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*A NEWLY QUALIFIED TEACHER'S COMPETENCY IN HANDLING
DIVERSITY: AN AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHY*

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DECLARATION

I, ADELIN RUKUNDO, declare that the thesis *A Newly Qualified Teacher's Competency in Handling Diversity: An Auto-ethnography* is my personal work and has not been submitted for degree or examination in any other university. All sources I have cited or quoted have been indicated and fully recognised by a complete list of bibliographical references.

I know that plagiarism is wrong. Plagiarism is to use another's work and pretend that is one's own. Therefore, each significant contribution to this thesis is my own interpretation. I therefore declare that this thesis is my own work.

Signature 

Date 13 May 2024



DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my beloved children, Grace and Yannick, who are my source of motivation and inspiration; my parents, Felicity and Michael, who shaped me into the person I am today; and my partner, Frederick Ishimwe.



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ABSTRACT

Although the topic of diversity has gained global popularity, there are various studies indicating that teacher competency in managing learner diversity is an area that requires improvement and additional research. This thesis explores a newly qualified teacher's competency in handling diversity in a South African context. The study deploys a qualitative research approach and auto-ethnographic methodology to gain a deeper understanding of newly qualified teachers' competencies in dealing with diversity. A newly qualified teacher's personal experience and knowledge of diversity within the context of education has been triangulated against the existing literature of diversity to affirm the validity of the data. The study finds that even though diversity is covered in teacher training institutions, newly qualified teachers remain unprepared for the challenges with diversity that they will encounter in their classrooms. In addition, pre-service teachers have limited exposure to the wide spectrum of diversity among learners. The teacher training curriculum as well as teacher practice programmes do not provide pre-service teachers with sufficient knowledge of diversity studies, experience, and exposure. This study is useful for teacher training institutions, education policy makers, teachers, and academics in gaining insights and perspectives of pre-service and newly qualified teachers where diversity is concerned.



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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CK	Content Knowledge
CCK	Common Content Knowledge
CPD	Continuous professional development
edTPA	educational Teacher Performance Assessment
GPK	General Pedagogical Knowledge
HOD	Head of Department
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
NGO	Non-profit Organisation
OCED	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PCK	Pedagogical Content knowledge
PGCE	Postgraduate Certificate in Education
SCK	Specialised Content Knowledge
SGB	School Governing Body
TP	Teaching Practice

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KEYWORDS

Newly Qualified Teacher

Diversity

Teacher Competency

Inclusion



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to and rationale for the study

Diversity among school learners is mainly framed as race, ethnicity, social class, gender, age, and language. As a newly qualified teacher, my experience of learner diversity within the South African education system has offered a unique perspective and motivation for undertaking this research. Over my two years of teaching, I worked at two distinctly different educational institutions, namely a school of skills [formerly known as special schools] and a combination school, which had both primary- and high-school levels. Working at a school of skills afforded me valuable exposure to a broad spectrum of diversity in terms of intellectual abilities (low to mild intellectual abilities). Furthermore, this educational environment exposed me to different forms of learning barriers and diversity of race, ethnicity, social class and gender. The second school (combined school) was located within an economically disadvantaged community in Cape Town, and further increased my exposure to diversity in terms of age, language, cultural and ethnic diversity.

As I gained more exposure to diversity, it became increasingly apparent that the reality of learner diversity I encountered as a pre-service teacher diverged significantly from my prior expectations of what diversity in schools might entail. This dissonance between my preconceived notions and the reality of learner diversity in educational environments served as a catalyst and a compelling motivation to undertake research focused on the experiences of newly qualified teachers in navigating and effectively addressing the challenges posed by multifaceted learner diversity. Hence, this thesis seeks to explore my own experience as a newly qualified teacher in handling diversity. This insight has value for policy and practice, and should convince teacher education institutions to consider diversity more seriously.

Since 1994, the Republic of South Africa has undergone profound societal transformation. The biggest change was the end of apartheid, a system characterised by racial segregation and discrimination, and this heralded a new era of inclusivity, equality, and diversity (Reygan & Steyn, 2017). Comparably, Botha and Baxen (2018) note that the South African Constitution of 1996 enshrined the principles of equality and non-discrimination, reinforcing the commitment to diversity and inclusivity in education. Within the realm of education, this

transition necessitated a paradigm shift, compelling teachers to accommodate learners from different cultural, linguistic, racial, and socio-economic backgrounds.

Learner diversity in school poses unique challenges, and teachers are expected not only to be proficient in their subject matter, but also culturally sensitive, adaptable, and equipped with strategies to teach learners with diverse needs and backgrounds. The ability of educators to effectively handle learner diversity has profound implications for the quality of education, the attainment of educational equity, and the broader goals of social justice and cohesion.

As South Africa continues to grapple with the legacy of historical inequalities and seeks to build a more inclusive and equitable society, the ongoing escalation of diversity-related challenges within educational institutions remains a subject of paramount concern (Brown & Buthelezi, 2020). Therefore, it is imperative to critically examine the competence of teachers in handling learner diversity.

1.2 Problem statement

Even though legislation in South Africa promotes diversity, the implementation of a relevant framework for engaging with diversity in the education sector has not been established (Reygan & Steyn, 2017). As a result, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2009) maintains that diversity is often a key source of different tensions in schools. The competence of newly qualified educators in effectively managing learner diversity has assumed increasing importance in response to the persistent increase of diversity classifications within educational settings. Paradoxically, newly qualified teachers frequently articulate sentiments of inadequacy in their perceived readiness to address the multifaceted aspects of learner diversity (Forghani-Arani et al., 2019).

1.3 Research questions

The main research questions of this study are:

- What competencies does a newly qualified teacher need in the area of diversity?
- What is the extent to which teacher training institutions prepare pre-service teachers to work in diverse classrooms?

1.4 Research aim and significance

The main aim of this research is to investigate a newly qualified teacher's competency in handling diversity. This research explores a newly qualified teacher's personal experience as well as teacher knowledge where diversity is concerned, and links it to the body of research and information that exists on the topic of competency in diversity management. In doing so, this research serves to encourage pre-service teachers to prepare themselves adequately for the teaching of diverse learners, to encourage teacher training institutions to provide students with skills and knowledge to deal with diversity, and finally, to challenge newly qualified teachers to become self-aware and to work actively on any personal or professional barriers that may be a disadvantage in handling learner diversity.

1.5 Thesis overview and structure

This thesis is divided into five chapters. The content of each chapter is summarised as follows:

Chapter 1

This chapter introduces the study. This introduction provides the background to and rationale for the study. In addition, this chapter provides a problem statement, research questions, and the research aim of the study. The introductory chapter concludes with an outline of the thesis.

Chapter 2

This chapter comprises the literature review and theoretical framework. The theoretical framework used in the study is one of teacher competence according to Sigrid Blömeke and its relation to diversity. Moreover, this chapter explores diversity challenges that newly qualified teachers encounter when dealing with diversity.

Chapter 3

This chapter presents the qualitative research design and methodology used in the study. It serves as a justification of the research approach that was used in order to answer the research questions and analyse the research data. The methodology employed is auto-ethnography. Furthermore, the chapter elaborates on how the data was collected, thereby ensuring its trustworthiness and credibility.

Chapter 4

This chapter presents the data and analyses of the data. A newly qualified teacher's experience and reflections of learner diversity as portrayed in the auto-ethnographical study are explored and interpreted. The data is discussed through reflections on lived experience, and thereafter triangulated against literature on teacher competency in handling diversity.

Chapter 5

This chapter concludes the study. It emphasises the link between the problem statement, research questions, research aims and objectives, and the study's findings. The chapter offers recommendations derived from the study and suggests ideas for subsequent research.



CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter serves as a review of current literature that explores teacher competency in handling diversity. It will expand on the concept of diversity; inclusivity as a contributor to diversity; the experience of newly qualified teachers where diversity is concerned; areas of teacher knowledge about diversity; and the extent to which teacher training programmes prepare pre-service teachers to respond to diversity. By investigating teacher competencies in dealing with diversity, the challenges that newly qualified teachers encounter when dealing with diversity will also be discussed. Finally, this chapter also includes the theoretical framework of teacher competence according to Sigrid Blömeke (2017) and its relation to diversity.

2.2 Diversity

Harrison and Klein (2007) point out that there are three types of diversity: separation diversity, disparity diversity and variety diversity. This study focuses on variety diversity which is mainly considered as the difference in classification composition in a community on some categorical variables such as race, religion, ethnicity, eye colour, gender, social status, etc. Despite a history that strove to cement white supremacy and create conflict on the basis of variety diversity, South Africa continues to be characterised by significant racial, ethnic, linguistic and other forms of diversity (Botha & Baxen, 2018). The topic of diversity has gained global popularity: UNESCO (2009) notes that diversity is often a source of different tensions and complications among societies. Diversity within the South African population has contributed significantly to the risk and intensity of historical and contemporary civil conflicts and non-cohesiveness of society, as reflected partly in the prevalence of mistrust among communities (Arbatli et al., 2020).

Embracing diversity is necessary in our communities because diversity encompasses the entire spectrum of individual differences that make people unique. In a flourishing, well-integrated community, the development and inclusion of previously disadvantaged and marginalised individuals should be prioritised (Mampane, 2019). Disadvantaged groups whose cultures differ from those of previously advantaged groups should be empowered and encouraged to challenge existing practices that exploit the minority groups. Botha and Baxen (2018) concur

with the latter and maintain that teachers who were previously neglected during apartheid inequalities require urgent need to train for all school contexts in South Africa. Thomas (2010) states that accommodating diversity requires changes from all stakeholders as well as adjustments of behavioural codes, operational structures, and styles. Therefore, within an educational setting, the School Governing Body (SGB), school leadership and policy makers must consider the previously marginalised student when engaging with diversity policies or frameworks. According to Mampane (2019, p. 140):

While they are legally bound to address diversity issues, the manner in which they do so is not prescribed. It is the institutions themselves, not the government, which decide how this is to be done. Thus, the approaches used to manage diversity as well as the effectiveness of their diversity management attempts could differ markedly from institution to institution.

Botha and Baxon (2018) argue that there is a necessity in South Africa to equip teachers with skills in diversity education that engage with challenges of power, privilege and difference. Additionally, there is a growing call for teacher training programmes to adequately prepare learners and teachers to engage competently with the issue of diversity. Although legislation in South Africa promotes diversity, the implementation of a relevant framework for engaging with diversity in the education sector is yet to be established (Reygan & Steyn, 2017) Comparably, Brown and Buthelezi (2020) concur that there is a false belief in South Africa that the dawn of democracy that aimed for diversity to be embraced and taught as per legislation was appropriately implemented. They argue that, to the contrary, teachers and other school personnel have not received adequate guidance on how to navigate diversity challenges. Therefore, the presence of diversity in schools and communities has been met with some challenges. As a result of diversity issues, the reality for some individuals such as those in same-sex relationships or with learning disabilities does not reflect the country's diversity legislation and policy.

2.2.1 Mismanagement of diversity

Thomas (2010) refers to diversity management as the capacity to make effective decisions when confronted with various distinctions, resemblances, as well as associated tensions and intricacies. Furthermore, diversity can cause social tension, defined as stress and strain, that stem from the interaction of clashing differences. Therefore, mismanagement of diversity can

be catastrophic and result in social challenges such as xenophobia and intolerance of others, resulting in violence, inequalities, discrimination, racism, homophobic acts, etc. For example, Mohamed (2022) reports that a Zimbabwean national, Elvis Nyathi, was a victim to a mob in Diepsloot, Gauteng (a province in South Africa). According to Mohamed (2022), Nyathi's widow, Nomsa's, life was spared after she showed the mob her passport, but Nyathi was forcefully removed from his house, beaten, stoned and set alight in the next street. Nyathi's devastating and tragic story is an example of the incapacity to make effective decisions when confronted with diversity with regard to country of origin, but rather turning to inhumane acts of non-tolerance that come from societies that are not competent in dealing with diversity and as a result become non-cohesive societies. The above case is an example of diversity mismanagement. Thus, the importance of a society that engenders qualities of social cohesion and justice cannot be overestimated. Again, diversity competency cannot be reached in communities that lack an appreciation of social justice and a community that struggles with social cohesion.

2.2.2 Diversity and social cohesion

Social cohesion has been described as the creation of a common sense of identity or belonging in society, linked to the desire to extend trust to those considered strangers in society and uphold their dignity, a basic human right of respect and the willingness to act on behalf of and in favour of those affected by inequality and marginalised in society (Burns et al., 2018). Van der Meer and Tolsma (2014) assert that social cohesion analyses the question: 'Who is connected to whom, where and how?' with most academics generalising the term to social trust, which is considered the main pillar of social cohesion. The lack of a straightforward and simple definition has contributed to the difficulty in advocating for social cohesion globally and in South Africa (Burns et al., 2018). A valuable model to characterise social cohesion is provided by Fonseca et al. (2019). Their model suggests that social cohesion is the connection and interdependence between an individual, the community and institutions. Fonseca et al. (2019) argue that for social cohesion to exist, an individual must have the desire to belong to a society or a community.

