I'm sitting here, how can I, well, I'd put it this way. I can remember going to a wedding last fall during football season that I wore my hair down and I have my AirPod in and I'm sitting like this before the wedding started. When it started, I took the AirPod out. But until then, I'm like, what else can I be doing right now? I could be watching a football game. It really is that there are times that I have felt like I have gone into a professional development and just tried to plan my year out. I could be doing something so much more, there could be something else I could be doing right now instead of listening to the latest and greatest about Wit and Wisdom or whatever the ELA curriculum might be. And I'm just like, you're wasting my time.
Similar to Megan, Emily, who has been teaching for 24 years in a rural school, shared her disdain for professional development as both a current social studies teacher and a past English Language Arts teacher. Emily chuckled with a wide grin and then replied:

No. I'm going to be honest. No, I do not. No, I get very frustrated in professional development. I just don't think they're, I mean, and for social studies teachers anyway, I'll say that. Well, I don't know. When I taught ELA, I never felt like they were beneficial. I can't say in all the years of teaching, and this is 24, I cannot really pinpoint a handful of professional development that I've attended that I really felt like I walked away with something. We were just saying today we have Promethean boards in our classrooms. I think we've had them for three years. I guess wonderful things, just wonderful to have, but we don't know enough about them to fully benefit from all that can be done with them. I was just saying that today with some of my fellow teachers, we had a professional development, the company sent somebody and talked and we left with nothing, and we know how to turn 'em on and we know how to make them work. But if we feel like there's so much more that we should be learning, but once again, another professional development that wasn't beneficial.

Echoing Megan and Emily, Paul, who teaches in an urban school district, agreed that professional development is not beneficial to him as a social studies teacher overall. He stated:

Only in very specific circumstances. A lot of it I would have defined as either repetitive or a waste of time, unfortunately. Sometimes we'll be in there and they'll hit on something. I'm like, oh, that's great. And it may not even have been something they intended on doing for that to be the most important part. I have found that they've tried to homogenize all professional development to make it all fit so they don't have to be as, so for social studies, we're going to do this difference and it all seems to more focus on either literacy or numeracy because they focus on math and ELA and they'll try and how can we just cram social studies into that? I found that happens quite a bit.

While Megan, Emily, and Paul felt that professional development is overall not beneficial, the six other participants expressed that they believe professional development is beneficial as long as it is of high quality. Bailey has taught the same grade level at the same school since she became a teacher 24 years ago. She explains that professional development is beneficial if it is well-planned and purposeful:

Yes. If it's good and it's thought out, I think it's one of the best things that we do when we have time, like I said, the literacy thing that I did a couple of years ago was great. I was a core coach. But back before COVID, we had 10 core coaches, and so each subject area
had state-trained teachers and we would do curriculum-focused stuff that we would teach a week-long in-service on during the summer. So if it's beneficial and teachers can take it and immediately use it for things if it's technology-based or if it's content specific, if it's data related things that you really truly can use that doesn't seem like it's wasting your time, I think that's important. No one in this position has a second to waste on something that it's like, here, we throw this in here too. You have to have something. That's what I think.

Tracy’s response was well-aligned with Bailey’s, as she emphasized the need and importance of planning professional development and catering to teachers’ needs:

Quality Professional development is, and that's professional development that has been planned, has been reflected upon, has been developed with intention and purpose and with deliberation. And isn't something to check a box in a professionalism self-score, or as a district we're doing this. It really requires people at multiple levels to kind of think about what our teachers need and then identify who is best to meet the need of providing the facilitation of this training so that when it goes to be implemented, our teachers are best prepared for it.

Kate, who teaches in a suburban district, agreed that professional development is beneficial and opened up about how her school administration makes their school-level professional development sessions applicable. However, she further explains that in order for professional development to be deemed beneficial, it needs to have practicality and a time for collaboration:

Overall? Yes. I would say only if it's practical, a lot of the heady stuff and that it's nice to know. Like I said earlier, it's nice to know that things, our data-based just sound instruction to do, but you have to see it practically working out in your classroom. That's something I love about my school is that at the end of our PD sessions, a lot of times our principal will say, now what are you going to take back to your classroom tomorrow? I just want to give you a couple of things that you can do tomorrow. Yes. There's been some heavy ELA-based things in my experience. That is very, I have a lot to say about the social studies side of those things, but of course, we use reading a lot in our class. And even those, I'm able to go back and say, well, how can it fit into my teaching? But I think the ones that are the least helpful to me, none really stick out to me are just the ones where I can't walk away with anything. It's just a lot of talking at me, but there's no practicality, what does this look like in your classroom or PD sessions where you can't discuss things with the people around you are pretty irrelevant because you're not talking, I have to talk to process and if I can't do that, then it's not going to help me.

According to six participants, professional development is beneficial when it is quality, well-planned, and practical. Bailey stressed the importance of content-specific professional
development, supported by current research. Specifically, enhanced content knowledge is crucial for effective teaching (National Staff Development Council, 2001; Progressive Policy Institute, 2005; Walker et al., 2006). Moreover, Kate, one of the participating teachers, highlighted the significance of collaborative learning. She noted that professional development is only beneficial if it allows educators to discuss newly acquired knowledge with their peers. Several researchers have recognized collaboration as a vital component of effective professional development (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; De La Paz et al., 2011; Desimone, 2009).

Three participants did not find professional development beneficial because they believed the opportunities they were provided were often irrelevant, ELA-focused, and repetitive. It can be assumed that these participants do not find their professional development opportunities helpful for their roles as social studies teachers and instead receive irrelevant information to take back to their classrooms. Research shows that this lack of autonomy and disregard for teachers' unique needs and interests can lead to an unsatisfactory and unfulfilling professional learning experience (Sparks, 2004). Furthermore, current research emphasizes that schools should prioritize professional development to meet the needs of teachers to ensure academic progress and student achievement (Brendefur et al., 2016; Schachter et al., 2019).

Research Question Two

Interview Question Three. The second research question was, “What are middle school social studies teachers’ perceptions regarding professional development and its relation to the subject?” The first corresponding interview question was, “What do you think the ideal social studies professional development session would look like?” Each of the nine teachers had a distinctive viewpoint regarding the components comprising an ideal social studies professional
development session. Two of the nine participants emphasized making the State content standards the focal point in social studies professional development sessions. Emily responded:

Yeah, I mean, I can't think of anything else other than just gearing it towards the standards. And we have before had professional development at the end of the year, I think it was two years ago when we had sixth, seventh, and eighth-grade teachers all meet. And so you do those crosswalks of what each grade level is teaching and how you can connect it to the next. That was semi-beneficial except it was the end of the year and everybody was so done. But that did help to find out what the grade below you taught so that you could think of when you're teaching, well, they should know this because that was one of their standards the previous year. And we did have a professional development where we tweaked our pacing guide at the end of the year. That was beneficial because it was right after testing and you had everything fresh on your mind. And we were able to say, well, we probably need to move this standard to this nine weeks based on what happened throughout the year or if I got my standards done. And that length of time to be able to take a nine-week test. That was beneficial, that was a beneficial one. But it was teacher-led and it was teachers just telling what they needed and what wasn't working and what was working.

Like Emily, Sarah stressed the importance of focusing on content standards in social studies professional development and of having the opportunity to work with colleagues who teach the same subject area and grade level.

I love this. This is nice to think about. Okay, so first of all, I would start with your section of social studies. The brand as a whole is like, are we US history in high school? Are we world history in middle school? Are we US history in eighth grade? You know what I'm saying? So I think to have an effective PD, it would have to be, I guess categorized if you will, by your grade content or maybe even world history and US History, something like that. And personally, for me, I would think it would be really beneficial to like look at the standards that you teach with the people who also teach those standards. Maybe all of the sixth-grade social studies, all of the eighth-grade social studies, and talk about the things that people obviously base it off data right, but if there's one teacher who's just killing it on standard 6.52 and everyone else is like, how did you do that? Where are you doing this? And being able to communicate effective teaching practices for how they're able to achieve higher scores. I think a lot of collaboration would be necessary and collaboration with people who are teaching the same thing.

The response provided by Sarah is supported by research in the field. Specifically, her mention of working alongside colleagues who teach the same subject and grade level aligns with the professional development model of a professional learning community (PLC). Empirical studies
have demonstrated that PLCs positively affect social studies teachers' attitudes toward professional development and can potentially improve student achievement (Copur & Demirel, 2022; Phillips, 2003; Thacker, 2017). Effective PLCs have been found to enhance the quality of social studies instruction, leading to better student outcomes and improving schools' overall effectiveness (Lomos et al., 2011; Jones et al., 2013; Hofman et al., 2015). Luke, who teaches at a high-performing suburban school, echoed Sarah's importance of collaboration in a social studies professional development session. He further explained that providing time during the session to practice new strategies with his peers would allow additional time for internalization and reflection.

I definitely want to work and talk to the people. I want to work with the people around me and talk to the people around me. I want to, whatever the heck there is, they're telling me I want to practice doing it myself, and I want enough time to be able to do that. That's pretty much it. I mean, the lecture part was always going to be there. And the internalization part or the practice part is definitely going to feel very awkward and uncomfortable for the presenter. And I think that's why they don't give us enough time for that. My take on it is you're supposed to be presenting, and so you come in with way too much stuff to present for the time that you have, and you got to resist that temptation. It's actually just like being a classroom teacher. Same exact stuff.

Two of the nine participants centered their responses on teaching methods, strategies, and practices in social studies education. Bailey, one of the teachers, stated that most social studies educators firmly grasp the subject matter. Therefore, she suggested that the primary focus should be on developing effective instructional strategies and differentiation methods to help students better comprehend historical content and make it more relevant to their lives.

It's a little hard since it's so per grade level. Well, give me just a second on that. I do think that it needs to not just be content knowledge because generally speaking, anyone that's teaching social studies has the content knowledge. The brand new girl that I've got now, I said brand new. She taught eighth grade for a year and they didn't feel like that was the best fit for her and have moved her down with me and I love her. I think she's amazing, but she has a Master's in history. Each of us had only 13 students in our first period, and so I had half of my 13 have IEPs and three of those have never been in a regular classroom before. They all have been in expanded resource until this year, and now
they're in a regular classroom and have to take the State standardized test. And I spent the whole first quarter feeling like I was drowning in mud there. Nothing I did was going to make any difference. I couldn't help them even with the best assistant in the building because three of them technically had to have a one-on-one. So we ended up with one for the three essentially, and we decided let's put them together. And so the two of us put those two classes together and it has worked so well because she can help me with the kids, and her higher kids are volunteering to help my lower kids. And she having extensive history content knowledge, which I feel like I have a pretty good grasp on, could not deliver it as well to 12-year-olds. She would be in, we did a Greek philosophy lesson a few weeks ago and she was going into all this very specific stuff and I was like, you don't understand. Generally, she does a very good job of being able to control her class and do all the things, but it was like you were shooting way over everybody's head. So we have been able to model some of that for her and she's like, she got her Master's in, I want to say data stuff. And so that's been helpful. So I think ideally a social studies professional development would probably be more about delivery, different ways of different teaching strategies, that sort of thing. I would think it would need to be more about the art of teaching as opposed to, this is specifically what you do for this unit or this unit. Maybe incorporate some of that. But a lot of it is kind of finding your style, but also what is the best way to reach to kids and to motivate the kids and all of that. So that would probably, I think, be the better choice for social studies professional development.

Like Bailey, Kate expressed that her ideal professional development in social studies would focus on instructional strategies and methods. She stated:

The execution would have to be to get your units in front of you and how you are going to use the strategies that we are giving you in your actual units or plan the first. So for sixth grade start with the foundations of humanity. Start with that and how can you implement these four strategies we've given you into your first four weeks of school? Actually practically sitting down and doing that, I attended the State conference last year and it was really heavy in geography and I love that because I've always struggled with geography, having it stick with my students. And so that gave me a lot of practical things. So that topic and then how to really do the blooms type of questioning. I really want to implement things like AP questioning in my middle school classroom because it's so kids are able to do it. I attended an AP session with my coworker, he's an AP teacher, and it was just us two and it was the way the questions were formatted. My seventh graders, even sixth graders, if it was just brought down a little bit with the instruction, the instructions were so specific that our middle school concrete thinkers would be like, oh, okay, I can do this without getting overwhelmed. And so another PD session, I would love to see content-wise would be how to use not just paper, not just writing documents in your classroom, but picture documents, any kind of primary secondary source that you would be able to use in your classroom to make it a little bit more relevant, I guess in a way I really love, I'm starting to use Quizizz and I haven't used it yet, but there's a feature on Quizizz that says you can make the question a real-world example. And I haven't done it yet, so yeah. I've seen it in a science way when I went through the training for it, but I haven't seen it in a social studies question, but I'm wondering how they would make it
relevant, a real-world example about, say the Great Wall of China. How could they make that a real-world example, but check their understanding of medieval China or ancient China? I don't know.

Bailey and Kate's viewpoints highlight the significance of incorporating pedagogical knowledge and content knowledge in professional development sessions for social studies educators. According to research, attending professional development sessions that emphasize classroom and pedagogical strategies can be highly beneficial for teachers, enabling them to not only deliver effective instruction but also manage their classrooms and cater to the diverse learning needs of their students (Thomas-Brown et al., 2016; Wayne et al., 2016). Professional development programs that aim to enhance teachers' knowledge of teaching and student management have the potential to yield positive educational outcomes for all students. Tracy, a teacher at an urban school known for high academic achievement, offered a different perspective. Like her response to the second interview question, she underscored the importance of addressing teachers' needs. Furthermore, she noted that resources would be the most suitable topic for professional development in social studies education. She answered:

So again, I would think it would have to go back to what's needed because not everyone needs the same thing. And I think that that's where PD kind of falls short sometimes, is everyone has to go to this session on questioning. Well, some teachers are already really great at developing questions. Some teachers really need an understanding of how to hit all the content that's required by the state standards within the context of time. It becomes very difficult in a subject area that doesn't get the same level of importance as say, math or ELA. When I think of social studies specifically, it's more going to be resources. Resources for sure. There's just a lack of resources about it. It would also be related to protection and self-preservation in many ways. There's been a lot of work that's been put out to minimize and restrict what teachers can say and would focus on the development of skills, specifically skills, and how to teach our students how to analyze, develop, and generate unique and individualized ideas from the examination of primary sources. Yes, I can teach my students how to draw conclusions from primary sources, and from there they can historically look at an excerpt and be able to figure out that women were treated poorly in the 19th century or Native Americans were forcibly removed from their homes while not actively coming out and saying it my personal self. So not giving opinions, not giving my own thoughts to it, but rather allowing students to draw their own conclusions.
Mike, an 8th-grade teacher at a rural school, had the opportunity to travel throughout the country and visit various historical places of significance, such as Jamestown, Philadelphia, Boston, Gettysburg, and Shiloh. In his response, he expressed his belief that field trips to these historical monuments and landmarks can be an invaluable tool for social studies teachers looking to enhance the quality of instruction in their classrooms. He replied:

I had really like to see some, depending on what level of social studies that you're teaching. For instance, my eighth-grade standards deal strictly with American history. I don't deal with any type of world history or anything like that, but if I were generating a PD for teachers in the State who are teaching eighth-grade social studies standards, I would really like to have a field trip for the teachers going to a place that helps, remember, we're locally of course, but somewhere that would help that teacher connect with the kids, showing them how history is related to them in their own backyard. And the more interaction the teacher has with that specific location or the specific place where those events occurred, the better able, I believe that that teacher would be able to tell that story.

**Interview Question Four.** The second corresponding interview question was, "Would you say professional development helps advance your primary subject content knowledge?"

Seven of nine teachers reported that professional development programs are ineffective in advancing their social studies content knowledge. Most teachers believe this is because of the lack of social studies content-specific professional development opportunities. Three participants expressed that this is due to the middle school environment's strong focus on English Language Arts. Emily, a 7th-grade social studies teacher, initially responded with hesitation.

I'm sorry that I'm so negative, but no. No, it doesn't. I mean, I feel like I advance my knowledge. I study the standards, I dig deeper and get online and find different activities and yeah, it's me. It's not professional development at all.

Emily continued to detail how she feels social studies is often put behind English Language Arts in her school by providing personal accounts of her own experiences. She responded:
They are heavily invested in ELA, which is rightfully so. I get that. But yeah. Well, here's a prime example. So at the beginning of the year, we had been using Mastery Connect, I don't know if you're familiar with it. So we had been using Mastery Connect over the last couple of years. They decided they weren't doing what they needed to do, the company was not giving us what they had promised, so they decided to no longer keep that service. So they get another platform ELS. They're like, okay, just give us something. We just need something. When we started with ELS, they had nothing for social studies. They did for ELA, they did for math, and nothing for social studies. And we're going, we got to have something. You've taken away Mastery Connect. Now you've got this platform that has nothing for social studies teachers at all. And it went months that way. And they finally decided we're going to go back and get MasteryConnect so you guys can have that information and have that data. And ELS has built more, but for a while there we had nothing. So that's pretty typical. It's like everything else gets taken care of, but social studies really doesn't matter. And that's kind of how you feel.

Kate, who has been teaching 7th-grade social studies for five years now, echoed Emily’s concerns in her response. She, too, indicated that when professional development is content-based, it is more than likely focused on English Language Arts.

Absolutely not. Absolutely not. It's always, if it is content-based, again, it's more of an ELA-based thing. We went through a PD session we were granted to do by the state, and the second half of it was a two-part PD that we did stuff in the summer. We had subs during the year so we could go to this training. And the whole second cohort of it, our second year was ELA-based. The whole thing, there's never, other than when I went to the State conference for that geography type stuff, nobody ever does PD on social studies content. We have to just crack open our textbooks and Google. That's how we have PD on our content. None. I'm so glad the state doesn't let people do K through eight or six through eight anymore all grade levels because how can you know that content? How can you know that much information about something? I did. I did want to say this. I think the only PD that provides for any kind of content knowledge is ELA. It's not for science, it's not for math, it's not for any of that unless you go to specific math pd. But I've never seen anything for science or social studies that's outside of conferences, I've never seen it before.

Like Emily and Kate, Sarah mentioned English Language Arts in her response. Sarah, who works at an underperforming urban school, noted that her professional development experience typically involves being grouped with an English Language Arts teacher.

Absolutely not. No. I don't know that I've actually been to one, so it would be great to see one. It is typically a general session. I will say there was one time, and it happened this year that we went to, it was for an ILT meeting. It wasn't even A DLD or anything. And they specifically wanted to talk about supporting ELA in social studies. Did they actually
talk about that? No, but it was like the first time I was like, oh, social studies has its own section in this PD today. So for most of the time, no, it's normally just kind of like everybody's grouped in one room or yeah, it does break off into, well, social studies people just go with the ELA people, that kind of stuff.