Putnam (2007) argues that diversity weakens social cohesion, which indicates that ethnically diverse societies experience lower social capital. Social capital is defined as the different resources an individual has access to as a result of being part of a society or community; thus,

it is a key element of social cohesion (Cloete, 2014). Similar to the findings of Putnam (2007), Laurence et al. (2019) find that diversity in society stimulates threat, which in turn leads to prejudice, therefore negatively impacting social cohesion. Social cohesion, in summary, entails the state of being able to live and flourish with people of diverse race, gender, culture, socio-economic backgrounds, etc. (Mekoa & Busari, 2018). When this is not achieved, social cohesion is weakened (Laurence et al., 2019).

Based on Putnam's argument, the correlation between social cohesion and diversity is that diversity weakens social cohesion. It follows that when a diverse society is not cohesive, diversity does not thrive.

The main goal of the educational sector in South Africa post-apartheid is to transform society by providing equal opportunities to all, but especially to those groups which were previously disadvantaged (Ebewo & Sirayi, 2018). This provides the direct link between formal education, diversity and inclusive education. Education is linked to social cohesion as it aims to provide training and skills which are centred on preserving society for future generations through the promotion of intercultural collaboration, teamwork, communication and problem solving (Ebewo & Sirayi, 2018). Therefore, accommodating diversity must be an inclusive process that respects different abilities, perspectives and practices that benefit all the diverse groups within the education institution, with optimal social cohesion at the centre of all decisions. This means that diversity needs to be maintained with care in order to produce an equal, fair, well-integrated and socially cohesive society (Mampane, 2019). It is pivotal that schools demonstrate the capacity to cultivate diversity-competent students, who ultimately assume roles as discerning members of society, owing to the presence of diversity-competent educators.

2.2.3 Diversity in South African schools

The welcoming of diversity in schools suggests the presence of acceptance and respect by learners understanding that each individual is unique and recognising our individual differences. This concerns the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, language, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies.

Despite the promotion of diversity in South African schools, there are still diversity-related difficulties that schools encounter that suggest that, in some instances, school leadership should

foster environments that exemplify equality for all learners. For instance, Brown and Buthelezi (2020) found that school learners who do not observe heteronormative expressions are subjected to homophobic brutality and discrimination, and are excluded from school activities. This is a form of bullying that newly qualified teachers have to be competent in addressing as part of being able to handle diverse learners. Brown and Buthelezi's (2020) finding suggests that just like society, schools in South Africa have not fully embraced diversity in a cohesive and inclusive manner. Moreover, in a study of parental involvement strategies in schools,

Parents who want to be active agents in creating a safe, enabling, and inclusive schooling space for their non-normative sexuality children recognised that the idea of a secure and enabling learning environment is not realised due to traditional cultures, along with the constructions of gender and sexuality. Thus, the exposure to negative experiences due to the unwillingness of school authorities to address diversity, insufficient strategies for inclusivity and values, and norms (Nichols, 2021, p. 98).

Reygan and Steyn (2017) point out that schools should be sites that provide learners with support and that afford teachers the opportunity to make positive impacts in their learners' lives. Hence, schools function as institutions that can promote diversity and social change by challenging the reproduction of inequality. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) offer the social reproductive theory which asserts that our schools are not centres of equal opportunity but tools for perpetuating social inquiries. This means that schools are not represented as institutions that engage in social justice and cohesiveness especially in a diverse society, but rather that schools simply continue to produce socially unaware individuals of different levels and social status in society. Ultimately, schools will still produce the rich politicians as well as the struggling poor who face major inequalities. Therefore, there is a connection between the status of education in a country and the progression of a society within that country. South Africa is a typical example of this concept. The unequal education in South Africa is a direct reflection of the unequal society in the country. As much as apartheid has produced inequalities in education based on race, the current democracy also carries its own inequalities. The mismanagement of diversity in South African schools causes major inequality and injustice for learners. Individuals hailing from communities where social cohesion is not readily nurtured have the potential to acquire diversity competence through their educational experiences, subsequently enhancing their societal contributions. Furthermore, learners subjected to diversity-related tensions and violence can receive appropriate support and intervention.

The emancipation of South African schools towards successfully challenging negative societal practices is no minor task, especially with the knowledge that schools reflect their societies. However, when empowered through knowledge, teachers and learners can take on the responsibility of challenging old oppressive ideologies of inequalities and advance a new democratic education system (Reygan & Steyn, 2017). Similarly, teachers play a crucial role in reducing social tensions that emanate from a lack of social cohesion and diversity mismanagement. Teachers influence how learners experience diversity as well as how they are introduced to diversity and whether the learners have good role models that practice inclusivity in educational spaces (Van der Wildt et al., 2017). South Africa has a rich diverse social landscape, and classrooms are a good reflection of this in terms of learners and teachers.

Reygan and Steyn (2017) assert that diversity should not be considered as tangential to the education sector but rather central to primary, secondary and tertiary education. In other words, the diversity competency that schools can provide can ultimately become the key to social justice, inclusion and social cohesion. There is a huge opportunity for learners and teachers to interrupt the transmission of old, outdated and oppressive ideologies and move towards the creation and transmission of new ways of being and new ways of associating with each other. On the same note, Mampane (2019) argues that socially just education involves the participation of all education community members. Therefore, teachers need to become socially just and understand issues of power and privilege because they interact with all the members of communities.

As mentioned above, even though apartheid policies of education continue to influence the status of diversity in South African schools, Brown and Buthelezi (2020) argue that the broader society faces growing inequality that has far surpassed that of the apartheid era. Owing to the challenges that South Africa faces in dealing with diversity in schools, racism, and inequality, as highlighted by Sibanda and Majola (2023), the inability to produce diversity-competent teachers in South African schools has a detrimental effect on learners.

In more recent times, South African university students have started to recognise the gap in understanding and dealing with diversity in both schools and universities. Reygan and Steyn (2017) point out that the 2015 student uprisings that closed universities across South Africa are also evidence of the necessity to address diversity issues that are underpinned by the continuation of colonised school curricula, and social and racial inequalities. Thus, it is important for both established and newly qualified teachers to teach with diversity in mind.

2.2.4 Inclusive education, a contributor to diversity

There are many emerging definitions of inclusive education; this study employs the definition of inclusive education by Walton (2017), where inclusion means that all learners should participate and exclusion in schools must be reduced. This follows both Stubbs (2008) and Moriña (2017), who describe inclusive education as having a school system in which all learners are able to participate and are treated equally. By embracing all learners in the mainstream, learners with special needs become part of the mainstream as they are part of the same community. Smit et al. (2020) believe that inclusive education is promoted by means of achieving a diverse education system. Ultimately, inclusive education contributes to diversity because it adds to the variety of learners present in a classroom.

Mahlo (2017) argues that the appropriate version of inclusive education can only be realised when diversity is catered for in the teaching and learning process. Therefore, despite inclusion being a contributor to diversity, there is also a strong link between diversity and inclusion. Diversity can be considered as the difference in classification in a community on some categorical variable such as race, religion, ethnicity, eye colour, gender, social abilities status, etc. In addition, education that is inclusive requires every learner with diverse needs to become successful in their schooling through the means of quality access to education (Mahlo, 2017). Based on Mahlo's definition of inclusive education as well as Harrison and Klein's (2007) perspective of diversity, I argue that embracing diversity can be fully realised when inclusive education is integrated into diversity management, as this ensures that no form of diversity is left unaddressed. Therefore, it is crucial that teachers are competent in dealing with the diversity encompassed by inclusive education. In this study, inclusive education is regarded as a variety of diversity that contributes to a broader spectrum of diversity within a school.

Inclusive education is a concept that has gained global popularity and therefore has become a skill that teachers must acquire. However, just like diversity, inclusive education has met with challenges. The teaching profession is already a demanding one, and with the introduction and implementation of inclusive education globally and in South Africa, more challenges have been created for teachers (Engelbrecht, 2020). Forlin and Chambers (2011) found that a major problem facing inclusive education was that teachers who had learners with intellectual disabilities in their classrooms had concerns about being able to effectively help their learners. There have been many important initiatives related to equity in teacher education in countries throughout the developed world; however, educational inequality continues to be a major

problem (Forlin et al., 2011). It is clear that there is still a crucial need for teachers to understand and be able to deal with the range of diverse learning styles and needs in the classroom, as well as dealing with diverse student backgrounds. Through the introduction of policies and protocols such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Szmukler, 2017) and the South African Inclusive Education Policy introduced through the White Paper in 2006, inclusive education has evolved into a human right and a social issue (Engelbrecht, 2020). Despite all the challenges and progress that the world has made in respect of inclusive education, inclusive education has not always been at the forefront of education policy making.

Historically, children with disabilities have often been overlooked in educational policy making (Cooc & Yang, 2017; Rose & Malkani, 2020). The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF, 2020) affirms that, as a result of poor policy making in the past, disabled children had limited access to education. This exacerbated their inability to participate in social, economic and political life. Denying learners with disabilities access to quality education speaks to the lack of social cohesion and unjust social practices that conflict with the concept of embracing diversity. Fortunately, it has been through the evolution of education that the notion of inclusivity has also strengthened. Tomlinson (2017) points out that while tertiary education used to be reserved for the elite and basic education for some, in 1994 global governments reached an agreement that all social and ethnic groups should be able to access education. Inclusive education entails providing genuine learning opportunities for every child within the same classroom and school. This encompasses not only children with disabilities but also includes speakers of minority languages who have traditionally been marginalised. Inclusive systems recognise and appreciate the distinct contribution that students from various backgrounds bring to the classroom, fostering the growth of diverse groups together for the mutual benefit of all involved (UNICEF, 2020). Likewise, Walton (2017) states that the world is gravitating towards inclusive educational policies. Accommodating all learners in the educational sector means that there is a wide range of learner diversity in schools. As per the above interpretation of inclusive education by UNICEF (2020), it is evident that inclusivity and diversity are in some way similar as both concepts acknowledge that individuals of different variations are included in education.

As with diversity and social cohesion, "inclusive education is based on the philosophy of social justice, where education is seen as a basic right for every child, aiming to ensure that equal access to education and opportunities are given to all, regardless of race, gender, sexual

orientation, cultural background, ethnicity and any other differences” (Pit-ten Cate et al., 2019, p. 3). Teachers play a key role in the success of inclusive education; thus, their attitudes and beliefs towards the policy are crucial (Pit-ten Cate et al., 2019, p. 3). Similarly, “the success in implementing inclusive education programmes relies heavily on the beliefs and attitudes of the teachers, and it has been shown that there is a positive direct correlation between learners’ performance and academic achievements, and the quality of the teacher’s education and professional development” (Holmqvist & Lelinge, 2021). This places great importance on the prioritisation of continuous professional development, good quality teacher pre-service training, and creating teaching environments which foster good teaching experiences for educators and newly qualified teachers, resulting in positive attitudes and beliefs towards inclusive education and diversity. For instance, if a teacher is discriminative towards learners with disabilities or believes that learners with disabilities are a diversity variation that should not be part of mainstream schools, his or her attitude and belief function as a barrier to inclusivity.

In more recent times, schools that accommodate learners with educational challenges are referred to as special needs schools. For many years it has been and still is a concern in South Africa that learners with learning disabilities face many more barriers in schools when compared with their counterparts (Walton, 2017). Having teachers who are not well trained to teach at schools of skills or deal with learners with special needs results in inequality. Typically, the rich in South Africa would send their children to schools that have teachers who are specifically trained to work with learners who have special needs. In contrast, learners from poorer families who have special needs do not necessarily have teachers with relevant qualifications (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Even though schools of skills specialise in the accommodation of learners with special needs, mainstream schools are not exempt from receiving learners who require special care. Therefore, inclusive education needs to be part of embracing diversity in schools for all learners to be appropriately accommodated.

2.3 Newly qualified teachers’ knowledge and experience of diversity

Some researchers may refer to newly qualified teachers as novice teachers. Novice teachers are teachers with no prior teaching experience and who are teaching for the first time. For the purpose of this study, the term ‘newly qualified teachers’ also refers to teachers who are teaching for the first time. In most cases these are teachers who have graduated and have just joined the teaching profession.

Some scholars indicate that educators are genuinely optimistic about being able to teach in diverse environments (Marshall, 2017). Similarly, Pit-ten Cate et al. (2018) assert that newly qualified teachers seem to have positive attitudes towards learner diversity but lack the professional knowledge and competency to address the diversity challenges within their curricula, schools, and school systems that they face regularly. Marshall's (2017) assessment of how prepared teachers are to deal with diversity clearly found that there are diversity challenges within the curriculum itself. Regrettably, the curriculum forms a framework for student learning outcomes and teachers' accountability. This means that if the curriculum is not well aligned with objectives that produce a diversity-competent student, the school system fails because students do not develop well. It is up to the curriculum to adequately prepare pre-service teachers to address the multifaceted learning needs of a diverse student body (Marshall, 2017).

With regard to newly qualified teachers in South Africa and their attitudes towards the implementation of inclusive education, Nel et al. (2016) suggest that teachers are supportive towards the policy, and excited about the opportunity to teach in diverse classrooms, but only in theory. In reality, newly qualified teachers have critical doubts about their abilities to successfully implement inclusive education programmes, which in turn calls for better and more efficient pre-service teacher training to support the policy and its effectiveness (Engelbrecht, 2020). Although South Africa has made great improvements in the area of policies aiming to increase equality and provide better access to education for all children, there are major gaps between the intentions of the policy and the realities of most South African school communities (Engelbrecht, 2020). Most of the disadvantaged communities lack the resources, including but not limited to human, technical and financial resources, needed to successfully implement the policies. Some of the challenges newly qualified teachers face when tasked with diverse classrooms and the implementation of inclusive teaching are lack of resources, lack of training, poor attitudes towards inclusivity from parents, school management and other major educational stakeholders, an unattainable curriculum, and the lack of collaborative and interdisciplinary orientation (Rajendran et al., 2020). All these challenges result in increased stress levels which negatively impact their ability to teach effectively and essentially have an impact on teacher retention rates (Hagermoser Sanetti et al., 2021). Spătărelu (2020) concurs that newly qualified teachers need the most support in their initial years of teaching, as encountering the challenges mentioned above so early in their careers may result in early resignation.

A recent research project by Ajani (2021) shows that countries with the best quality education systems are those investing in the continuous professional development of their educators. Pre-service and in-service teacher professional development programmes which are well structured have the potential to help teachers develop the necessary skills required in a diverse classroom (Ajani, 2021). Although well-structured professional development programmes can result in good-quality education, the implementation of the programmes is equally, if not more, important (Mamabolo et al., 2021). This indicates that training of newly qualified teachers prior to their teaching is a crucial step in their development, which has a significant impact on their attitudes and actions when they start teaching. Shikalepo (2020) claims that for teachers to be competent in the classrooms, they need to acquire the necessary skills through intensive training.

There is a significant need for educators to successfully engage with diversity in a positive and beneficial way. Unfortunately, there is a gap in the fundamental knowledge of teacher educators in general (Spradlin & Parsons, 2008). A gap in teacher education knowledge puts us at a disadvantage when we either try to understand fully or to measure how competent teacher educators are in producing diversity-competent teachers. Randolph (2015) finds that even though the world has moved from seeing diversity in schools as a problem that may have required assimilation to viewing diversity in schools as an opportunity, the situation does not simply indicate that teachers are prepared to work in diverse schools. Instead, Randolph (2015) noted that teachers had linked difference in race with difference in culture in order to cope in schools that presented learners who were of a different race from themselves. This method of coping does not necessarily make them non-racist or integrative, nor does it suggest competency in diversity.

In South Africa, pre-service teacher training focuses largely on inclusive education, with the aim of addressing barriers to learning in schools (Engelbrecht et al., 2017). It focuses on establishing a teaching environment which promotes inclusion, and not exclusion and separation (Human Rights Watch, 2015). Dalton et al. (2012) maintain that the implementation of inclusive education policies has sadly not been successful as it has been hindered by the fact that newly qualified teachers lack basic curriculum knowledge and the ability to address different needs in the classroom. More recently, inclusive education has been formally added to the Initial Teacher Education programmes in South Africa (Walton, 2017). Dalton et al. (2012) find that first-time teachers have indicated that they are not satisfied with the content of their ITE

modules, while later research indicates that trainee teachers require a more practical approach to their learning (Du Plessis & Sunde, 2017).

In addition to gaining knowledge through content that is taught, pre-service teachers can also gain knowledge and experience on diversity through pre-service teaching practice. The purpose of this training is to ensure the development of knowledge about diversity, to gain professional experience, to develop the ability to produce the required results, and to develop adaptability and flexibility skills which can be used in any diverse school setting (Moosa, 2018). Nkambule and Mukeredzi (2017) investigated whether pre-service teachers were able to gain knowledge through the exposure to diversity offered during the TP programme. The main observation from this study was that pre-service teachers had little to no support from their mentor teachers while doing their TP and thus became newly qualified teachers that lacked knowledge of how to deal with diversity. Similarly, Gravett and Kroon (2023) found that pre-service teachers could not use the theoretical knowledge gained through modules to apply to contrasting situations in the classroom. A suggested solution to this is to encourage mentor teachers to assist student teachers specifically with diversity during their TP (Hugo, 2018). I argue that when student teachers receive efficient support in developing diversity-related competencies, they emerge as newly qualified teachers equipped with a degree of proficiency in diversity.

Mentor teachers play a crucial role in the TP process and their level of commitment to the development of newly qualified teachers during pre-service teaching has a great impact on the extent to which newly qualified teachers gain knowledge on diversity and how to address it (Phillips & Chetty, 2018). Research indicates that most newly qualified teachers have little to no prior exposure to students with learning disabilities before they start teaching (Rusznyak & Walton, 2017). Pit-ten Cate et al. (2018) argue that pre-service teachers lack exposure to teaching learners with special needs and further emphasise that teacher training should prepare teachers for diverse classrooms. Often pre-service TP takes place in urban schools; however, when the teachers qualify, they end up teaching in rural or peri-urban schools which have a different set of challenges when compared with the urban schools where they taught during the TP session (Botha & Baxen, 2018). This lack of experience in a range of schools places a burden on the role of mentor teachers in assisting newly qualified teachers in building their knowledge of diversity.

Moosa (2018) indicates that mentor programmes in South Africa for newly qualified teachers are unfortunately not well structured, as there is a lack of alignment between the vision of TP

programmes and expectations of mentor teachers. In a recent case study, newly qualified teachers expressed a lack of guidance and support from their mentor teachers during their TP (Jita & Munje, 2022). The newly qualified teachers who had direction and ‘support’ from their mentor teachers stated that they often had to follow the rules of the school on how to deal with diversity. In Rusznyak and Walton’s (2017) study, most of the participants indicated that they had witnessed side-lining of students with learning disabilities or language difficulties, but had to follow the brief from the supervisor on how to deal with such situations, which was in most cases not aligned with inclusive education policies. Hugo (2018) suggests that the role of mentor teachers in the development of pre-service teacher knowledge of diversity could be enhanced through the provision of explicit instructions on the role and responsibilities of mentors.

In addition to lack of support from mentor teachers, it is important to note that prior to the 2015 ‘fees must fall’ protest with its radical demands such as decolonisation of the school curriculum and Africanisation, South African education (including tertiary education) was still under the influence of a relatively Westernised curriculum and fundamental pedagogic that was built on an authoritative education system. Reygan and Steyn (2017) argue that the history of South African education is important when considering how diversity is constructed and presented at educational institutions. It is important to note this consideration when understanding the extent of newly qualified teachers’ knowledge of diversity in South Africa.

Canagarajah (2012) notes that the communities he belonged to as a teacher have influenced the construction of his professional identity. Tertiary education is an educational community, and the type of ‘tertiary culture’ a pre-service teacher experiences or is exposed to, may have an influence on the type of teacher he or she becomes. While many scholars comment on professional identities, school culture, and diversity, there is still a gap in understanding the extent of pre-service teachers’ readiness to teach in schools that have diverse learners. We can however recognise that newly qualified teachers are bound to learn from the experienced teachers that they work with as part of being influenced by the community they belong to, as Canagarajah notes. Therefore, if the teachers at the school where a newly qualified teacher is appointed are not competent in dealing with diversity, the newly qualified teacher’s experience of diversity that should influence his or her own learning process towards dealing with diversity will be challenged. According to Moletsane et al. (2004), KwaZulu-Natal where teachers and learners come from mainly isiZulu-speaking backgrounds, they noted:

When asked, teachers reported no diversity among learners because all came from poor homes characterised by high unemployment and were often cared for by grandparents, single parents or had fathers working in Johannesburg. Teachers reported that they did not include multicultural or diversity education in the classroom as they felt it had little relevance in the school. However, on further questioning, teachers and SGB members admitted that there were learners with disabilities, learners with learning difficulties, and that sexual violence towards learners was a problem. Here we also foreground diversity within the teacher population and highlight that teachers are not monolithic in terms of race, culture, language, class, ethnicity, age and so on (Moletsane et al., 2004, pp. 62–63).

I offer the above case study as a glimpse of the knowledge of diversity of teachers in South Africa. Experienced teachers' knowledge of diversity is crucial as it plays a role in the experience that newly qualified teachers have of diversity in schools. Learning from a mentor teacher who is not competent in diversity creates a blind experience and poor diversity literacy for a newly qualified teacher.

2.4 Teacher training to response to diversity

One of the requirements of teacher training is for a pre-service teacher to attend and engage in school observation as part of their practical teaching programme. In most cases pre-service teachers tend to choose schools that are situated in communities they are familiar with (Rusznyak, 2018). Gravett and Jiyane (2019) claim that this is not always beneficial to the concept of being exposed to diverse backgrounds and limits the type of diversity that pre-service teachers are exposed to. When teachers start looking for a job, they typically choose any school that has a post and it is not always the type of school that their teaching practice has exposed them to (Gravett & Jiyane, 2019). Thus, “scholars and practitioners in many nations agree that teacher preparation programmes need to change intensively if they are to succeed at preparing 21st century teachers who can work effectively with all students” (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016, p. 69). Perhaps teacher training programmes need to give serious consideration to the learner diversity the teachers will be exposed to in their workplace and ensure that teachers are well prepared for teaching in an inclusive setting, particularly where the children come from previously marginalised communities (Phillips & Chetty, 2018). There have been consistent findings such as by Pit-ten Cate et al. (2018) that indicate that teacher training institutions need to update and strengthen their programmes in order to produce diversity-competent teachers.

Similarly, in a recent study that observed how teachers engaged with sexual diversity among learners, the following outcome was observed:

The student-based support team members (formal structure that consists of selected teachers who are responsible for creating enabling, inclusive and safe learning environments for all students who experience barriers to learning) do not perceive learners with diverse sexual orientations [to be] in need of care and support. Secondly, the support structure is nonresponsive in the event of discrimination and prejudice faced by learners with diverse sexual orientations. And third, some educators within the school are perpetrators of homophobia and violence. These results call for a comprehensive in-service teacher training on aspects of sexual diversity (Brown & Buthelezi, 2020, p. 472).

Canagarajah (2012) maintains that culture shapes and is shaped by the people. Therefore, where diversity is concerned, pre-service teachers' responses to the culture of diversity are formed by their communities and they also influence how diversity is viewed as a culture around them. As established in the previous section, there is concern regarding the effectiveness of teacher preparation in terms of getting teachers well prepared to work with learners from diverse backgrounds (Nkambule & Mukeredzi, 2017). Findings suggesting increasing knowledge of legislation and policy related to inclusion, and improving levels of confidence in becoming inclusive-orientated teachers, have not been effective in minimising concerns or perceived stress about having learners from diverse backgrounds or disabilities in classrooms (Nkambule & Mukeredzi, 2017). Likewise, Reygan and Steyn (2017) find that South Africa faces an urgent need for a concerted and coherent approach to the teaching of diversity literacy in schools, one that is inclusive of the understanding of power, privilege and difference through curriculum, learning materials and teacher training. Ultimately, the process of teacher training has not been able to adequately produce teacher graduates that possess sophisticated diversity literacy skills.

In South Africa, the proportion of the country's budget which is allocated to education is approximately a fifth of the total budget (Du Plessis & Sunde, 2017). It is noted that very little of this budget is allocated to the training of first-time teachers as school leaders choose to not spend money training teachers who may not stay at the school in the long run (Du Plessis & Sunde, 2017). Harfitt (2015) states that newly qualified teachers experience insecurity and lack self-confidence; thus, the experiences they have during their practical teaching practice have a profound impact on their long-term commitment to teaching.

2.5 Newly qualified teachers' competence in the area of diversity

Over the years, an increase in the diversity of classrooms has been seen worldwide. This is due mainly to factors such as migration and increased access to diverse schools (Forghani-Arani et al., 2019). The ability of newly qualified teachers to be competent in teaching, dealing with and adapting to a diverse classroom has become a significant factor in good-quality education. Goh et al. (2017) use a phenomenographic approach to analyse the different perspectives that newly qualified teachers have on their competency. The study concludes that there is not one concept of what competency is from the teachers' perspectives, and this needs to be taken into consideration when drawing any conclusions on what teachers' competency regarding diversity is. Additionally, newly qualified teachers come into the classroom with their own perceptions of what they think competency means and therefore cannot be judged against a rigid set of points.

Similarly, Roose et al. (2019) aim to provide insight into how teachers' beliefs and views of inclusive classrooms affect their ability to interact positively with their learners and tailor their teaching styles to meet the needs of different students. The study examines three types of beliefs: teachers' beliefs about diversity, beliefs about tailoring teaching styles to suit different learners, and beliefs related to having a growth mindset. The study finds a positive correlation between teachers' beliefs about diversity and their ability to interact positively with their learners as well as a positive correlation between their beliefs about tailoring their teaching styles and their ability to do so in practice as will be reiterated in the concluding chapter to this research project.