Studies have shown that educational policies like No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) have created problematic incentives for states and school districts. Legislation has led to a prioritization of English and Math subjects over social studies, which has resulted in social studies education receiving less funding and attention for professional development opportunities (Duffield et al., 2013; Duncan, 2011; Perrotta, 2021; O'Connor et al., 2007). Emily, Kate, and Sarah's experiences illustrate the impact of these policies on social studies teachers who receive comparatively less curricular support and opportunities for professional development compared to their colleagues who teach English Language Arts (Grant et al., 2012; Rock et al., 2006). Paul, who teaches 7th and 8th grade social studies this year opened up about his struggles with adapting to a new grade level and new content with minimal support through professional development. This was his first year teaching both world history and United States history. He explained:

No. It's going to be whatever the most recent, not theme, but whoever they've paid money to and whatever the new exciting thing is, that's what they're going to focus on. A year ago it's like, okay, you're going to learn station rotation. We want to see station rotation and we want it every week and we're going to do this, and this is how you do it. It has to be done like this. And then this past year they're like, okay, we're not going to do that anymore. And I'm like, okay, So being a history teacher, it's like it's my job to find patterns from the past. And I'm like, so how do I know that the stuff we're doing this year is going to be relevant in a year? So it's never the actual content. It's whatever the district that's chosen, this is what the big push is going to be, whether it's data or technology, and that is very frustrating. That's why I struggled with seventh grade because that's not where my area of interest is. That's not what I studied in school. So it actually was a struggle for me this year when we were doing India and China and Japan, and I'm like, I don't know this stuff as well. And I think it reflects, whereas the American history, I'm like, I got this and I can go deep in it and make all the connections, but that was dependent upon my learning in college and kind of freshening up every so often. But yeah, it was very difficult for seventh grade this year.
Paul confirmed that his content knowledge was reliant on his college education. Nevertheless, research further supports the benefits of teachers’ ongoing engagement in subject-matter-based professional development in enhancing teachers’ content knowledge and skills (Wayne et al., 2016). Megan, a teacher park ranger in the summers, mentioned that professional development helps her with primary subject content knowledge. However, she emphasized that she seeks and arranges professional development opportunities. She responded:

Only the ones that I’ve gone after. I mean, if I’ve gone after it, then yes, it's helped. I mean, I have done professional developments with Gilder Lehrman, the Tennessee State Library and Archives, the Tennessee State Museum, and the National Park Service. I’ve got to go find what will be beneficial to me versus the school system. They don't bring that same kind of thing. I mean, it's like you could probably find some stuff online that the social studies teachers could sit in and watch and be part of a Zoom, but they just don't. Yeah. I mean, when you can find the right topics and the right stuff, then it's beneficial. But if other than that, no.

Tracy, who has participated in National Fellowships, expressed that she feels like she is advancing her content knowledge through professional development. Furthermore, like Megan mentioned programs and professional development opportunities outside the school setting. She answered:

Yes. I would say that when you go, the more a teacher knows about their content, the better. So when I’ve gone to sessions that aren't necessarily about teaching strategies but are more historical background and learning theory, that is more about, oh, let's examine Lincoln's presidency, or let's look at the development of Jacksonian democracy through a series done at the Heritage. There are lots of programs that put on educational webinars like the Gilder Lehrman Institute, the National Constitution Center, the Bill of Rights Institute, and iCivics, all of these programs put on phenomenal content PD. And so the more content we know and the more resources that we're exposed to, the better we can be at facilitating historical education.

Bailey’s response aligned with Tracy's. She indicated that professional development enables teachers to keep up with historical events and changes:

Absolutely. Absolutely. There's always something to learn. There's always something new that as the years go by and the kids change and what they have access to changes and even what we know about history changes from time to time that people regularly history
never changes. Yes, actually it very much does. I'm sorry that you don't realize that they regularly find things that archeological digs and they find documents and all sorts of things. History actually does change. And so even it's kind of like a doctor. You have to be able to keep up with a lot of that. And even though you might be responsible for doing most of that on your own, if you don't do professional development, you don't know what you don't know so much. So it helps you to be able to be like this that's out there for you.

Professional development that improves a teacher's knowledge about the subject matter is crucial for enhancing teaching effectiveness. However, social studies is often overlooked despite its significance as a core subject (Duffield et al., 2013; Guskey, 2003). Some participants pointed out that there is usually less emphasis on social studies than on English Language Arts, mathematics, and science and that their opportunities for professional development that improves their content knowledge are limited.

Research Question Three

Interview Question Five. The third research question was, “What are middle school social studies teachers' perceptions of professional development concerning pedagogy?” The first corresponding interview question was, “What do you think the ideal professional development for acquiring differentiated instructional strategies would be like?” All nine participants provided unique perspectives on their ideal professional development for acquiring differentiated instructional strategies. Mike highlighted the significance of extended professional development which allows for collaboration with peers who teach the same content. He stated:

I believe that the ideal PD for something like that would be a minimum of four hours. I think PDs where you just come in for an hour and then you're done after school, you don't have the true time necessary to devote to what you're trying to learn. And whenever you get to differentiation, there's multitudes of learners out there and if you're trying to reach each one of those individually, you've got to have some time to truly sit down and think about things. It doesn't just come to you in a one-hour session. I think a lot of brainstorming and collaboration with other people who are teaching that subject content is critical and having time to have those conversations and then come back to the whole group and then talk about that. I think that that really needs to occur.
Mike's response aligns with current research, emphasizing the significance of extended professional development time. Desimone's (2009) study has shown that extended professional development programs increase the likelihood of teachers acquiring appropriate instructional practices, directly impacting their students' growth and achievement. When combined with a focus on pedagogy, long-term professional development benefits social studies teachers by providing them with information on diverse learners and how to provide a more equitable education for students (O'Brien, 2011). Bailey stressed the significance of working with other teachers, including special education teachers, who could provide an example of varying instructional strategies for students at all levels. She responded:

Right, okay. So, this has been generally my strength. I tend to do well with kids that need to grow. And this year, it's been a struggle with this particular group of kids. I think that it might help to have people who've been in special education and are good at those things. There's a woman who used to be at our school that's now an assistant principal at an elementary school who was very good at it. Here are some ideas for your APEX kids or your gifted kids. These are some ideas for this. She was really good at those things and modeled what it would look like. I know there's another teacher at one of the schools in our district, and he's been top of the state for multiple years. Of course, he gets all the highest kids in the district, so it's leveled within an advanced classroom of children who not only are high academically but have traveled the world. So that's easy to do with that. Part of that, I think, though, too, is how you manage a classroom with that many children at the same time, something that we're going to next year, we've always had advanced sixth-grade math and language arts, and we're getting rid of that next year. They will only have advanced in seventh and eighth grade. Part of the reason is that pulling those children from science and social studies equates to having two to three classes where there is no one to answer those questions or to ask those higher-order questions. And so looking back into that, which will be more what we'll have in the next year, I would say someone who can model specific strategies with very high highs, very low lows, and a lot of in-betweens. And what do you do to keep what I've always tried to do, we try to do mini project kind of things. And so if you're very creative, you may take longer. If you're someone who works a little slower, it's okay because there's immediately this next thing for you to work on. So, I've always done it, but it hasn't worked as well this year, which is a little frustrating. It's just this group of children. It's been a struggle kind of all year kind of doing what my status quo. But I
think that would be it. I think it'd have to be something along the lines of strategies and how to manage people, resources, and time at the same time.

The modeling process provides a visible example of a desired teaching practice (Renkl, 2014). Research suggests that modeling is essential to effective professional development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Like Bailey, Emily believes observing peers modeling best practices is an excellent way to gain new instructional strategies. Emily answered:

I guess you could call it a professional development, but I think the most successful thing would be is to go into other teacher's classrooms and see what they do, what they're doing for differentiation. Just watching other successful teachers to me is the best way, not sitting and somebody telling me something. Me seeing it in action and really working.

As Emily mentioned, peer observations are a valuable modality of professional development. This technique is effective because it provides teachers with direct feedback on their teaching practices and allows them to reflect on their teaching strategies in a supportive learning environment while exchanging best practices (Beigy & Woodin, 1999; Borich, 1999; Richards & Farrell, 2005). Luke approached the question from a different angle. He believed professional development should focus on student awareness and their varying learning levels and disabilities to gain differentiated instructional strategies. He explained:

Yes. Let me say this, with all the different kinds of students and the different kinds of differentiation that might be called for, probably the best place to start and major for the presenter is awareness and understanding, because everybody comes into teaching with a idea of a default student baseline. This is what a student is able to do and so on. And anything different from that can be challenging. And a lot of times it can be challenging just to understand differences that could be cultural, linguistic, and specialized instruction. Kids have been in my classroom, that's a whole different ball game. Then, of course, you got your autistic kids, the gifted kids. So I think we hear about these categories and think we understand them, but unless you work with that kind all the time, you really don't have awareness. So I wish PD would focus more on just awareness. I feel like we blow through the awareness piece and we get into the sort of tactical way of differentiating instruction in the classroom. But if I don't really understand the different kind of students I'm trying to differentiate for, that doesn't matter. I have to understand the students first, then I'll naturally understand how I could differentiate for them.
Megan shared that she finds it challenging to tailor her teaching to meet the unique needs of her students, as their experiences differ significantly from hers. She believes the most effective professional development would involve learning about interactive and hands-on learning opportunities for her students to enhance their understanding of social studies concepts.

Yeah, yeah. Wow. I think that one would be, it would be kind of more what can a student experience. So in that PD, I would feel like I would need to be able to get some manner, some way of being able to see, Hey, here's this level for this kid. Here's this level for this kid. Often not good at that because, and the kids will say it to me like, Ms., well, you just tell us this stuff off the top of your head and everything. And I'm like, I don't, but I appreciate you thinking that I do. And so there's times where I feel, because of the way I know it, the way it was taught to me, I can't break it down. I can't think of ways to break it down. And so there's some times that I just think if there could be somebody outside looking in a way who could tell me, Hey, this is a better way to teach this for this level, this level, this level. Because I don't feel like I do that very well at times. And it's kind a, I mean, the only way sometimes I can think of it is having to be able to say to a kid, but this situation is this way because well, imagine your mom and dad or something. And so there's some ways that I just think to be able to differentiate my instruction if there is somebody who can help me break down a topic better, I mean, it's almost kind of breaking that language down. Another way to think about it is if there's a way for me to take kids, if there would be a way to have that hands-on experience aspect where I'm learning a way to bring in something so that the kids can feel it, smell it, breathe it, that kind of way because of that idea, I mean, I could sit in front of a teacher and hear them say it and understand it, but that's not my kids today. And so I've said to them before where if a teacher stood up and lectured me, I'm writing my notes and I'm writing the crap out of those notes. If I go back and look over those notes, I'm going to remember what the professor said or what the teacher said when it comes to the kids, where they're just like, well, I don't understand this and I'm trying to show them pictures and this and this. And I'm just kind of sitting there going, I never needed all of this. I could just read it. And so that's been an adjustment, and that is where I do feel like that hands-on aspect comes in so big time. And so it's that if there was a professional development where if the NPS or the TSLA came in and said, here is a new experience, if these kids come to this museum and they see this to learn it, I'd be sitting here, okay, how much and when do I go? If I go back and look over those notes, I'm going to remember what the professor said or what the teacher said when it comes to the kids, where they're just like, well, I don't understand this and I'm trying to show them pictures and this and this. And I'm just kind of sitting there going, I never needed all of this. I could just read it. And so that's been an adjustment, and that is where I do feel like that hands-on aspect comes in so big time. And so it's that if there was a professional development where if the NPS or the TSLA came in and said, here is a new experience, if these kids come to this museum and they see this to learn it, I'd be sitting here, okay, how much and when do I go? Kind of thing. So that would probably be the thing I keep going back to, would just be about hands-on something, that experience of learning that I just didn't feel like I never had to have necessarily. But I also recognize that I was a very lucky kid, lucky adult, and that my parents gave my brother and me experiences in life growing up that, so when I'm learning about George Washington or learning about the US government, Hey, I got a trip to Washington DC to remember this from, that wasn't a school sponsored trip or something, but hey, it hit home. Hey, this was a Smithsonian and this is that kind of thing. So the value of that I think is something that needs to come across for some people in PD because there are too many teachers that I know who are like, oh, I'm not taking these kids to the bathroom. If I can help it kind of attitude. And I'm sitting here on the
opposite end of, put me on a bus, a charter bus, not a school bus, but put me on a bus and I'll take kids all over the place. And that's something I wish I could pass on a lot.