Rajendran et al. (2020) argue that teacher competencies in the area of diversity, in conjunction with their attitudes towards diverse classrooms, are the most significant factors that contribute negatively or positively to the quality of the education learners receive. In the study conducted by Gravett and Kroon (2023), the authors found that newly qualified teachers in South Africa who went through the ITE programme felt unprepared for day-to-day teaching and dealing with classroom settings defined by inequalities. The study endorses the view that newly qualified teachers felt that some of the lecturers tasked with training them were removed from the disadvantageous circumstances in the schools and lacked first-hand experience of any diversity-related issues, and thus could not effectively prepare them to deal with a diverse classroom (Gravett & Kroon, 2023). Newly qualified teachers have been found to have a positive attitude to diversity in the classroom and are motivated to learn new skills and to acquire tools that are inclusive (Karacabey et al., 2019).

Bonner et al. (2018) found that in addition to the teachers in the study having positive attitudes towards diversity, they also observed high competence in teaching in diverse classrooms. Similarly, Picower and Marshall (2017) found that the majority of the teachers who practiced educational Teacher Performance Assessment felt more competent in their teaching ability and in dealing with diversity. In contradiction to the findings from Bonner et al. (2018) and Picower and Marshall (2017), Du Plessis and Sunde (2017) found that newly qualified teachers experienced situations such as having to teach subjects they were not qualified for, and teaching these subjects in a second language to a multicultural and diverse classroom made it harder to teach effectively. When teachers are put in this situation, Du Plessis and Sunde (2017) argue that it results in professional identity issues.

One of the significant changes which have been made in South Africa in the teaching sector is the introduction of the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) qualification, which allows students with a bachelor's degree to complete a year-long teaching qualification, if studying full time, or two years if the studies are part time, in which case, the qualification exposes the students to teaching practice for a period of eight to twelve weeks (Nomlomo, & Sosibo, 2016). There have been concerns over the quality of pre-service training gained through the PGCE programme owing to the short period students are given to develop their professional teaching knowledge and gain exposure to real-life classroom teaching.

Using critical theory and the capabilities approach, Botha and Baxen (2018) analyse qualitative data from South African pre-service teachers as they reflect on their experience during their training for early childhood teaching. The main findings of the study indicated that some universities are doing well in placing students pursuing a teaching degree in diverse schools where they can get exposure to dealing with diverse classrooms. However, there was a lack of placement reported in rural schools. The other main finding of the study relates to the challenge of language diversity. Similar to the findings of Du Plessis and Sunde (2017), participants of Botha and Baxen's (2018) study expressed dissatisfaction with the inadequate training given in preparation for having to teach subjects in vernacular languages.

Nomlomo and Sosibo (2016) conducted a study which sought to investigate the perceptions of newly qualified PGCE students with regard to their experience and to determine whether they felt adequately prepared to teach. Sixty-eight percent of the sample expressed concerns over gaps they found in the programme, including a mismatch between teaching practice placement and real-life teaching situations, limited exposure to teaching practice due to the short period

of the programme, and poorly structured courses which resulted in students submitting pieces of work with no understanding of how the different parts were connected or how they could apply the theory in real-life situations (Nomlomo & Sosibo, 2016). The mismatch between the content taught at universities versus the real-life teaching situations has also been reported by Botha and Baxen (2018), where the participants of the study expressed feelings of unpreparedness as teacher training programmes create the ‘ideal’ teaching situations that would only ever occur in a perfect world. In reality, the participants revealed, these ideal setups do not exist (Botha & Baxen, 2018).

It is evident that newly qualified teachers possess a certain level of knowledge and competence in managing diversity. Nevertheless, there is an increasing demand for more supportive interactions from all educational sectors. This is aimed at enhancing the experiences of student teachers with diversity, refining pedagogic knowledge related to diversity, improving teacher training contributions to the development of diversity-competent teachers, and increasing the support provided to newly qualified teachers in handling diversity.

Continuous professional development (CPD) has been argued to be among the most effective tools policy makers can utilise to reduce newly qualified teacher turnover and assist pre-service teachers in their task of handling diverse classrooms. CPD is the formal and informal development of teachers through activities and training which aim to address the professional needs of teachers. The goal of CPD is to ensure that teachers are equipped with the necessary skills required to deliver high-quality education and handle diverse classrooms (Mwila et al., 2022).

2.6 Theoretical Framework

This study has sought to examine newly qualified teachers’ competency in addressing diversity in the classroom. In an attempt to determine what these competencies are and enhance understanding of newly qualified teachers’ competences in dealing with diversity, the study leans on the theoretical framework of teacher competence of Sigrid Blömeke (2017). The framework was originally designed in an effort to explain learner achievement based on teacher competence (Blömeke, 2017). Teacher competence is central to the different kinds of resources of the education sector. Competence in dealing with diversity is crucial in order to achieve successful teaching and learning. Good-quality education is dependent on the different resources’ teachers have access to (Blömeke, 2017). These can be resources such as their skills, beliefs, motives, values, and knowledge (Blömeke, 2017). A good-quality education is

achieved through teacher competence in all areas including diversity for those in a classroom with learners of different backgrounds and abilities (Getenet, 2017). Establishing a framework which can assess general teacher competences means that this model needs to be multifaceted and include all resources. According to Blömeke’s theoretical framework of teacher competence, competence is shown as multi-faceted and includes analytical resources as well as motivational resources needed to be effective in a diverse classroom. It is necessary to assess teacher competence against a number of valuables: Competence profiles describe the patterns of how all teacher resources (cognition, affect, motivation, situational skills) play together (Blömeke, 2017). This framework and model are described in more detail and shown in the figure overleaf.

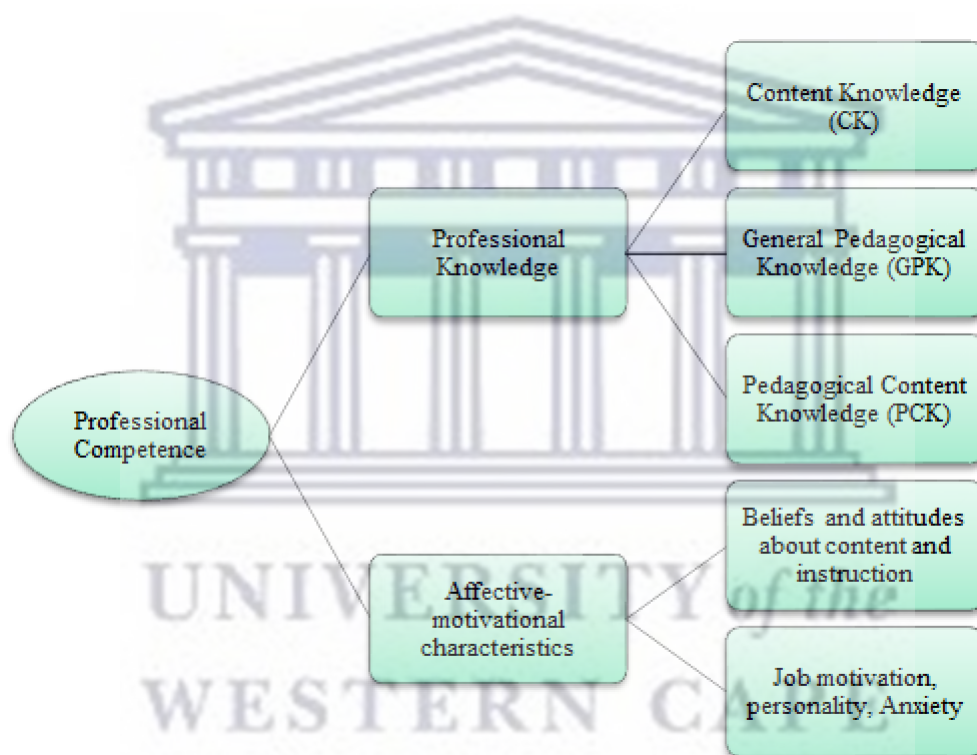


Figure 2.1: *Dimensions of teachers’ professional competence* (Blömeke, 2017)

2.6.1 Professional competence

The idea of competence, its definition and understanding, has gained increasing attention owing to the fact that it has an interdisciplinary background. In educational psychology, the introduction of competence is attributed to White (1959), who defined competence as a constructive relationship between a person and the environment within which they operate. More recent definitions of competence in the educational sector indicate that the concept is not a straightforward one to define because of the changing nature of the teaching profession. The

concept of competency is dynamic and ever evolving; the constant changes mean that the components that constitute the definition of competence need regular reviewing and revision (Potolea & Toma, 2019). Potolea and Toma (2019) provide a model to define competence in the educational sector. The model consists of three basic elements: knowledge, personality traits, and abilities and skills. They argue that these three elements are significant for success in attaining a desired teaching outcome in a given context. Therefore, we cannot seek to understand competency by just assessing one element. Even though knowledge could seem to be the more logical element, personality traits as well as abilities and skills are equally important. A similar definition is provided by the OECD (2018), where they suggest that competency goes beyond the acquisition of knowledge and skills, and it is the effective use of one's acquired knowledge and skills, attitudes and values to achieve complex goals. For instance, having sufficient knowledge of diversity does not make you a diversity-competent teacher if you do not use that knowledge. Potolea and Toma (2019), as well as the OECD (2018), expounded on the perspective of competence that is very similar to that of Blömeke (2017).

Under the theoretical framework of teacher competence according to Blömeke (2017), professional competence can be divided into two main areas: professional knowledge and affective-motivational characteristics. Teachers' professional knowledge is divided into CK, general pedagogical knowledge (GPK), and pedagogical content knowledge (PCK). Teachers' motivational characteristics are divided into beliefs and attitudes about content and instruction, and job motivation, personality and anxiety. The model shows that the level at which teachers are competent in the classroom depends on the qualities they bring to their roles and those they can learn on the job (Blömeke, 2017; Blömeke et al., 2015). The next section provides a breakdown of each element of the model, briefly giving the definitions and an overview of the concepts.

2.6.2 Professional knowledge

Content knowledge

Research indicates that professional knowledge encompasses multiple, complex layers of knowledge and experience which shape teachers' professional journeys and development (Carlson et al., 2019). Gess-Newsome et al. (2019) define CK as the overall factual understanding that a teacher has regarding a particular subject, while Carlson et

al. (2019) define CK as the scholarly content within a specific field of study. They argue that in most cases, teachers will obtain CK in the classroom or in a similar setting, on how to teach the content, but in other cases, teachers will be required to acquire CK in an informal manner when asked to teach subjects that they have not formally studied. Dyches and Boyd (2017) add that content knowledge requires familiarity with the subject material and content. Kim et al. (2018) break CK down into common content knowledge (CCK) and specialised content knowledge (SCK). CCK refers to “knowledge of the technique and tactics of a movement and the rules governing its performance”, while SCK “includes knowledge of the instructional representations of CCK, instructional tasks to teach CCK, and errors that students can make associated with those tasks” (Kim et al., 2018, p.139).

General pedagogical knowledge

GPK is defined as the capacity to apply fundamental teaching skills within classroom settings (Gess-Newsome et al., 2019). Carlson et al. (2019) assert that in addition to teachers having knowledge of the content that they are teaching, there are other general knowledge bases which are necessary to effectively address the educational needs of each student. These knowledge bases include but are not limited to: understanding the developmental readiness of each student, the nature of the curriculum, the nature of the different assessment types, knowledge of effective strategies for collaborative learning, and understanding the unique learning needs of each student. These general knowledge bases, Carlson et al. (2019) add, are usually developed through formal means such as teacher development programmes, and are reinforced through teaching experience and professional learning activities.

Pedagogic content knowledge

Tröbst et al. (2018) argue that PCK is at the core of a teacher’s professional knowledge, as this body of knowledge is required to make content more accessible to learners. The outlook of Kim et al. (2018) on PCK is similar to that of Tröbst et al. (2018), asserting that PCK is a behaviour and the essence of the application of professional knowledge, embodying the use of professional judgement. Under PCK, teachers are required to make decisions by applying prior knowledge and the decision is influenced by the specific current context, with the series of decisions being dependent on each other (Kim et al., 2018, p. 139). Deng (2018) states that PCK allows a teacher to modify the CK he or she possesses into dynamic but flexible forms, which can be applied to the different learning contexts (p. 156). Furthermore, PCK includes knowledge of effective class control and organisation, productive methods of instruction,

knowledge of contexts such as resources available, the socio-cultural context of the community in which the school is situated, and district policies (Kim et al., 2018). Carlson et al. (2019) assert that CK and GPK are fundamental to teacher PCK.

From the above definitions, one can conclude that professional knowledge is complex and constitutes a crucial part in understanding professional teacher competence. In the context of diversity, the ability to deal with diversity in a classroom is one of the many aspects of pedagogy that teachers need to master. In addition, teachers need to be aware of diversity and the challenges that diversity can pose. They need to understand the variety of diverse learners that they have in their classrooms. Loughran (2019) advises that when analysing teacher professional development, it is important to consider the fact that development takes place over a period of time, and thus there is an incremental build-up of knowledge, which is reinforced and enriched through teacher experience.

The next section provides a brief definition of the other components of professional competence, affective motivational characteristics.

2.6.3 Affective motivational characteristics

Blömeke's (2017) teacher professional competence model suggests that affective motivational characteristics consist of two main bases: beliefs and attitudes about content and instruction, and job motivation, personality and anxiety. These two broad categories are defined below.

Beliefs and attitudes about content and instruction

Everyone, including teachers, has different beliefs, ranging from personal, religious, and political to educational beliefs, which are influenced by experience (Shah, 2021). For teachers, it has been established that actual and practical teaching is greatly influenced by the teachers' beliefs towards the different components of the teaching experience, and this experience in turn influences their beliefs (Shah, 2021). Shah (2021) mentions that the definition of teachers' beliefs is vague, as beliefs are an abstract concept, consisting of rational ideas and views which teachers develop through their training and teaching experience as they attempt to understand their students. Their beliefs, therefore, contribute to how competent they are in dealing with diversity. Brown and Buthelezi (2020) found that teachers' perceptions of learners with diversity variations that are not within the typical norm such as same-sex sexual orientations are based on various ideologies, for instance, conservative religious prompts and cultural norms.

To assess a newly qualified teacher's competency in diversity management, one might focus on the affective motivational characteristics of Blömeke's (2017) model. Martinez (2005) found that teacher pedagogy is impacted by their lack of knowledge regarding the diversity of their learners. Vázquez-Montilla et al. (2014) argue that teachers' beliefs regarding their learners' backgrounds and languages affect the quality of teaching and thus their ability to deal competently with diversity in the classroom. Bonner et al. (2018) reiterate this argument, stating that teachers' beliefs and their ability to use pedagogical methods and practices that are effective have an enormous impact on their teaching, especially in diverse classrooms. Teachers who are more culturally intuitive understand the larger factors which have impacted on learners from diverse backgrounds, what the impact has been on their education, and how best to tailor their teaching practices to achieve the best results (Bonner et al., 2018).

Attitudes are referred to by Hutzler et al. (2019) as a simplification tool, whereby an individual uses this tool to cope with a complex situation or disentangle a web of information. Attitudes reflect one's personal beliefs, values, and personality traits, which are influenced by the knowledge and experience gained in relation to a specific situation. Attitudes ultimately result in action or intended action (Hutzler et al., 2019). Research by Woodcock (2021) indicates that most teachers have a positive attitude towards diversity and believe that inclusive education is an effective method to deal with a diverse classroom. Furthermore, teachers who have a positive approach towards inclusivity in the classroom have been shown to give positive and encouraging feedback, especially to learners with learning disabilities (Woodcock, 2021).

Job motivation, personality and anxiety

Job motivation in the teaching profession is defined as the complex factors, biases, needs and tools which evoke enthusiasm in the workplace, and ensure and sustain job-related behaviour towards achieving a desired goal (Phytanza & Burhaein, 2020). Motivation is defined by Khasawneh (2021) as a set of factors that shape and ultimately determine one's action and interaction in a given situation. This behaviour is not directly observable but is rather deduced from an individual's behaviour or response to a certain situation. Whitaker and Valtierra (2018) describe four types of job motivation: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, altruistic motivation, and the working environment. Examples of intrinsic motivation would be the love of teaching and intellectual stimulation; extrinsic motivation could come from work-life balance and job security; while altruistic motivation could emanate from the desire to give back

to the community, working with the youth, and shaping their future. The working environment is affected by factors such as opportunities for growth in that environment, and independence (Whitaker & Valtierra, 2018).

Job motivation is another factor which can have an impact on a teacher's ability and need or desire to competently deal with diversity in a classroom. All the other constantly changing requirements and knowledge teachers need to ensure they possess and meet diversity in the classrooms seem to pose more challenges than solutions (Szelei et al., 2020). In South Africa, classroom demographics have changed significantly since the apartheid era (Reygan & Steyn, 2017). Through a number of legislative and policy measures, schools have the mandate to provide equal opportunities to all students, regardless of their differences. This means that teachers are expected to have the necessary skills and abilities to discern their students' different learning styles and needs and accommodate this learning diversity and others such as language, culture, gender, etc., in their pedagogical decisions. This has a direct impact on the responsibility that is placed on the teacher. The need to acknowledge an individual student's learning style and needs increases the complexity of teachers' work (Pit-ten Cate et al., 2018). Govender (2018) argues that the major factor contributing to the success of teachers' implementation of the curriculum is their knowledge and capacity; however, Whitaker and Valtierra (2018) add that job motivation plays a significant role as well. With a continuously changing teaching environment and increasing demands and expectations being placed on teachers, job motivation becomes more important in the success of effective teaching in diverse classrooms (Whitaker & Valtierra, 2018).

Personality refers to one's essence and is argued to be a key variable in teacher effectiveness in the classroom (Win & Yee, 2018). Personality plays a role in the teacher's ability to deal with the different cultures, languages, lifestyles and values they are faced with in their environments (Martinez, 2005). Although it is argued that personality cannot be changed, one can develop traits that contradict one's instinctive personality type. For example, a teacher who is an introvert can develop traits such as social skills, public speaking ability, openness and flexibility. These traits may help the teacher to relate better to a diverse classroom. Quality education and teaching require the appropriate skills; thus, teacher personality plays a great role in achieving this (Fisher & Kent, 1998).

There is a greater need now than ever before for teachers to become more culturally aware, and to do this, they need to expose themselves to the different types of cultures that may exist in

their classrooms (Bonner et al., 2018). More recently, culture has become a huge part of students' lives because schools have started to encourage learners to embrace their cultures.

Anxiety is an emotion marked by sensation of tension, anxious thoughts and physical changes like increased blood pressure (Kowalski, 2000). Anxiety is a common feeling that newly qualified teachers experience. This feeling is exacerbated when faced with a stressful situation, which many can face in a diverse classroom (Bonner et al., 2018).

Bonner's research shows that many newly qualified teachers feel unprepared for the reality of teaching in a diverse classroom. Theoretically, they are taught to treat all their students equally. This results in the assumption that "equal means the same", and they use the same teaching methods and equitable treatments for all students, ignoring that students are different with contrasting needs (Martinez, 2005, p. 2).

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of current literature that explores newly qualified teachers' competency in handling diversity. Understanding diversity and what it means in a South African context has further been explored in the theme of inclusivity and how it contributes to diversity. Based on the above literature resources, this review has established that newly qualified teachers learn through their experience as newly qualified teachers as well as through their journey of becoming a teacher. Furthermore, the challenges that newly qualified teachers encounter when dealing with diversity have been highlighted in the review. Finally, this chapter has attempted to determine how competency can be measured through the theoretical framework of teacher competence according to Sigrid Blömeke, and its relation to diversity

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHADODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 provided an overview of the current literature that explores newly qualified teachers' competency in handling diversity. Understanding diversity and what it means in a South African context has been explored within the theme of inclusivity and how this contributes to diversity. Based on the literature resources, the review has established that newly qualified teachers learn through their experience as newly qualified teachers as well as through their journey towards becoming a teacher. The challenges that newly qualified teachers encounter when dealing with diversity were discussed in the literature review in the preceding chapter. The previous chapter also attempted to determine how competency can be measured through the theoretical framework of teacher competence according to Sigrid Blömeke and its relation to diversity.

This chapter is a description of the process and methodology deployed in this study. First, this chapter discusses the aim of this research. Secondly, I discuss the qualitative research approach and auto-ethnographic methodology used in this study, and how these methods are best suited to gaining a deeper understanding of newly qualified teachers' competencies in dealing with diversity. The chapter expands on the research aims and on how the data was collected. Finally, I outline the steps I took to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the research data and outline the ethical considerations of the study.

3.2 Research aim, purpose and significance

The main aim of this research was to investigate a newly qualified teacher's competency in dealing with diversity. This research explores a newly qualified teacher's personal experience as well as teacher knowledge of diversity, and links it to the body of research and facts that exist on the subject of newly qualified teachers' competency in diversity management. In doing so, this research serves to encourage pre-service teachers to prepare themselves adequately for the teaching of diverse learners; to provide teacher training institutions with a fair assessment of the competence of newly qualified teachers in dealing with diversity; and finally, to challenge newly qualified teachers to become self-aware and to work actively on any personal or professional barriers that may serve as a disadvantage in dealing with diversity.

The main research questions this study intends to answer are:

- What competencies does a newly qualified teacher need in the area of diversity?
- What is the extent to which teacher training institutions prepare pre-service teachers to work in diverse classrooms?

This study uses a qualitative research design to answer the main research questions and sub-questions. This type of research method offers me the freedom to intimately explore my experience as a newly qualified teacher dealing with diversity and my professional development prior to this experience. Qualitative research has five broad characteristics: naturalistic actual settings as sources of data collection, descriptive data, emphasis on the research process rather than the outcomes, the use of inductive reasoning, and concern with participant perspectives (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). These characteristics are described briefly below. Concern with research participants focuses on meaning, which is obtained from the unique value that one places on people, relationships and events, and how this impacts their experiences in a particular situation (Arendse, 2020). As I aim to explore what competencies newly qualified teachers require to deal with diversity, the challenge is to identify and analyse the competencies I developed as a newly qualified teacher, or what competencies I lacked as a pre-service teacher. Secondary to identifying these competencies, I aim to explore to what extent these competencies or lack of having certain competencies aided me in dealing with diversity or hindered my professional abilities as a newly qualified teacher. The significance of using the qualitative research method for this study is my involvement in the research process.

3.3 Qualitative research

This research employs a qualitative approach which is a social research methodology that can be identified as a scientific method that contextualises experiences in a holistic manner, such as cultural, social, political, and personal history (Bell et al., 2021). Aspers and Corte (2019) define qualitative research as a repetitive process which results in enhanced understanding of particular subject matter, where the author makes noteworthy discoveries, with the focal point being to provide a clear account of lived or experienced events from specific and selected individuals, as opposed to making general assumptions and drawing conclusions about a population from a sample representation (Johnson et al., 2020). In other words, the research is case-study based. Roy and Uekusa (2020) assert that the key focus of qualitative research is to give others a voice, especially those who have been or are marginalised by society. Similarly, Ahmad et al. (2019) state that qualitative research is a form of research where more significance

is given to the views and perspectives of the participants, with results expressed in natural language.

Babbie and Mouton (2001) state that the primary interest of qualitative researchers is to provide a profound account of the research participants' actions, taking into consideration elements such as the participants' own beliefs, history and context which have an impact on their actions. Qualitative research is social research which aims to understand how social experience is constructed by questioning the nature of reality which is influenced by society (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Denzin and Lincoln concur with Fossey et al. (2002) that qualitative research can be described as an interpretive research methodology which focuses mainly on understanding the meaning behind human experience and how this impacts broader and more specific actions in specific contexts.

For quality interpretation of data, a reflective process needs to take place. This process involves the continuous task of questioning to understand the participants' perspectives (Richards & Morse, 2012). Reflection also plays the crucial role of assisting with full immersion in the data to give a richer understanding of the views and perspectives of the participants; this then influences the analytical framework used (Richards & Morse, 2012). Reflecting on what the participants are sharing is key to understanding the narrative as well as the context, circumstances, events and actions which are linked to the specific situation (Richards & Morse, 2012).

Early studies on qualitative research by Bogdan and Biklen (1992) suggest that this type of research methodology has five characteristics:

- Naturalistic, actual settings as sources of data collection: qualitative research has actual settings where the researcher can collect data. These settings include and are not limited to schools, neighbourhoods and hospitals. Video- and audio-recording devices may be used. The main aim of qualitative researchers going to the natural setting is the concern with context and the belief that the topic under study is best understood in the natural setting in which it took place.
- Descriptive data: qualitative research data is descriptive in nature, usually in the form of words or pictures rather than numbers. Generally, this data is in interview transcripts, notes, memos, photographs, and other formal records. Data collection and analysis in qualitative research have to be approached with the mindset that all details are significant and could contribute to answering the research questions.

- Concern with process: qualitative research places more emphasis on the research process rather than the outcomes of the research process. The focus of qualitative data collection is obtaining a meaningful understanding of how societal norms and labels are created and what influences one's meaning and thus experience of societal norms.
- The use of inductive reasoning: the aim of qualitative research is to develop a theory from the research findings, thus qualitative researchers do not look for evidence to support pre-outlined hypotheses, but rather form conclusions as they undertake the research and interact with the research participants.
- Meaning: in qualitative research, this refers to concern with participant perspectives. The researcher is interested in how different people make sense of their lives, and focuses on capturing the individual perspectives accurately.

Narration, which is also commonly referred to as 'narrative inquiry' in research, is described as an interpretive process, which aims to understand how an individual's environment affects their experiences, perceptions and decision-making. (Bamberg, 2012). As a methodology, it aims to investigate a narrative by articulating the meaning of the research participants' lived experiences (Thomas, 2012), while describing the method of its inquiry (Norman, 2020). Narrative inquiry connects people to their actions in specific events, places and time (Bamberg, 2012) and it is distinguished from other research methods through the fact that it "deals with individual lives" (Clandinin & Murphy, 2007, p. 633).

This study utilises personal narration, where I use a first-person perspective to refer to myself, and consider all aspects which have influenced my competencies as a newly qualified teacher working in diverse environments. Bleakley (2005) argues that narrative inquiry, through its structure, provides the researcher with a broader foundation from which conclusions can be drawn and policies drafted.