Like Megan, Tracy stressed the significance of offering hands-on learning experiences to her students. She thinks the best way to train teachers in differentiated instructional strategies is to allow them to explore different modes of differentiation. Additionally, she shared some specific forms of differentiation that she employs in her classroom. She responded:

Yeah, okay. So for me, and one of the reasons why I think I've had a lot of success in social studies is knowing how to differentiate historical education. Not every student can sit down and read through the Declaration of Independence and understand and draw conclusions with it. So taking text, primary or secondary, and using reify or even at this point, AI and chat GGT to shift the Lexile, yeah, the lexile level of the document so that they can still break it down, focusing in on vocabulary, the development and usage of video to express content and not forcing them to read. The kids can watch a three minute video clip on someone's presidency and not know how to summarize and be able to summarize it. But we'll read a whole four paragraphs and not be able to say one thing about it. So I love the program. Ed puzzle for that equivalent is really phenomenal for vocabulary building. So that I would focus on the chunking and breaking down of text, the use of video and the development of vocabulary, and then incorporation of all of those things into choice. I personally like a lot of choice boards so that students can learn in the process that they best connect with, whether that be providing lots of hands-on sorting activities or the progression of sequential learning, they need sequencing or the ranking. Ranking is a great way to differentiate because what your expectation is for one student may look different for another student. So who were the best world leaders maybe? And so how you rank them, what you use to substantiate that ranking will look different student to student. But all of them are thinking critically about the leaders that they learned throughout the course of let's say, seventh grade social studies.

**Interview Question Six.** The second corresponding interview question was, “Some teachers say that professional development has little impact on their pedagogy. What would you say to them?” The participants were divided on this topic. Three participants agreed that professional development has little impact on their pedagogy. Megan expanded on her initial responses by explaining that her professional development opportunities often focus heavily on English Language Arts. However, she feels this training type does not always positively affect her classroom practices. Megan expressed her frustration with being required to attend English
Language Arts-specific professional development, which she believes has little to no impact on her teaching practices. She explained:

Absolutely. I mean, it really doesn't because when I'm sitting in some of those ELA things, I'll say, “Hey, listen, I love to read. I'm a reader. I would be happy to help y'all with this or with that kind of thing.” Our school system adopted Wit and Wisdom, and I won't get into that for this, but I appreciate the fact that it's a book study-type thing. We had attempted that previously in the eighth grade to do a book study. And I had a teacher ask me like, well, what books do you think we should read in ELA? Since you're teaching social studies, we might want to kind of match your books up. And I was like, oh, really? Y'all are doing this? Oh, okay. Give me just a minute. And I started naming off books. I love Elizabeth George Speare. The Witch of Blackbird Pond would be great during the first nine weeks because I'm teaching colonialism, dah, dah, dah, dah. And I mean, I gave them a list of about 10 books, and then I came back from the park service to find that they were getting, they had ordered the books and done everything. And so the very first book they were reading was Fever 1793. And I was like, ah, I love that book! The problem is I'm going to be teaching them that the English have just arrived in America, and you're going to be talking about the United States that's going to cause confusion. So I'm like, look, if we want to do cross-curricular stuff, then we got to match up better. And so when they're not willing to do that kind of thing, then I'm like, I'm done with y'all. Forget it. And so since most of my professional development is in that ELA mindset, I'm just looking at stuff going, not going to do it. Not interested, not going to help me. Yeah, see you all y'all later. So I just think it's a lot of waste. A lot of waste.

Sarah, like Megan, shared that professional development sessions do not assist her in developing more effective teaching practices. Instead, she feels like a student who might face consequences if she fails to integrate the components learned in professional development into her classroom.

She stated:

I am also in agreement with this statement. I actually had to do an insight survey today, and I think I clicked this exact button. I just feel like sometimes, PD, I understand what it's supposed to be, and I feel like most of the time it's used as we have all this information, we're going to throw it to you in one school day, use it. We're going to check in on you, and if you don't do it, here are the consequences. And I don't think it's actually like developing any kind of skills that we want to see in teachers or developing better practices. It's really just kind of like a review day. I feel like when you're a teacher and you're like, all right guys, here's what we're reviewing. Here's your study guide. We're going to play this game. Great. Your test is tomorrow. And it's kind of like that same vibe for me.
Emily echoed Megan and Sarah’s responses. She reiterated the significance of teachers being allowed to observe their peers in action, which, unfortunately, is not always accessible.

I totally agree. Well, I do agree, but it does depend on the type of professional development, once again, that getting in the classroom, seeing other teachers in action, talking to other teachers about what they do, and just feeding off other teachers. That's your prime spot right there, sitting and somebody teaching you something. I thought about the Promethean Board professional development just recently. I mean, I got nothing, and they were being paid, I'm sure to come. I was like if I could just talk to some teachers that do this in the classroom, maybe they could help me with it. Which we haven't had that.

Emily initially agreed that professional development had little impact on her pedagogy. However, she later acknowledged the benefits of learning from other teachers, including peer and classroom observations and teacher-driven sessions. These experiences helped her learn about new pedagogy and teaching practices. Research has shown that it is common practice to assign the task of designing and executing training programs to district officials rather than teachers, which can result in a deficient and ungratifying learning experience for teachers due to a lack of autonomy and catering to their unique needs and interests (Choy et al., 2016; Colbert et al., 2008; Sparks, 2004). The remaining six participants held different opinions and asserted that professional development impacts their pedagogy. Kate emphasized the importance of seeking professional development opportunities tailored to your needs if the ones offered to you are ineffective. She responded:

I would disagree, and I would say you need to attend better PD sessions. And I know that's not fair because if you have PDs at your school, it is what it is. You can't do anything about it. But actually what I would do is I would encourage them to go find things that are interesting to them. One of the things I like to do is just get on Instagram, and I just look at clips of pedagogy or I look at different things about what different people are doing. And to me, that's even a little professional development because I'm looking at stuff that I like. So once you find something you're interested in, then you go and you go find a PD for that. We have to get professional development points and we have to get that stuff so we can advance our license and do all those things. So I would also encourage people to just try to participate and not just brush it off too. There are a lot of veteran teachers that they just, I've seen pictures of your first year PD, your third year
PD, and the face is just progressively worse because they don't find any kind of benefit, they're not open-minded to how a strategy may actually work. But my friend who teaches social studies, a level five teacher, he's probably like, yeah, this is cool. This is cool. I'm not doing it, but this is okay. I'm not going to do it. I'm awesome at what I do. He would never say that he's not like that at all. But actually, he has told me, yeah, this isn't going to help me because he doesn't need to change. Our school has gotten really good at giving us practical things. And so I think I'm a little spoiled with PDs.

Like Kate, Tracy believes professional development is essential for enhancing her pedagogy and teaching practices. She believes that teachers who disagree are not in the right profession and do not possess a growth mindset.

I would say that they're probably not in the right industry then. They probably have chosen the wrong path. As a 14-year teacher, I have had national fellowships. I have led and attended an overwhelming amount of PD. I am now sought after to be on boards and different committees. And I would say if I am not learning still, then I am not in the right profession. At no point, I may go into a session, and I may hear 90% of what I know, but hearing it from a different perspective will ignite an idea for me or will. It'll draw a connection to something I learned from two or three years ago. I'm like, oh yes. Let me pull this out of the handbook or the toolkit. If you think that professional development is not beneficial, if you think you're just everything and there's no place for you to learn, then you need to reevaluate what you're doing because you're taking on the mindset of several of our students who it is that we don't need this.

Tracy continued her response by highlighting the significance of providing teachers with well-planned and effective professional development opportunities. She emphasized the importance of prioritizing teachers' needs in such programs, which can help them hone their skills and improve their teaching practices. She ended her response by stating:

But what they don't need is professional development which is a waste of their time. When you're not deliberate, and you're not focused, and you're not putting teachers first in the professional development that you're offering, you're going to repeatedly get that mindset from teachers. So when teachers don't put effort, thought, focus, and deliberation into their lessons, the students are disengaged. Teachers are going to be disengaged to thoughtless PD. So it has to be meaningful. We have to take the same strategies and thought processes we take to engage students and motivate students into teacher PD.

Like Kate, Mike emphasized the importance of better professional development for teachers who feel it does not impact their pedagogy. Professional development provides teachers with valuable information on new pedagogical methods, curricula, and managing student behavior (Desimone
et al., 2007; Desimone et al., 2005). In line with this research, Mike shared how a particular professional development opportunity had improved his behavior management skills. He responded:

> They're attending the wrong professional development. Yeah, there's been multiple that have impacted my pedagogy, matter of fact, one of the ones that I went to this year was actually led by a physical education teacher. And this man is phenomenal and I learned so much from him about behavior management. And even though I don't consider myself to have classroom management issues, just the additional practices that he was implementing in his PE class, it was something that was worth trying in my class as well. And whenever you can have the same type of structure stretching across multiple classes or multiple teachers, the kids become accustomed to that. And as long as those are positive things, that's great. So yeah, I think that if they don't believe that they're getting anything out of it that's going to help teach them and change their pedagogy at all, they just need to have better PD.