Understanding the narrative can take place through a narrative interview which is a type of qualitative interview that focuses on the participant's biography (Dubnewick et al., 2018). Through the use of storytelling, one's identity can be constructed and thus the link between knowledge, context and identity is discovered (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). There are a number of important aspects and skills to narration in a qualitative study, such as the researcher's ideologies and the ability to be reflexive. Reflexivity refers to the ongoing process involving reflection with the aim of building and adjusting our understanding of social realities

through interactive discussions on experience. It is a continuous process, informed by reflection (Clandinin & Caine, 2012).

According to Creswell and Miller (2000) good qualitative research uses structured and attentive methods to collect and analyse data, ensuring that this data is valid and credible. This is commonly referred to as systematic analysis. Systematic analysis of narrative data aims to use the properties of narratives, such as their persuasive nature, and their functions in connecting versions of events and providing justification for certain actions to bring together different pieces of the data and formulate conclusions (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006).

3.4 Auto-ethnography

This study has adopted the auto-ethnographic research method, as already intimated. An auto-ethnography study is a qualitative research method that connects the personal to the cultural (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). More recent research indicates that this form of research method was created as a response to limitations of other methods of qualitative and quantitative research (Fourie, 2021). Auto-ethnographies have a number of purposes, including but not limited to investigating significant personal experiences within social contexts (Ellis & Bochner, 2000), exposing social or cultural challenges, discrimination or inequalities that need to be confronted, and finding interpretations of certain cases or events (Butz & Besio, 2009).

Modern writers associate auto-ethnographic work with different types of self-expression, such as blogging, written content on social platforms, and singing, arguing that these forms of self-expression contribute to societal contexts by allowing the writer to demonstrate knowledge, expertise, abilities and preferences, thus providing individualised profiles, which are then observed and enhanced for integration into societal norms (Wall, 2016).

Auto-ethnography consists of three interlinked elements: 'auto', 'ethno' and 'graphy'. 'Auto' refers to self, subjective and personal experience, thus auto-ethnographers rely on methods used in life writing in pieces such as autobiographies and memoirs (Bochner & Ellis, 2016). This requires the writer to engage in a phenomenon known as 'memory work', which reflects on personal experiences, notable past events, personal views and feelings while attempting to make sense of all of these. In this study, I focus on my experiences as a newly qualified teacher teaching in a diverse classroom and the training and skills I gained prior to this, which may have assisted me in dealing with diversity. I highlight significant events which stand out as contributing to

the issue. I also articulate my future hopes on the training provided to pre-service teachers to ensure that they are well equipped to handle diversity.

‘Ethno’ refers to beliefs, actions and the identities of a particular group, and it requires the researcher to utilise the practices of ethnography. These include referencing, identifying patterns within the collected data, analysing the main narratives that emerge from the self-reflection process, describing noteworthy events, as well as providing insider access to contexts which would otherwise not be made available through other research methods (Bochner & Ellis, 2016). In my reflections, I aim to use my personal experiences deliberately to draw the links between my views and experiences as a newly qualified teacher, and cultural views, beliefs and practices with regard to diversity. Additionally, this would allow me to also demonstrate a relationship between the theoretical framework, thereby grounding my research findings and contributing to new contextual knowledge in the domain of diversity experiences of pre-service teachers.

‘Graphy’ refers to the interpretation and representation of the beliefs, actions and identities of a particular group with regard to a specific topic (Bochner & Ellis, 2016). In essence, an auto-ethnography is a type of qualitative research whereby the researcher writes reflexively, investigating personal experiences with the aim of connecting these to societal issues to gain understanding of the issue of interest (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Auto-ethnography assumes that the researcher’s personal experience is infused with societal standards, views and beliefs, and that the researcher engages in meticulous self-reflection, also referred to as reflexivity (Jones et al., 2016).

Hughes and Pennington (2017) assert that auto-ethnography can be considered as both methodology and method. As a method, it involves finding a worthwhile situation of interest and adopting a reflexive approach to thinking, engaging with and analysing the data. To apply this concept to my study, the situation of interest is a newly qualified teacher’s competence in addressing diversity. Adams and Herrmann (2020) provide an overview of the history of auto-ethnographic studies and credit the increasing use and evolution of auto-ethnography to a number of philosophical movements and a response to other types of research and their limitations, thus implying that auto-ethnographic studies provide a valuable and effective way to use theories and frameworks.

I hope to question the competencies that newly qualified teachers need to effectively address diversity in the classroom through the lens of Blömeke’s dimensions of teachers’ professional

competence framework, in order to determine whether current newly qualified teachers possess the necessary competencies required to address diversity and the extent to which teacher training institutions prepare newly qualified teachers to work in diverse classrooms.

What makes an auto-ethnographic approach different from other research methods, is that the researcher is part of the group which is being studied (Anderson, 2006). The data used to describe, analyse and understand cultural experience comes from the researcher's own personal experience (Chang, 2016). Thus, this research method is a form of self-narration that will place the researcher within a social context. As a result of the above information, by trying to investigate newly qualified teachers' competencies in diversity, I have drawn on my own experiences of diversity as a newly qualified teacher through the following processes:

- self-reflection,
- narration, and
- systematic analysis.

Therefore, the data-collection tool of this study reflects experiences in written form.

3.4.1 Self-reflection and reflexivity

This study has been conducted by focusing on my personal experience, where I reflect on my competencies in the area of diversity as a newly qualified teacher. On the one hand, self-reflection is a process which is reliant on the expression of words, feelings, emotions and lived experiences (Fourie, 2021). Reflexivity, on the other hand, requires auto-ethnographic authors to question themselves and their positionality continuously and consistently throughout the writing process, as both the researcher and the participant in the research (Cline, 2012). England (1994) asserts that reflexivity is a crucial technique in the ethnographic research and writing process, describing it as “self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious analytical scrutiny of the self as researcher” (p. 82).

There are many factors which influence research and writing. These include life experiences and personal characteristics, such as the writer's ethnicity, race, gender and age (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). These factors, as well as other factors associated with the research process, the auto-ethnographer's position and influence in the study, shape the research questions, determine what the focal research points are, and what the writer considers inessential to the research. Providing clear descriptions of which factors have influenced a study, and what the

effects are, is an indication that the auto-ethnographer has adopted a reflexive approach to their work (Barrett et al., 2020). Taking the above into consideration, and as a researcher who has first-hand experience, I continuously conduct critical self-evaluations of my perceptions and positions at all stages of my self-reflection.

Throughout this study, I provide meaningful commentary and critique of factors which have had an impact on my development as a pre-service teacher being prepared for the teaching experience as well as my experience in addressing diversity as a newly qualified teacher. The accounts I provide may show how the practice of generalisation in research may conceal significant variations of cultural issues surrounding the topic of diversity in the classroom (Adams et al., 2017). The auto-ethnographic method explores the connections between the culture concerning diversity, the wider society and myself (Roy & Uekusa, 2020). Although my accounts focus mainly on my own personal experiences, I connect my lived experiences to the wider society and the social challenges that exist as a result of diversity.

3.4.2 Narrative research

Narrative research has become more common in studies, mainly because teachers, like many others, are storytellers (Connelly, & Clandinin, 1990). This type of research writing aims to provide studies from the perspectives of people and their experience of the world, and is a writing methodology which explores a narrative, while describing the inquiry process (Norman, 2020).

Narrative research unravels successive stories of the participants' lived experiences, told in their own words, thus giving the researcher the opportunity to map out their life experiences in an organised and systematic manner. This gives further significance to the researcher's life experiences through the meaningful stories which are told (Bleakley, 2000). Narrative writing is a form of inquiry which can be used to gather data or interpret data, and is based on the act of storytelling (Latta & Kim, 2009). Auto-ethnographic researchers who use this type of research method collect the stories and write narrations of their experience. Polkinghorne (2007) describes narrative research as “the study of stories” (p. 471). Narrative research should aim to question existing generalisations and beliefs on a certain topic, assumptions and conclusions, and not only reflect ‘reality’ (Fraser, 2004).

The type of narrative research I use is *autobiographical narrative*, which aims to understand individuals' stories as autobiographies interlinked with a specific societal context (Bruner,

2004). An autobiographical, reflective, narrative research methodology is appropriate for this study because the nature of this research is a form of validation that teachers' perspectives and sensitivities towards the challenges of their profession are legitimate. Thus, this research paints a picture of my reality using language in the form of text.

Narrative research as a methodology is defined by three characteristics: temporality, sociality and place (Clandinin, 2006). Temporality refers to the specific events which the writer is analysing which are non-spiritual in nature and are in temporal transition (Clandinin, 2006). Sociality requires the author to consider both personal and social contexts and circumstances in their narrative research process (Clandinin, 2006). Personal context includes the writer's feelings, hopes and desires, whereas social context and circumstances refer to the conditions in which the narrator's experiences took place. Place refers to the physical and tangible location where the event occurred (Clandinin, 2006).

3.4.3 Systematic analysis and voice

Data collection for this study was achieved through my autobiographical narrative writing, then analysed through systematic narrative analysis with the aim of yielding evidence from the experiences narrated. Systematic analysis of narrative data can follow a number of approaches, which are classified into two broad categories: formal structural and functional. Formal structural is a structured and attentive approach which analyses how a story is structured and developed from the beginning to the ending (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004). Functional analysis focuses more on what the story is imparting and less on how the story is structured or developed. Interpretation of narrative data is another step, in systematic analysis, which aims to take a deeper look at the data collected to identify concealed meanings (Clandinin, 2006).

Data analysis in narrative research is made up of four phases: preparing the data, identifying basic components of the data, organising the data, and interpreting the data (Newby, 2014). Data preparation is the process of getting the data in a form which can be manipulated. For this study, my experiences as a newly qualified teacher were narrated in writing, in software format. Identifying basic components of the data involves grouping and categorising the data into key themes. Organising the data is structuring the analysis into groups at different levels, depending on the nature of the data. The final phase of narrative data analysis, data interpretation, involves providing underlying meanings from the data (Herman, 2009).

My experience as a newly qualified teacher is triangulated with academic literature of the experience of newly qualified teachers' experiences of diversity. By conducting an auto-ethnography, my feelings and experiences will be legitimised, as will the experiences of other newly qualified teachers dealing with diversity in their teaching environments. A chance to have a voice in the body of literature that exists will be given to us.

3.5 Credibility and trustworthiness

Credibility and trustworthiness are defined as the measure of the accuracy of the research data analysis and interpretation as a representation of the actual research participants' lived experiences and perceptions (Schwandt, 1997). To ensure that qualitative research is credible, Creswell and Miller (2000) suggest the use of viewpoints to demonstrate validity. In qualitative research, these viewpoints are determined by the researcher, the research participants, the readers of the research, and those who review the research (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The researcher's viewpoint is significant for the credibility and trustworthiness of the research, as the researcher has control over how long they collect data, what data to analyse and how this data is analysed, and how to transform the data into an influential narrative (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

A second viewpoint which can be used to ensure that the research is credible is that of the research participants. Since qualitative work presumes that reality is socially established and is as accurate as what the research participants view it to be, Creswell and Miller (2000) suggest that the researcher corroborates the details of the accounts given by the research participants. A third suggestion to ensure credibility is the use of individuals who are external to the research, such as reviewers and readers of the research, who can help confirm the accuracy of the details of the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Another tool which can ensure credibility and trustworthiness of research is reflexivity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Finlay's (2002) work suggests that there are different ways a researcher can ensure reflexivity in their writing. These are introspection, intersubjective reflection, mutual collaboration, social critique and discursive deconstruction. The most relevant form of reflexivity I adopt in my research is reflexivity through introspection, which is described as the researcher's own reflections on their own experience using thinking and intuition as guidance to record data (Walsh, 1995).

In addition to using the above-mentioned tools to achieve credibility and trustworthiness in my work, I also provide a clear link between the theoretical framework, the research questions, the data collection, analysis and interpretation of the results. Furthermore, I provide sufficient narrative data and detailed descriptions of both personal and social contexts in which the research was performed to ensure confirmability.

3.6 Ethical consideration

This study has upheld the necessary ethical requirements of research as ethical consideration is an essential part of this study. To meet the ethical regulations of research, permission to conduct this research was received first from the Faculty Research Committee and thereafter from the university Senate Research Committee.

Some academics suggest that the ethics of ethnographic research is questionable. However, in more recent times various authors and academics have found that there is very low participant risk posed by qualitative research (Wiles, 2012). Thus, anonymity has been maintained in names of people and schools. Auto-ethnographers have to remain sensitive to the fact that the information they publish may implicate others (Ellis et al., 2011). This study has responded to the latter concern by systematically writing in a way that makes the location of the communities written about unidentifiable to readers. The study focuses on me and my experience as a newly qualified, but also considers the behaviour of others and my relationship with other people. I have upheld confidentiality and anonymity of names of people, places and personal information. I have remained mindful of objectivity in my reflection on what competencies I have and need as a newly qualified teacher in a diverse classroom.

Auto-ethnographers recognise that their recollection of the “truth” may change as the genre of writing or representing experience changes (Ellis et al., 2011). Hence, the importance of contingency, because memory is fallible and it is impossible to recall or report on events in language that exactly represents how those events were lived and felt. These authors recognise that people who have experienced the ‘same’ event often tell different stories about what happened (Ellis et al., 2011). To counter this limitation, my narrations are detailed descriptions of the relevant events, which can be confirmed.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to explain the methods and procedures that were utilised in the generation of data so that the research questions could be answered. A definition of qualitative

research and its components are provided as well as an outline of data collection and analysis in auto-ethnographic writing. An overview of the research methods used in this study is also provided, briefly discussing self-reflection, narrative research and systematic analysis.

In the next chapter, detailed descriptions of the data used in this study are provided. The study utilises self-reflection and narrative writing to gather data.



CHAPTER 4

REFLECTIONS, DATA AND DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter explained the methods and procedures utilised in the generation of data so that the research questions could be answered. The chapter provided a definition of qualitative research and components of this type of research, an outline of data collection and analysis in auto-ethnographic writing, and an overview of the research methods used in this study. This chapter consists of data collection, data analysis, findings, and discussions.

I provide brief reflections on my background, beliefs, motives, values, and situational skills, followed by a glimpse into my early childhood influences towards becoming a teacher. I then explore my experience as a pre-service teacher by interpreting how my teaching practice and pedagogical knowledge influenced the way I handled diversity as a newly qualified teacher. The latter is accomplished by discussing the diversity landscape I was exposed to, interrogating the knowledge I had of diversity, and analysing my experience in teaching practice. Thereafter, I discuss the challenges I faced as a newly qualified because of the level of diversity competency I had. In addition, I provide a visual image of my pre-service teacher perceptions of what being a teacher entailed versus what I have come to know about what being a teacher requires, followed by a discussion of the image. Finally, I use Sigrid Blömeke's (2017) framework of teacher competence to establish my own competency in respect of diversity.

4.2.1 Reflections on my background, beliefs, motives, values, and situational skills

I identify as being South African, despite being born outside of South Africa. My identity is mostly forged by my upbringing and childhood experiences. My childhood memories and experiences are framed in the context of South Africa, the only country I have come to know fully. My formal education (primary, secondary, and tertiary) was received entirely in South Africa. My view of diversity is influenced by the education I received and the schools I attended; these were urban schools. By urban schools, I mean schools not located in rural areas or informal settlements, but rather in the city. From my perspective, my parents, who were mostly absent, had little influence on my views of the world. They did, however, influence my religious upbringing, namely, Christianity. I follow a Christian way of life yet remain open minded towards different trends and current affairs that may not align with Christian beliefs. If

someone's way of life is labelled a sin by my religion, I am in no position to judge how people choose to live their lives, nor do I become radical in response to the beliefs and lifestyles of others. I am convinced that the tolerant aspect of my character is heavily influenced by my educational background. I grew up among discriminative and judgemental family members, but the better part of me embraced the *ubuntu* way of living, a concept I am sure is unfamiliar to some of my family members. I was introduced to *ubuntu* – empathy, equality, and equity – in school through subjects such as life orientation, history, language interpretation, and critical thinking pedagogy.

As a young professional, my motives are to contribute positively towards society. I feel a sense of responsibility towards my community to do better, because I now know more, especially where children are concerned.

The values I have are influenced by my critical and curious mind. I want to be accepted and therefore must accept people as they are. The latter I can trace back to school lessons that promoted critical thinking. My language teachers would always steer me towards assessing characters as well as story lines in texts by using critical thinking. In my mind, I refuse to be a person who expects more from others yet fails to be empathetic towards others. I am constantly looking for opportunities to learn about other cultures, races, norms, and perspectives; this is a result of my curiosity.

As a teacher today, I remain mindful that the things I say to my learners will influence how they view the world and the kind of people they become. Like everyone else, I have flaws; however, in my profession (one I chose and love) my most important motive is to do no harm and to always try to empathise with my learners. As a previous foreigner who has suffered from discrimination, I admit that I am indeed more sensitive towards subtle racism and a lack of tolerance towards others.

While Blömeke (2017) affirms that a competency framework should be multifaceted and inclusive of situational skills, I find that unfamiliar situations as well as situations that I am not very knowledgeable about are challenging to me as a teacher. Regardless of my good intentions, in unfamiliar scenarios I display poor problem-solving skills.

Harrison and Klein (2007) point out that variety diversity is the classification composition in a community on some categorical variable such as race, religion, ethnicity, eye colour, gender, and social status. In my case, some of my variables are: young Christian black female, immigrant and previous refugee, poor background, race and discrimination trauma, mother,

wife, student, brown skin, short, kinky hair (afro-textured hair), and educated young professional. Noting the above variety is crucial to this research, as Blömeke (2017) has established that one's background, beliefs, motives, values, and situational skills contribute towards one's competency.

4.2.2 A glimpse into my early childhood

In 1999 I was five years old. I lived in a refugee camp in Malawi with my family of five at the time. My eldest brother was ten years older than I was; I had to accompany him to school because my parents worked long hours as non-skilled labourers. There were no day-care facilities in the village we resided in. I would sit outside my brother's classroom the entire school day, and that became my initial introduction to school and teachers. His classroom was under an old white tent that covered just enough to protect the learners from the scorching hot sun in summer. I cherished the small tent because it worked significantly in my favour by allowing me to observe everything that was going on in the classroom, and I somehow felt a sense of belonging. My brother had only one teacher who taught him all his subjects. His teacher was like a supreme being in the classroom. In those days, the teacher's word was law, and I was attracted to that kind of power. My perception of what it means to be a teacher evolved later.

After travelling through six African countries within a timeline of four years, seeking refuge from the war that had taken place in my birth country, my family settled in South Africa. "The Mandela land of freedom and peace" as described by other refugees who had arrived before us. According to my parents, South Africa would accept us as asylum seekers and offer us the medical attention we desperately needed. Even as a child, I remember having a feeling of arrival. By arrival I mean a feeling that I had reached my destination, I was finally in a land where I would be accepted and thrive. I have flourished, but acceptance came at the cost of losing my own identity. Of all the varieties of diversity, asylum seekers were bound to be among the minority group in schools, specifically at the schools I attended.

Early childhood development centres or crèches are not institutions that I had the privilege of attending. By the time my family had settled in South Africa, it was time for Grade 1. We had a temporary asylum seekers' permit that did not allow us access to banking in the country. My parents were car guards and kept their earnings in a suitcase under their bed, and the coins for bread and milk were kept between the base and mattress of their bed. One day, they had taken longer than usual to come home and I was hungry. I lifted their mattress, grabbed as many

brown coins that my little fingers could handle, and rushed to the tuckshop to buy anything I could find to eat. The old and hideous studio apartment that my family of five lived in at the time was in an extremely dangerous area; the security would lock the main apartment door by 7pm. To open it, you needed to have someone on the inside turn the door knob. I arrived back after 7pm and the apartment was locked. After wandering around for some time, a lady of the night walked me to the nearest police station. The police did not know how to help a seven-year-old child who could not speak any language they could understand, so they sent me to an orphanage while they investigated the whereabouts of my parents.

At the orphanage, the children would speak to me, and every time I responded in my mother tongue, they would either slap or kick me, and when I did not respond, they would shout or shake me by holding my shoulders, and violently twisting my body around. It became a game for them. The pain I encountered from this experience has become a lifelong partner that is easily triggered by a sense of rejection. The caregiver removed me from the main house to my own room; she brought all my food and drinks to the room. I was not allowed to leave the room, so other children could no longer hit me. I was isolated from my 'friends' rather than becoming integrated. In retrospect, I can affirm that I was ill-treated by the other children because I was different, and my difference was not accepted. I was bullied and physically abused by my own peers for being different, or rather for speaking a language they were not familiar with. I made a mental note: "If you speak a language people do not understand, they will not accept you." This was the first of many mental notes I had to create in order to cope with being different.

After a little over a month at the orphanage, news of my absence had spread rapidly, prompting police intervention. They located and arrested my mother on charges of child neglect. After the court proceedings, I was returned to my parents' custody, closely monitored by social workers and a psychologist to assist with the trauma both my family and I had encountered during my absence.

4.2.3 Primary school

By the time I turned seven years old, I was attending a South African primary school and corporal punishment was still practiced in schools. Whenever learners were disruptive during assembly time, the school principal would walk up to the noisiest classroom line and beat each learner in that classroom line twice on the learner's legs with a wooden stick. This was terribly painful, and I remember thinking and questioning, "Why is the entire staff watching him while

he harms us?” I resented the school principal for the beating, but I resented the teachers who watched the principal hit us even more. I started to understand that children had less power in the world, and all I wanted to do was become a grown-up who could be the voice that spoke on behalf of the learners. Hence, the desire to advocate for the amplification of children’s voices was born.

From as early as Grade 2, I have always viewed teachers as people who have great influence in the world. “Listen to your teachers,” my parents would say to me as they watched me step onto the school bus almost every day. I quickly gathered that the relationship I had with my teachers was important to my parents. My parents had made it very clear that if I received a hiding at school for misbehaviour, they would double the hiding when I arrived home. This evoked a strong desire to impress my teachers and have them give my parents positive feedback. Looking back now, all my schoolteachers have played a role in the person I am today. Some teachers have influenced me positively, and some negatively.

As a child, I would arrive home and proceed to imitate corporal punishment by hitting the furniture at home, imagining that the furniture I was hitting to be children who were badly behaved, and I was the teacher who was punishing these children. It took me years to unlearn that punishment should not involve physical harm. Even though corporal punishment was a negative trait, I learned some of the greatest lessons I know today from the school system. I learned from my schoolteachers; they truly shaped my mind. My favourite primary school teacher’s words (“You can be anything you want in this world, if you truly believe it, and, if you put your mind to it, it will happen”) still echo in my mind today. In retrospect, I realise that I was about to embark on my young adult journey through motivational words such as those quoted above. Some of my teachers had given me all the tools I needed for the emancipation of my own life.

4.2.4 High school

My dream of teaching continued to follow me all the way to high school. I had become more critical and mature in my thinking. I analysed a lot of what my teachers would do with the intention of becoming a better teacher myself. In my childlike mind, classroom management should have been easy. I failed to understand why some of my teachers struggled with classroom management during core teaching and learning hours. I despised teachers who complained about the schooling system and how it had failed us, the learners, at the time.

Moreover, in my mind, teachers had all the power to do anything, because they were the bosses of their classrooms.

After high school, I applied to study teaching as a first choice at several universities across South Africa, and so my journey towards becoming a teacher continued.

4.3 Teaching practice at university

4.3.1 Second-year teaching practice

During my second-year teaching practice, I found the closest school to me for my own convenience. It was a girls' high-performing Model C school. (It was a semi-private establishment that had previously been a whites-only school during apartheid.) The school was still predominately white, with ninety percent of learners being white with only one black teacher on the staff. The profile at the school was, therefore, not diverse. I substantiate the latter statement, because there were classrooms with only white learners; and, because the school was a high-performing school, the school policy only accepted learners who had achieved good academic results. Accepting learners with high grades meant that most learners had the same or a similar learning pace, so there was minimum intellectual diversity. I noted that race diversity is not the only diversity that exists; other forms of diversity such as gender, culture and religious diversity were also still limited at the school. For example, linguistic, socio-economic, and ethnic aspects contributed to the school's demographic profile. Hence, as I had an expectation of multiple diversity, I maintain that the diversity spectrum was narrow relative to other public schools that I was later exposed to during the rest of my teacher training practice as well as the teaching posts I later accepted in South Africa.

The school was situated in an upper-class Christian community, and most learners who attended this school were from the community in close proximity to the school and did not appear to have financial constraints. With the strict discipline policy, learners were respectful and polite. I did not witness any major behavioural challenges while at the school. There were very subtle incidents, but nothing that really stood out. In addition, the school had a strict no bullying policy (learners could be expelled from school for bullying, body-shaming or aggressively teasing other learners). There were several learners who were openly lesbian or bisexual, and this was accepted by teachers and learners.

Creating a safe space can encourage people from various backgrounds to debate an issue from different perspectives, and in the process learn about their own uniqueness. Therefore, this form of expression, engagement and learning can be challenged when a classroom displays the same racial, ethnic or cultural group of learners or when school staff comprise same-race teachers, especially in a country like South Africa that is very diverse. On the same note, Mdepa and Tshiwula (2012) maintain that a diverse student body is usually considered to be one in which several different cultures are represented and practiced. In a country like South Africa, where twelve official languages are spoken, how to harness student diversity in the context of access, participation and social cohesion is crucial. Hence, the feeling of isolation or non-inclusion by black learners who attend dominantly white schools can limit black learners' potential to participate in the education setting adequately.

Being the only black pre-service teacher and sometimes the only black person in the staffroom caused me some degree of anxiety. I was disappointed that some teachers treated me differently as a result of my skin colour. Up until this point, I had been naive enough to believe that only children could be bullies towards one another. I had not imagined that bullies would exist even in a work environment as an adult. Growing up, I had attended a primary school and later a high school that had mixed-race learners and teachers. By the term 'mixed race', I mean that there were different races, for example, we had Indians, blacks and so-called coloureds present in both the primary and high schools I attended as a child. Therefore, being the only black person in a room of only white staff members was new to me; it felt unnatural and strange. I sensed that most teachers were not open to having conversations with me compared with the other pre-service teachers who were white. Every morning I would sit alone during briefings while other pre-service teachers (all white) had experienced teachers walk up to them and start small talk. The racism was not blatant, but so subtle that it would have seemed outrageous had I complained; it was simply not the usual obvious aggressive form of racism. "Forms of racism expresses *[sic]* its specific logic, traditional racism in rural settings and a more 'sophisticated' colour-blind racism or tokenism in urban institutions" (Leonardo & Hunter, 2007, p. 783).