**Research Question Four**

**Interview Question Seven.** The fourth research question was, “What are middle school social studies teachers’ perceptions regarding professional development in relation to student achievement?” The first corresponding interview question was, “Suppose you attended a professional development session to improve student learning and learning outcomes. What would it be like?” Each of the nine participants mentioned data usage when discussing professional development to enhance student learning. Luke, a 7th-grade social studies teacher at an A-rated school recognized by the State Department of Education, responded:

> Well, I think it would have to have a data component because at the end of the day, all we can do is just measure and look for progress. It has to be specific, and it has to be very clear because I may talk for 30 minutes and feel like everybody's learning. And then later I realized, wow, nobody was really, it was like over their heads kind of a deal. I used to talk over people's heads a whole lot. But yeah, I think probably start with data and understand how to collect different kinds of data, how to interpret and how to use that data and what to do with it after you understand it. That's probably the area that has the most misconceptions on the part of teachers.

Like Luke, Paul initially directed his response towards the mention of data. In his response, he expressed frustration regarding the abundance of social studies content standards that students
must master to exhibit improved learning outcomes on the end-of-year State assessment. Implementing the No Child Left Behind Act encouraged professional development activities to comply with specific standards, including enhancing teachers' knowledge of content, district-wide educational plans, and skills to assist students in meeting challenging state academic standards (NCLB, 2002). However, social studies offerings were deemed insufficient due to their briefness, lack of social studies content, and misalignment with pedagogical methods for teachers (Borko, 2004; Duffield et al., 2013). Consequently, social studies teachers are overburdened with the responsibility of teaching many content standards within an academic year with minimal help while still being held to the same professional standard as their colleagues who teach different subjects. Paul responded:

So if they can give me realistic expectations, like this is how the achievement is going to be measured. This is how we've seen growth in the past, this is how it breaks down. If they can give me real world, this is exactly how it works. Without too much math, if they show me just a chart with this percentage, that's not going to work for me. But if they can say, you can get this much growth by doing this, I can handle that, like I said with the, Hey, here's a closure method, here's how you can close out the lesson to really tighten things up. That worked. So if it's very specific, very specific goals, very specific achievements, I can handle that, but not a lot of ideas. Just give me the, how's this going to affect my class right now? But at my school they only care about data. That's all they focus on. I have gotten, here's a list of the bottom 25 students. Here's exactly the math about how everyone needs to do on this. So yes, data is like, oh my god, data boards and it's got to be up to date. And in social studies it's so much more difficult because one, there's so many more standards. And then if you're talking about TCAP achievement, you don't know what standards are showing up. They don't cover all of them. So I have no idea. It's like, do I go back on this standard? They didn't do well on? How much focus do I put on it? Because it might not even be there. Which is another frustration for social studies.

Tracy acknowledged the significance of data in her response, but she also highlighted the importance of boosting students' confidence through positive reinforcement and encouragement, which leads to better learning outcomes. She stated:
So if I needed to create a session that my goal was to improve student achievement, I would approach it in a few capacities. I would look at it from a few vantage points. One, I would look at it and let me explain why I am qualified to do this. And so I would give some data points and some references to the past as to why this strategy worked. I would then shift significantly into the use of data. So I made choices based upon data. This was the data I was provided at the beginning. This is how I measured the gradual progression of growth, and this is what my final data was. So I would do a portion of the data that I used for it, and then I would go step by step in the strategies that I used specifically in identifying students that needed to move. Social studies can be difficult. You can tend to have a lot of proficient students that need to go up to advance. You've got to really identify who those bubble kids are. Like, you're three, I need you to be a four. And so now look at the role of encouragement and positive reinforcement and the building up of their confidence. That's really a lot of times all they need to go from a three to a four. They just need someone to boost them up and tell them, yeah, I can do that. Let's build our thinking skills. You thought that? I can't believe that. Let's build some more. And middle school especially, all they want is someone to positively reinforce what they're doing. Their confidence is shit. Anyways. Once you start to boost that confidence up a little bit, the growth that you will see in kids is overwhelming. The same for your lower level kids. Let's break it down. So alright, you've just identified all this vocabulary. Look at how well you just did with that. Let's now use it and apply it in a sentence. That sentence is great. And look, you connected it. Just constant feedback. Feedback and development of skills within the content is so, so important. When you get to TCAP, and I hate that one test measures them, and I have written questions for Tennessee. I reviewed questions for Tennessee, I write questions for Pearson, for other states, and there genuinely is skill involved within what they take. And so I would explain that. I would bring in some practice questions and show this question is about the election of 1860, but they can't do it unless they can read this graph. So I would focus on if you're not bringing in the social studies practices that are at the beginning of each grade level set of standards, when I've been on the standards review committee twice. And so those were added specifically to give guidance to skills and the skills are embedded within those assessment questions. So I would focus on the progression of skills as well. So to tie it all back in feedback, positive reinforcement, focus on skills and growth.

Mike, a highly qualified expert in agriculture and Agricultural Science education, strongly emphasized the significance of offering practical learning opportunities to students to improve learning outcomes. He explained a specific learning strategy he intends to implement and stressed the importance of appropriately evaluating, interpreting, and understanding student data to enhance the educational process. He answered:

It would be a PD focused on how we can create more hands-on lessons in our subject matter, specifically in social studies. For myself, I've actually thought about doing a PD which would incorporate drones into the social studies classrooms in order to try to,
Sarah's school has a large population of students learning English as a second language (ESL).

She suggests that the most effective approach to enhancing student learning outcomes is for teachers to concentrate on fostering robust student-teacher relationships. She proposes that professional development programs prioritize instructional strategies that aid in creating and sustaining such relationships.

Okay. I have to say, I have been to a PD this year. That was the topic of it. So I'm going to try to keep that concept in mind. It was about these things should be happening in your classroom. If these happen, then you'll see it on the student test scores, which I'm like, okay, if it was about student achievement, honestly, I think a lot of it would start with you got to have a relationship. Honestly, give teachers the building blocks to be effective teachers in the sense that they have relationship with their students, their students trust them, they want to listen to them, they know their content. So maybe some kind of student teacher relationship support, content support, and the delivery of the content and how to understand and plan for your content. Maybe a little planning session, and then maybe something that's like, okay, after you've done these things and your students take an assessment, here's how you look at the data and here's how you analyze it. So when you go back through these steps again, these are the things that you can do differently. So I think that would be how, I guess I imagine the student success happening. It would have to have steps and components that, I mean, if you're a teacher who's, for lack of better words, vanilla, and you get up there and you think these kids are going to listen to you. There's no retention there. So I think it would have to be a concept of building relationships, understanding your content and planning for it, and then some sort of, here's data. Here's how you analyze it, repeat the cycle and do it again.

**Interview Question Eight.** The second corresponding interview question was, “Some administrators say teachers who invest more time in professional development tend to have
higher test scores. What would you say to them?” Over the past thirty years, studies have emphasized the vital role of teacher development and learning to improve the quality of education and enhance student achievement (Borko & Putnam, 1995; Darling-Hammond, 1993; Thompson & Zueli, 1999; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). The research by Strong et al. (2004) and Serpell & Bozeman (1999) has proven that teachers who undergo comprehensive professional development significantly impact student achievement in less than two years. There was a division of opinion among teachers on whether investing more time in professional development would result in higher test scores. Five participants agreed with the statement, while four participants disagreed. Mike agreed:

I would agree with that. Yeah. I think that if you are investing more time personally as an educator into PD, that is something that it's not required of you to do. You're bettering yourself, you're becoming more of a subject matter expert in whatever that subject may be. And I think that you're going to teach with more passion and more knowledge than other teachers out there. I believe that a student can pick out a teacher who is passionate about their subject versus somebody who's just knowledgeable about it and can just recite it back.

Tracy agreed with Mike's statement, emphasizing the importance of teachers maintaining a growth mindset throughout their careers despite personal obstacles. Tracy responded:

I mean, duh. If you're bettering your craft and your educational achievement, then you are naturally going to do better. I would say that the teachers who are naturally doing more PD have a desire to grow and learn, and they want to get better at what they do. But the teachers that don't do more and more and more, they're not necessarily wrong. They're not necessarily bad teachers. They're not necessarily not growing. I would just say that is natural, you're going to have that in every workforce industry. The people that naturally want to do well and want to do good. Those people who have that growth mindset, and I hate that word, that's a buzzword. But when you have that and you want to make yourself better, you're going to naturally show growth because you're going to give more of yourself to your profession. I would say that some teachers are going to go up and down. They're going to go up the mountain sometimes, and then act different, maybe they've had a baby, maybe they're getting divorced, maybe they're financially unstable. Maybe their personal life will come into the workforce. And as educators we let that happen. And so it's okay to grow a couple of years and plateau others, but grow again. But when you start to dip down, that's when you start to fall in trouble, I think.
Mike and Tracy's argument is supported by research that shows investing time and effort in professional development activities can help social studies teachers improve their classroom teaching, leading to improved student achievement (Thomas-Brown et al., 2016). A study on American history teachers revealed that investing in professional development led to better student performance (De La Paz et al., 2011). The research demonstrated that sustained investment in professional development activities allowed teachers to modify their instructional practices, resulting in improved student achievement. Bailey elaborated on her process of enhancing her teaching strategies by investing a lot of time in studying historical content, which in turn helps her improve student learning and scores. She explained:

I'd say that's likely, but teachers who invest time in teaching have better test scores. The whole process, I have generally had very good test scores, which is, it's a social thing. It's not as hard as it is in some of the other content areas, but I kind of spend a lot of my time watching movies about history and reading about history. And even though I've taught it for as long as I can have, I rarely teach something exactly the same way year after. It's like there's got to be some way that I can make this a little bit better. And then it's like, oh, well that maybe didn't work quite as well go this direction. There's that. You have to have the drive to make that happen. But if you have access to good professional development, it just hits on those pieces that maybe you need to fill in those things that you don’t do.

Emily, a 7th-grade social studies teacher at an A-rated school recognized by the State Department of Education with a 62.9% social studies student success rate, disagreed:

Well, I guess it would depend upon the quality of the professional development. I feel like teachers with the highest test scores are the teachers with the highest investment with their students and in the material, I don't have a lot of professional development, but I have the top scores in my school. And I'm not bragging at all, but I was even told that this year. But I spend a lot of time, even after 24 years of teaching and three years in social studies, every single night I work on lesson plans. I work on my slide decks, what am I going to do? Because every student, every year is different, every class is different. So if you invest the time and the effort into it, that's what's going to make the difference not sitting in a professional development. That's how I feel. And working the young teachers around me, I mean, they'll ask me questions and I'll show them different things. I mean, that's what makes the difference. But you've got to invest in that more. There's got to be some more programs where those seasoned teachers can be allowed to help the other teachers. Well, when I taught in a different county, there was a program, I think it was
through a university where we actually got a stipend and the teachers that were chosen and the principals chose us and we ended up going into classrooms and just giving advice. It was kind of like we were observing. We weren't giving anybody a grade, but we were observing. And then after we'd watched those teachers teach a class, we might say, well, I noticed you were having discipline issues with this school group of students. Why don't you try this? Or have you tried this? To me, that's true professional development that a teacher needs.

As Emily mentioned, observations and feedback are essential aspects of professional development that allow teachers to learn from each other, share best practices, and offer support (Borich, 1999; Richards & Farrell, 2005). Like Emily, Megan also disagreed. Megan teaches at a D-rated school recognized by the State Department of Education with a 17.6% social studies student success rate. She explained:

I invest a lot of time in professional development and my scores do not always show that. That's kind of how I want to say it, because my thought is if we in all invested more time in social studies, I get so frustrated with my, I and I have a new administrator this year, so I don't tag him with this, but I had administrator in the previous years who had been a social studies teacher, and ironically, she had been my PE teacher when I was in school. So I was a little bit like who she lectured me about scores. And she'd be like, these kids were a level five in seventh grade, and now they're a level two in eighth grade. And I'm like, okay. And she's like, well, you're not upset? And I'm like you're telling me they did really well in world history and then you're telling me they didn't do so hot in US history. What about fifth grade? I mean, that would be my response. How did they do in fifth grade? Because there's no comparison between how they did talking about the reformation versus government. I mean, I like the reformation more than I like government, but it's that kind of thing. I wish, again, in a perfect world that we didn't care so much about the test scores because I know too many kids who can spout off all the information in the world if they're standing in front of me who will absolutely melt down when it comes to sitting down and taking that test. My administrator that did my evaluations this year asked me early on, just how do you feel about this? I said, you can give me whatever scores you want to give me. I will not care. And she's like, you don't care. And I was like, I don't, because my main goal is to teach my kids about history, but it's also to teach them to think for themselves and to not follow whatever thoughts that somebody else tells them to do. They need to question and they need to think for themselves. That's not going to show up on a test. But if they can walk out of my room thinking for themselves, then I've done the best that I can. And if they're better prepared for high school, then I've done the best that I can. And I was like, so you can give me a one. You can give me a zero if you want to do that, I will not care. You will not see me stomp out of here crying, upset. I'm just going do my thing. And she's just like, I really like you. I said, okay, thank you. I appreciate that. I'm going to go back and teach my class now. And my kids are like, Ms. Megan, don't you care how we did on the TCAP?
And I'm like, no, not really. It's your grade. I was like, it's your grade. It's not mine. I mean, at the same time, I can't live my life based off of how well or you didn't do on a test that I really don't feel like matters that much when in the scheme of things. So yeah, when somebody, I hate to say it that way, in this respect of when somebody starts talking about test scores and how we need to improve them and we need to do this, I usually do tune out. I usually am probably the person sitting there going, so what's for lunch today? Because they're not test scores. They're not test scores, and they're not numbers. They're kids. And we don't treat 'em enough like kids. And then we wonder why we have behavior problems and this going on. And the kids will usually tell me at the beginning of the year, they'll be like, we hate you, we hate you. And I'm like, okay, okay, whatever. And by the end of the year, we like you, Ms. Megan, you're like the coolest teacher on the hallway. And I was like, what changed your mind? But usually when a kid's like Ms. Megan, you're my favorite teacher. And I was like, really? What did I do wrong? I'm trying to figure this out.

Megan's disregard for testing and emphasis on students' scores could be attributed to the insufficient backing for tested and less-publicized subjects like social studies. In her interview, she mentioned the significant support given to English Language Arts in her school, while social studies teachers receive minimal support for professional development. This lack of support is unfortunate as social studies teachers are held to the same state standards as their colleagues on the accountability rubrics that align with student standardized testing (TDOE, 2019). Sarah echoed the response given by Emily and Megan. Sarah teaches at an F-rated school recognized by the State Department of Education with a 23.7% social studies student success rate. She responded jokingly:

I would love to meet them. I would love to know what PDs they're going to. Yeah. I don't know that I agree necessarily. Sure. That maybe there are some teachers that are taking something that's happening in PD and incorporating it maybe into their own room and finding their way to make it work in their room. I can only speak to the PDs I've been to as a member of my district and I don't see it, but if it's out there, I'd love to see it.

During her interview, Sarah expressed her concern about her school's significant emphasis on English Language Arts in professional development, which tends to limit opportunities for social studies teachers. Consequently, she feels dissatisfied and believes this approach has little impact on her test scores and student achievement. According to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
research indicates that many teachers are dissatisfied with the current professional development offerings, citing their lack of relevance, effectiveness, and connection to their work of helping students learn. Further analysis reveals that many teachers have limited options when selecting professional development initiatives, contributing to dissatisfaction.
CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

This investigation explored middle school social studies teachers' perceptions of professional development and its relation to content knowledge, pedagogy, and student achievement. The researcher examined a) teachers' perceptions of professional development and b) the current state of professional development offerings presented to middle school social studies teachers. The following research questions guided the study: 1) What are middle school social studies teachers' perceptions of professional development? 2) What are middle school social studies teachers' perceptions regarding professional development and its relation to the subject? 3) What are middle school social studies teachers' perceptions regarding professional development concerning pedagogy? 4) What are middle school social studies teachers' perceptions regarding professional development in relation to student achievement?

The researcher examined existing literature and data from middle school social studies teachers at nine different schools in the western region of a selected state. The selection of schools was based on various factors, including geographic location, grade level, state report card, and community type (i.e., rural, suburban, urban). Nine teachers were selected utilizing nonrandom purposeful sampling from the state's western region. Data sources included semi-structured interviews, field notes, and document analysis. The researcher identified themes from interview findings and the implications for professional development for middle school social studies teachers. Recommendations for future research were also addressed.

Findings

As a result of the study, the researcher identified three common themes shared among middle school social studies teachers. Common themes were: 1) effective professional
Theme 1: Professional Development Should Be Relevant and Applicable

The first theme identified through data analysis was, “effective professional development should be relevant and applicable to impact pedagogy and classroom practices.” The first theme directly addressed the research question, “What are middle school social studies teachers' perceptions regarding professional development concerning pedagogy?” Pedagogical knowledge involves understanding the learning process, using effective teaching methods, and having knowledge of students' needs. Some professional development opportunities aim to improve teachers' subject-matter knowledge, while others focus on improving their pedagogy, such as teaching practices, classroom management, lesson planning, or assessment methods (Garet et al., 2001). Eight out of nine interviewed teachers agreed that professional development must be relevant and applicable to their classrooms to benefit their teaching directly. Bailey was asked if she thought professional development is beneficial, and she stated:

Yes. If it's good and it's thought out, I think it's one of the best things that we do when we have, like I said, the literacy thing that I did a couple of years ago was great. I was a core coach. That may have been, you're pretty young, so I don't know how long you've been teaching, but back before COVID, we had 10 core coaches, and so each subject area had state-trained teachers, and we would do curriculum-focused stuff that we would teach a week-long in-service on during the summer. So if it's beneficial and teachers can take it and immediately use it for things if it's technology-based or if it's content specific, if it's data related things that you really truly can use that doesn't seem like it's wasting your time, I think that's important. No one in this position has a second to waste on something that it's like, here, we throw this in here too. You have to have something. That's what I think.

Bailey emphasized the importance of professional development, providing teachers with practical strategies for immediate implementation in their classrooms. Tracy echoed similar
sentiments, expressing that her focus for a professional development session would include the following:

So I have led a significant amount of PD, so at the national, state, and kind of local district levels. I would say that when I lead a PD session in general, no matter what it's on, whether it's assessment or questioning or development of aligned content to standard aligned content, whatever it is, I want it to be applicable and implementable. So even if it is something that most teachers will find monotonous, I want to bring an ability to take something back with teachers that they can use literally the next day. So when I approach what my PD is going to look like, I definitely focus in on how can the PD be usable immediately regardless of what it is. So I would want it to be something that any teacher in any subject can take a strategy or a tool and utilize it in their classrooms.

Seven teachers believe professional development positively impacts their pedagogy and teaching practices when applicable to their classrooms. Teachers expressing a desire for professional development opportunities relevant to their classroom goals is not a new trend. Research (Long, 2006; Sparks, 2004) indicates that educators' dissatisfaction with professional development stems from its perceived irrelevance or lack of applicability. A 2014 Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation study revealed that teachers conveyed discontent with existing professional development programs, citing their lack of relevance, effectiveness, and connection to their role in facilitating student learning. When asked how she would respond to a teacher stating that professional development does not impact their pedagogy, Tracy concluded her response by stating:

Well, what they don't need is professional development, that is a waste of their time. When you're not deliberate, and you're not focused, and you're not putting teachers first in the professional development that you're offering, you're going to repeatedly get that mindset from teachers. So when teachers don't put effort, thought, focus, and deliberation into their lessons, the students are disengaged. Teachers are going to be disengaged to thoughtless PD. So it has to be meaningful. We have to take the same strategies and thought processes we take to engaging students and motivating students into teacher PD.

In her response, Tracy highlighted that professional development should integrate the same components and strategies teachers use when instructing students. According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), effective professional development should encompass active learning,
content-specific teaching practices, opportunities for collaboration, coaching and expert support, feedback and reflection, and modeling to demonstrate best practices. These components parallel the expectations placed on teachers when delivering content-focused lessons to their students. Numerous educators stressed the significance of effective professional development, emphasizing the need for ample time for collaborative efforts among peers. Mike stated what his ideal professional development session for gaining differentiated instructional strategies would look like:

I believe that the ideal PD for something like that would be a minimum of four hour time. I think PDs where you just come in for an hour and then you're done after school, you don't have the true time necessary to devote to what you're trying to learn. And whenever you get to differentiation, there's multitudes of learners out there and if you're trying to reach each one of those individually, you've got to have some time to truly sit down and think about things. It doesn't just come to you in a one-hour session. I think a lot of brainstorming and collaboration with other people who are teaching that subject content is critical and having time to have those conversations and then come back to the whole group and then talk about that. I think that that really needs to occur.

Mike emphasizes the significance of extended time and collaboration as fundamental components of a practical professional development session. His recommendation to collaborate with colleagues teaching the same content and grade level aligns with the concept of a professional learning community (PLC), which is a prevalent form of professional development in many educational institutions. A PLC typically comprises a cohort of educators teaching the same grade level and subject area, collaboratively addressing lesson planning, content standards, pacing, and strategies for addressing student misconceptions. Existing literature provides evidence that PLCs are acknowledged as the most effective form of professional development for social studies educators (Salmon, 2019). Furthermore, research indicates that schools with effective professional learning communities demonstrate a greater capacity to provide authentic
pedagogy and are more successful in improving student achievement (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Louis et al., 1996; Vescio et al., 2008).

**Theme 2: Teachers Seek Content-Focused Professional Development**

The second theme identified through data analysis was, “teachers seek professional development opportunities that strengthen their content knowledge and align with state-mandated standards.” The second theme directly addressed the research question, “What are middle school social studies teachers' perceptions regarding professional development and its relation to the subject?” According to Shulman's (1986) framework, content knowledge encompasses the accumulated knowledge, understanding, and skills teachers must possess and convey to students within a specific subject or content area. Throughout history, the emphasis on content knowledge has been paramount in enhancing teaching practices and fostering student achievement. In 1986, the Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a Profession published "A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century," emphasizing the importance of content knowledge among teachers (Guest, 1993; Rutter, 2011). Subsequent reports such as "Tomorrow's Teachers (1986)" and "The Reform of Teacher Education (1989)" further emphasized the need to improve educators' content knowledge and teaching methods.

In the past 20 years, research has underscored the importance of having strong content knowledge to improve teaching (National Staff Development Council, 2001; Progressive Policy Institute, 2005; Walker et al., 2006). The National Council for Social Studies (2008) also stated that continuous professional development to enhance content expertise can help social studies teachers improve their teaching and subject knowledge, leading to better student outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Eight out of nine teachers stated they seek professional
development opportunities that enhance their social studies content knowledge and align with state-mandated content standards. Sarah, who earned a master's degree in teaching, stated,

So I think to have an effective PD, it would have to be, I guess, categorized, if you will, by your grade content or maybe even world history and US History, something like that. And personally, for me, I would think it would be really beneficial to look at the standards that you teach with the people who also teach those standards.

Sarah's response indicated the significance of centering professional development on social studies content and standards. Similarly, during her interview, Emily, an experienced educator, echoed Sarah's sentiments by emphasizing the importance of adhering to state-mandated content standards.

Teaching the standards, breaking down the standards, and making sure everybody understood the standards. The standards should be the Bible in the classroom. And I think especially the new teachers don't adhere to it, like maybe us seasoned teachers.

Research supports the benefits of teachers' ongoing involvement in subject-specific professional development (Wayne et al., 2016). Long-term, on-the-job professional development focused on the subject's content improves teachers' knowledge and skills, classroom instruction, and student performance (Wayne et al., 2016). Although teachers support content and standards-focused professional development, many face challenges in accessing these opportunities. Seven teachers feel their professional development does not directly contribute to their social studies content knowledge. One of the obstacles mentioned by teachers is the ongoing emphasis and heavy investment in English Language Arts. Seven teachers highlighted the heavy investment in English Language Arts as a primary hindrance to their participation in social studies-specific professional development. When asked if professional development enhanced her primary subject knowledge, Kate responded:

Absolutely not. Absolutely not. It's always, if it is content-based, again, it's more of an ELA-based thing. We went through a PD session we were granted to do by the state, and the second half of it was a two-part PD that we did stuff in the summer. We had subs
during the year, so we could go to this training. And the whole second cohort of it, our second year, was ELA-based. The whole thing, there's never, other than when I went to the State conference for that geography type stuff, nobody ever does PD on social studies content. We have to just crack open our textbooks and Google. That's how we have PD on our content.

Seven of the nine teachers noted how social studies professional development seems more like an afterthought and how they are often encouraged to attend ELA-specific professional development opportunities. Megan stated:

I mean, most of the time, no, because the professional developments that I have to go to in my district are largely ELA-based, and they're ELA-focused. And so it's just kind of like, oh, we need something to do with the social studies teachers go with ELA people. And I'm sitting here going, come on, bring us in. Some people who can talk about social studies.

Over the last decade, research has shown the advantages of content-specific professional development opportunities for K-12 social studies teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; De La Paz et al., 2011; Desimone, 2009). In 2013, a study on high school U.S. history teachers found that attending content-specific professional development sessions enhanced teacher knowledge, student engagement, and achievement (Duffield et al., 2013). Despite backing from current research, the support for social studies content-specific professional development opportunities is limited compared to other more publicized content areas. The slim importance placed on social studies-specific professional development is concerning as social studies teachers are held to the same standards as their colleagues on state-produced accountability rubrics and end-of-year benchmark testing that measures student achievement. Unfortunately, seven out of nine teachers interviewed feel that the emphasis on content is often absent from the professional development opportunities provided to social studies teachers.

Three of the nine teachers noted another obstacle in their responses: the lack of funding for social studies professional development. Many teachers mentioned initiatives their districts
would pay a large amount of money for but felt these did not enhance their content knowledge or classroom practices. Paul, who teaches in an urban school district, stated:

No. It's going to be whatever the most recent thing, not theme, but whoever they've paid money to and whatever the new exciting thing is, that's what they're going to focus on. A year ago, it's like, okay, you're going to learn station rotation. We want to see station rotation, and we want it every week and we're going to do this, and this is how you do it. It has to be done like this. And then this past year, they're like, okay, we're not going to do that anymore. And I'm like, okay, So being a history teacher, it's like it's my job to find patterns from the past. And I'm like, so how do I know that the stuff we're doing this year is going to be relevant in a year? So it's never the actual content. It's whatever the district has chosen, this is what the big push is going to be, whether it's data or technology, and that is very frustrating.

The lack of support, resources, and funding creates significant challenges for social studies teachers seeking valuable professional development opportunities. As a result, funding for social studies professional development is rarely a priority, meaning that teachers receive less support for their growth and development than their colleagues (Hess & Zola, 2012; Swan & Griffin, 2013).

**Theme 3: Traditional Professional Development is Data Focused**

The third theme identified through data analysis was, “*traditional professional development practices place a strong emphasis on the examination and interpretation of student data.*” The third theme directly addressed the research question, “What are middle school social studies teachers’ perceptions regarding professional development in relation to student achievement?” All nine teachers agreed that most professional development opportunities prioritize analyzing and interpreting student data. Recent studies indicate that teachers, school and district leaders, and state stakeholders emphasize data and outcomes more due to new educational reforms (Behari, 2014; Pharis et al., 2019). Legislation such as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) have emphasized
high-stakes testing, school performance, accountability measures, and student growth and achievement.

The NCLB (2002) initiative emerged from the apprehension that the American education system was trailing its international counterparts. It held schools accountable for enhancing student achievement through mandated standardized tests and minimum performance benchmarks. As per the legal requirements, third to eighth-grade students must undergo reading and math assessments. This initial emphasis on high-stakes testing prompted teachers to monitor student assessment data meticulously. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act was ultimately overturned and succeeded by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015. The enactment of this legislation perpetuated the persistent focus on school accountability measures and student achievement through the administration of ongoing benchmark tests, thereby underscoring the significance of consistently analyzing student data. The focus on standardized tests, student scores, and overall school performance has burdened educators, educational institutions, and districts to consistently analyze, interpret, and extract insights from student data. When asked how she would design a session to improve student outcomes, Tracy responded:

So if I needed to create a session that my goal was to improve student achievement, I would approach it in a few capacities. I would look at it from a few vantage points. One, I would look at it and let me explain why I am qualified to do this. And so I would give some data points and some references to the past as to why this strategy worked. I would then, I would shift significantly into the use of data. So I made choices based upon data. This was the data I was provided at the beginning. This is how I measured the gradual progression of growth, and this is what my final data was. So I would do a portion of the data disaggregation that I used for it, and then I would go step by step in the strategies that I used specifically in identifying students that needed to move.

Several teachers emphasized the significance of analyzing student data and its impact on improving student learning outcomes. Mike mentioned:

Most of ours is really more student database. At least this year, it has been. We have a new administrator in the building, and he is phenomenal. He is really, really good with data. But I don't think that is a bad thing, though, because he's capable of taking that data,
analyzing it and interpreting it, and helping teachers who struggle with data to understand it, he's able to help them. And if they understand the data that much better, they're able to better serve their students.

While professional development predominantly revolves around data, it is essential to note that many educators stressed the significance of not fixating solely on data. Instead, they advocated for providing opportunities to delve deeper into understanding their students' knowledge. Additionally, numerous teachers underscored the importance of familiarizing themselves with their students, including their abilities and backgrounds. Emily stated:

Well, I guess it would depend upon the quality of the professional development. I feel like teachers with the highest test scores are the teachers with the highest investment with their students and their students. And in the material, I don't have a lot of professional development, but I have the top scores in my school. And I'm not bragging at all, but I was even told that this year. But I spend a lot of time, even after 24 years of teaching and three years in social studies, every single night I work on lesson plans. I work on my slide decks, what am I going to do? Because every student, every year is different, every class is different. So if you invest the time and the effort into it, that's what's going to make the difference, not sitting in professional development. That's how I feel.

The dynamic nature of the education landscape stresses the importance of teachers' comprehensive understanding of their students to elevate student achievement and development. Consequently, teachers should be afforded opportunities to acquire the skills necessary for data evaluation and enhancing student learning, thereby improving their capacity to analyze data effectively. Professional development sessions should furnish pertinent information to empower teachers in delivering impactful instruction and addressing the diverse learning needs of their students (Desimone, 2009). Additionally, professional development should concentrate on augmenting teachers' understanding of their students, which has the potential to yield favorable educational outcomes for all learners (Wayne et al., 2016).

Conclusions and Implications

During this study, nine different middle school social studies teachers from nine different schools described their perceptions and experiences with professional development.
Additionally, teachers described how professional development relates to their pedagogical knowledge, content knowledge, and student achievement. Teachers considered professional development advantageous when it encompassed applicability, relevancy, and collaboration. Teachers emphasized the recurring reliance on data analysis and interpretation in their ongoing professional development offerings. Lastly, teachers discussed their experiences and limitations as social studies educators, highlighting the limited opportunities they receive compared to their colleagues who teach other content areas.

All nine teachers communicated the importance of effective professional development, highlighting the need for relevance, applicability, practicality, collaboration, and focus on content. Research has identified key elements of effective professional development, including a focus on content, active learning, collaboration, effective practice models, coaching and expert support, feedback and reflection, and sustained duration (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; De La Paz et al., 2011; Desimone, 2009). Eight teachers expressed concern about the lack of social studies-specific professional development offerings. The researcher believes that ongoing content-specific professional development tailored to social studies practices and state-mandated content standards would benefit teachers, enhancing their pedagogical techniques and positively impacting student achievement on social studies end-of-year assessments. Furthermore, the researcher believes that increasing the availability of social studies-specific professional development that encompasses applicability, relevancy, and collaboration would boost teacher engagement and enthusiasm about their outlook on professional development. Grant (2003) and Borko (2004) noted that most social studies teachers hold a negative view of professional development, believing that current offerings are inadequate and irrelevant.
The current study suggests that practical professional development opportunities are crucial for middle school social studies teachers. The research highlights the importance of tailoring professional development to the specific needs of teachers and providing relevant information that aligns with their classroom practices. It further emphasizes teachers' value in collaborating with colleagues who teach the same subject and grade level. The study indicates that professional development in social studies is often not prioritized over other subjects, such as English Language Arts and mathematics. Additionally, the research reveals that professional development frequently incorporates a data component in its framework.

**Directions for Future Research**

Findings from the current study revealed the perceptions of middle school social studies teachers at a micro-level. The current study highlighted middle school social studies teachers' perceptions of professional development and its relation to subject knowledge, pedagogy, and student achievement. The research centered explicitly on middle school social studies teachers within the western region of the state where the study was conducted. As a result, the findings suggest several possibilities for future studies. Subsequent investigations could be expanded by encompassing a more significant number of teacher participants and school sites, thereby amplifying the scope and scale of the current study. Furthermore, extending this study to encompass multiple school districts across multiple states may yield more comprehensive data and unearth additional themes. Additionally, including social studies teachers from the elementary and high school levels could broaden the research range, potentially illuminating similarities and differences in the professional development offerings across the three tiers of education.
The current study highlighted the necessity for social studies content-specific professional development opportunities. Teachers expressed limited access to content-specific opportunities compared to their colleagues teaching English Language Arts and mathematics. Additionally, teachers emphasized the importance of having relevant and applicable professional development programs that allow for collaboration with peers teaching the same subject and grade level. Conducting a similar study on educators teaching diverse content areas could yield valuable insights.

Conducting a quantitative or mixed-methodology study presents an opportunity to enrich the findings of this research on teacher perceptions of professional development. In a quantitative study, the researcher could administer teacher surveys to a large pool of participants to gather statistical data that would supplement teacher statements, beliefs, and perceptions. Further exploration using a quantitative methodology could lead to a more comprehensive analysis of this phenomenon and contribute to the existing body of literature.
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Institutional Review Board  
Division of Research and Innovation  
Office of Research Compliance  
University of Memphis  
315 Admin Bldg  
Memphis, TN 38152-3370

March 22, 2024

PI Name: Presley Shilling  
Co-Investigators:  
Advisor and/or Co-PI: Jeffrey Byford  
Submission Type: Initial  
Title: ENHANCING CONTENT, PEDAGOGY, AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT: AN EXAMINATION OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH THE LENS OF MIDDLE SCHOOL SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS  
IRB ID: PRO-FY2024-349  
Exempt Approval: March 22, 2024

The University of Memphis Institutional Review Board, FWA00006815, has reviewed your submission in accordance with all applicable statuses and regulations as well as ethical principles.

Approval of this project is given with the following obligations:

When the project is finished a completion submission is required  
Any changes to the approved protocol requires board approval prior to implementation  
When necessary submit an incident/adverse events for board review  
Human subjects training is required every 2 years and is to be kept current at citiprogram.org.  
If applicable, please upload a copy of the IRB Approval Letter to your Cayuse Proposal Record.

For any additional questions or concerns please contact us at irb@memphis.edu or 901.678.2705

Thank you,  
James P. Whelan, Ph.D.  
Institutional Review Board Chair  
The University of Memphis.
APPENDIX B
Consent to Participate in a Research Study:
Enhancing Content, Pedagogy, And Student Achievement: An Examination Of Professional Development Through The Lens Of Middle School Social Studies Teachers

Who is conducting this research?
Lead Investigator, Presley Shilling of the University of Memphis, Department of Instruction and Curriculum Leadership is in charge of the study. Her faculty advisor is Dr. Jeffrey Byford. There may be other research team members assisting during the study.

Why is this research being done?
The purpose of this research is to gain insight into current middle school social studies teachers’ perceptions of professional development. By doing this study, I hope to learn how teachers perceive and feel about the current state of professional development in social studies education, and its relation to content knowledge, pedagogy, and student achievement. You are being invited to participate because you were selected through nonrandom purposeful sampling to represent middle school social studies teachers in the state of Tennessee’s Western region.

How long will I be in this research?
You will be asked to participate in a 30-minute interview conducted at your school in a private setting. The meeting will take 20 to 30 minutes. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer to participate will not exceed 1 hour over the next two weeks.

What happens if I agree to participate in this Research?
If you agree, you will be asked to participate in a 30-minute interview in a private room within your school. The interview will consist of eight questions related to professional development. During the interview, a digital recorder will be used, and the entire interview will be transcribed by an independent transcription service. After transcription, the nine participants will be contacted to review their own interview transcripts for conciseness and approval within 72 hours of the initial interview.

For research involving survey, questionnaires, and or interviews:
During the interview, you may skip any questions that make the participant uncomfortable. Also, the interviewer will discontinue questioning immediately upon the participant's request.

The Lead Investigator, Presley Shilling, will recontact the participant after the interview to review the transcript created from your interview in an effort to ensure its conciseness.

What happens to the information collected for this research?
The information collected for this research will be used to complete this research study. Neither your name nor other identifiable data will be used in any published reports or conference presentations. All of your identifying information will be kept confidential.

**How will my privacy and data confidentiality be protected?**

We promise to protect your privacy and the security of your personal information as best we can. Although you need to know about some limits to this promise. Measures we will take include:

- Your interview will take place in a private setting and all data collected will be locked in a secure location for the entirety of the study. This data will be destroyed upon completion of the study.
- Your information will be combined with information from other study participants. When we write about the study, we will write about the culmination of the information gathered. You will not be individually identified in these written publications. Your name and any other identifying information will be kept private.

No one on the research team will know the information that is associated with you. The study is anonymous.

Individuals and organizations that monitor this research may be permitted to inspect the research records. This monitoring may include access to your private information and data collected. These individuals and organizations include the University of Memphis Institutional Review Board and Government Regulatory agencies.

**What are the benefits of participating in this research?**

You may or may not benefit from participating in this research.

**What other choices do I have besides participating in this research?**

If you do not want to be in the study, there are no other choices except not to take part in the study.

**What if I want to stop participating in this research?**

It is up to you to decide whether to volunteer for this study. You can also decide to end your participation at any time. There is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled if you decide to withdraw your participation. Your decision about participating will not affect your relationship with the researcher(s) or the University of Memphis.

**Will it cost me money to take part in this research?**

There are no costs associated with participation in this research study.

**Will I receive any compensation or reward for participating in this research?**

You will not be compensated for taking part in this research.
Who can answer my question about this research?

Before you decide to volunteer for this study, please ask any questions that might come to mind. Later, if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study, you can contact the investigator, Presley Shilling at (901)-827-3297 or pshlling@memphis.edu, or advisor, Dr. Jeffrey Byford at (901)-678-4883 or jmbyford@memphis.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the Institutional Review Board staff at the University of Memphis at (901)-678-2705 or email irb@memphis.edu. We will give you a signed copy of this consent to take with you.

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I have had the opportunity to consider the information in this document. I have asked any questions needed for me to decide about my participation. I understand that I can ask additional questions through the study.

By signing below, I volunteer to participate in this research. I understand that I am not waiving any legal rights. I have been given a copy of this consent document. I understand that if my ability to consent for myself changes, my legal representative or I may be asked to consent again prior to my continued participation.

______________________________       ____________________________________    ______
NAME OF ADULT PARTICIPANT     SIGNATURE OF ADULT PARTICIPANT
DATE

Researcher Signature (To be completed at the time of Informed Consent)

I have explained the research to the participant and answered all of his/her questions. I believe that he/she understands the information described in this consent and freely consents to participate.

______________________________       ____________________________________    ______
NAME OF RESEARCH TEAM MEMBER     SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH TEAM MEMBER
DATE