During my time at the above school, learners of "colour" had walked up to me and expressed how grateful and excited they were to see another teacher whom they could relate to. I began to form a connection with learners because the learners also complained that there were teachers who could not relate to, or understand them, thus underscoring the struggle that learners of "colour" faced in terms of expressing their difficulties.

I had an incident where a teacher (Mr. J) asked me to leave his classroom, because he did not feel prepared to have an observer for the day. When I reported this to my teaching practice mentor, she explained that she had received previous complaints from Mr. J's black learners who had reported that they felt they were treated differently from the white learners and perhaps that could have been the reason why he was not ready to host a black pre-service teacher on that occasion. On the same day that Mr. J had refused to welcome me in his class, he had another white pre-service teacher from a different university observe his classes. This was my introduction to how some schools and teachers handle racial diversity. I understood that discrimination still existed in South Africa. However, no teaching content had prepared me for the above form of discrimination. Because racism allegations can quickly become fraught in a country like South Africa, the school had seemingly taken a 'sweep it under the rug' approach. No one wanted to discuss openly that there appeared to be a racist teacher at the school. In my understanding, learners at the school had complained about racism, yet the school had failed to address the allegations. In reflections further in this thesis, I discuss how this experience contributed to how I managed racial diversity (learner diversity as well as staffroom diversity) as a newly qualified teacher.

Chester Pierce (1974) suggested that racism is not always blatant and obscene, but also subtle and cumulative. Pierce's definition of racism is crucial to the diversity competency of a teacher. Not only should a teacher be able to address blatant racism, but also the subtle forms of racism. It is the subtle forms of racism that undermine confidence (Pierce, 1995). Low confidence has resulted in my own mismanagement of racist situations, because I was not sure if subtle racism constitutes racism. The low confidence in addressing racism can be traced to my second-year teaching practice and how the above school handled 'subtle racism'. In addition, I was unable to validate the feelings of the learners of colour who had approached me to share their experiences. I failed to encourage, or to guide or reassure them.

After the Mr. J incident that my mentor teacher had failed to escalate or encourage me to file a complaint about, I became nervous about subtle racism and unskilled in assisting previously marginalised learners who later complained about racial microaggressions, a disregard that stemmed from unconscious attitudes of white superiority which are seldom investigated (Solórzano et al. 2000). Solórzano et al. (2000) maintain that the way to address microaggressions would be to report the case. Prior to my second-year teaching practice, the pre-service teacher curriculum had focused on neither the reporting procedures for such aggression nor the escalation process. A lack of support in this sense created self-doubt and constant self-

questioning, a reaction that Solórzano et al. (2000) find common among other victims of subtle racism.

In addition to the subtle racism that exists in some schools, this is what I also learned in terms of diversity as a result of choosing the above school: First, South African schools do not only consist of local learners but also include international learners. These could be learners from other countries in Africa as well as learners from different continents, such as Asia and Europe. This was a new experience for me. When I was in high school, my entire class comprised local learners only, whereas the classes I observed in second year had mostly learners from international or other African countries. It seemed to me that the range of diversity had widened beyond my own experience and exposure as a primary and high school learner.

Secondly, part of accommodating the non-South African learners required understanding that their perspective and realities were different from those of South Africans. History lessons were, for instance, not as enthusiastic and vivid as I had experienced them when I was in high school. My history teacher was always precise and unapologetic about his statements; he always spoke freely and allowed as much dialogue in his classes as he could encourage. There was no wrong or overly sensitive history topic. During my initial teaching practice observation, my mentor teacher had explained that history was taught with empathy in mind because of the number of white learners in the school. I realised that the history teacher avoided constantly painting white people in a negative way where history was concerned. There were several terms that were to be avoided; for example, instead of saying that “the white police brutally murdered learners during the Soweto uprising,” he or she had to say, “the police brutally murdered learners in the Soweto uprising”, thus removing the word ‘white’, and so race, from the sentence. I initially viewed the above technique as problematic, because I had always believed the whole apartheid history of South Africa to have been based on race and white supremacy. The history teacher had also explained that she had to teach as if the learners’ parents were in the classroom, and that she had received messages from parents in the past, messages that requested that she had to be more aware of sensitive learners in the classroom during history lessons. I had never considered the fact that teaching history could require so much sensitivity; it was certainly a new lesson for me.

Finally, schools in affluent areas also face learner attendance challenges. My second-year teaching practice observation was just after the mid-year June holidays, and there were multiple learners who had not returned to school because they were travelling, and their flights to South

Africa had either been delayed or the learners were not yet back in the country. Learner absenteeism was particularly surprising to me, because I had always associated problematic attendance with learners who came from financially challenged homes.

4.3.2 Teaching practice in my third year

It was thrilling to be in third year. I had to pick a primary school within a 50km radius of the university. It was an exciting teaching practice for me, because I would be allowed to teach. I would also be graded based on my teaching techniques and learner engagement. Teaching practice in third year focused on the teaching profession and professionalism.

The diversity landscape of the primary school I chose for my third-year teaching practice was slightly richer than the all-girls school I had selected for my second-year teaching practice. There was a wide range of racial diversity. The school had white, Indian, coloured, black, and Chinese learners. It was a Model C mixed-gender school. In contrast to my earlier teaching observation experience, the learners' learning abilities varied from slow to fast-paced learners. The learners came from different socio-economic backgrounds and spoke diverse languages. For instance, there were learners who spoke isiZulu, isiXhosa and Sepedi. Hence, there was a rich ethnic diversity as well. Even though the school was situated in a suburb, it was also located close to a township. Therefore, the school had learners who were from lower-income to middle-income homes. The mentor teacher assigned to me was excellent in ensuring that all learners were treated equally and received the same amount of attention from him. He was sensitive to the reality that not all learners in his class were from the same financial background. For group assessments he would strategically place learners with no resources (stationery) in groups with learners who had resources, and he would inform the groups that stationery was meant to be used as a group and not individually, and that marks would be awarded based on how well they worked in a group and how well they had shared resources. I found this to be an impressive way of not allowing learners without resources to be anxious about the lack of resources, and of preventing incomplete assessment tasks because of a lack of resources. He would also keep a supply of classroom stationery for learners who did not have any stationery.

I did however notice some discomfort among Muslim learners when my mentor teacher would read a Bible verse every morning to his learners. This was a morning routine that he had adopted in his classroom. I deduced that the discomfort may have been because he had Muslim learners in his class, and the school was not an official Christian school. I recall wondering if

perhaps a motivational quotation from the Bible as well as from the Qur'an would have been a better fit.

It was particularly interesting to see how my mentor teacher would encourage learners to speak in their mother tongue. His classroom had a rich linguistic diversity, with Afrikaans learners enjoying their conversations in their native language and other African learners code switching among the different languages. As a result of the rich language diversity, an Afrikaans learner would laugh at isiXhosa jokes, and the classroom would repeat Mandarin words that they had learned from the single Chinese learner in the class. Thus, even the single most minority language in the classroom had somehow influenced classroom conversations. The experience of how learners responded to one another in different languages and how my mentor teacher engaged with their different languages in his classroom was the most significant experience of diversity that I encountered during teaching practice. Furthermore, it is important to note that my mentor teacher was not fluent in other African languages, as he was from an Afrikaans background, yet he had learned and understood certain words in some South African languages (isiZulu & isiXhosa) and would frequently use them while code switching.

Kassim et al. (2013) describe teacher educators as all those who actively facilitate the formal learning of pre-service teachers and teachers, both tertiary pre-service teacher educators and teaching practice programme mentors. Fundamental research is needed on teacher educators as a heterogeneous group. Mutemeri and Chetty (2011) found that most studies on teacher educators have often solely focused on institution-based teacher educators, while Lunenberg et al. (2014) note that mentor teachers also play a crucial role in pre-service teachers' development. The latter is crucial, because a mentor who lacks situational skills such as the previous teacher who read the Bible to s while having Muslim learners in his class can contribute to the pre-service teacher's diversity competency.

4.3.3 Fourth/final-year teaching practice

My final-year teaching practice was at a school of excellence (high performing in academics and sports). It was a mixed-gender and mixed-race secondary school. The school had a history of producing some of the top matriculation/school-leaving results in the Western province. The learners at the school were extremely competitive and engaged well in their academic work. The school had mostly black and coloured (mixed-race) learners. Yet, the teachers at the school were all coloured teachers. I highlight the fact that the entire staff was coloured, because I

recall noticing that the 50–55 percent of black learners at the school were not well represented in terms of having teachers who reflected their own form of diversity. English was the medium of instruction, yet all announcements were conducted in Afrikaans, because the entire school staff were Afrikaans home language speakers. While conducting classroom lessons, I noticed that there were a fair number of black learners who spoke Afrikaans fluently, but there were also learners who barely understood Afrikaans. The linguistic landscape at the school was rich, but the school generally promoted Afrikaans. Although the school was situated in an Afrikaans community, there were several isiXhosa-speaking learners who travelled from different communities to attend that school because of the school's reputation.

The school also had foreign learners (mainly from other African countries like the Congo, Burundi, Malawi and Zimbabwe). During my time at the school, I never heard foreign learners speak to each other in their home languages. I recall an experienced teacher politely saying to a foreign-sounding learner, "Your accent sounds French," and asking, "Where are you from?" The learner had replied, "*Juffrou* (Miss), I am from Johannesburg." The class quickly protested, saying, "No, Miss, he's lying; he is from Congo, he ran away from his country." Some learners in the classroom proceeded to laugh in a stifled way. The foreign learner's body language indicated that he was indeed uncomfortable with people knowing that he was not South African. The teacher quickly moved on to the next topic. I wondered whether the teacher had hastily changed the subject because she did not want the learners to keep teasing the foreign learner or because she genuinely wanted to avoid having to tell the learners to be kinder to each other regardless of their backgrounds. The overall environment in the class I had been assigned for my teaching practice was one where learners consistently picked on each other because of their varied diversity. It was disappointing that I did not witness teachers address this during my time at the school. Being teased because one is different seemed to be the norm. I empathised with the foreign learners, especially because of my own earlier childhood experience that had scarred me for life.

Boelens et al. (2018) maintain that while various educational institutions have attempted to implement blended learning to accommodate diverse learner populations, there is still a lack of specific individual attention, and strategies on how to cater for individual needs remain scarce. I note that based on my teaching practice experience, while South African learners seem to speak their mother tongue freely in schools, this is not always the case for refugee and foreign learners.

In contrast, I witnessed incidents of social awareness and conscious caring. One of the top performing learners at the school came from a very poor home and the teachers would take turns weekly to bring the learner lunch and they would sometimes even send the learner home with groceries. Helping the learner was not part of a community or NGO initiative, but an attempt by the teachers to support the learner, to enable her to thrive and to improve her circumstances. The teachers had a very generous attitude towards learners who were from homes that had financial and socio-economic challenges. A few of the staffroom conversations among the staff included teachers arranging for the collection of items such as clothes from their homes, places of worship and communities to give to the poorer learners. This was particularly impressive, and I was encouraged and motivated to join their initiative. Witnessing teachers going beyond their call of duty to accommodate struggling learners resonated with me. As a teacher today, I have continued to imitate this behaviour and take interest in the needs of my learners. The experience of using the community to assist learners from disadvantaged backgrounds was even more educative for me because my experience at university as a pre-service teacher did not equip me to engage with my community with the intention of responding to the needs of my learners. I cannot recall any social engagement nor community participation facilitated by the teaching curriculum during my time at the university as a pre-service teacher. My fourth-year teaching practice also focused on group activities and trained me to be able to work in groups because as a teacher you are always part of an institution and cannot work in isolation. I was met with various group activities upon returning to campus from teaching practice. Although most group activities went smoothly, there is one incident that stood out for me during my fourth year. My lecturer had instructed us to create a PowerPoint presentation of a preferred lesson plan and to present the lesson as a group. I had previously always made it a mission to stick with one group for all my university group activities, because it was convenient to work in a group that was made up of my friends with whom I was familiar and comfortable, and because there seemed to be racial segregation among the groups. It was rare to see mixed-race, black and white students working in one group. People seemed to forge groups according to the same skin colour as themselves. If my classmates ended up with a different racial group, this was usually because other groups were full and not by choice.

Language diversity posed a challenge rather than an element to be celebrated among some groups. My experience of joining a non-English-speaking group was not a pleasant one. I was the odd one out of my regular group and since the requirement of group members was an even number, I had had to join a different group. There was much conflict between the group

members and myself. The group members spoke Afrikaans, and I was the only one in the group who did not understand Afrikaans. They would translate what they were saying whenever they felt it was necessary. In retrospect, the focus had always been on being able to work in a group, and I had abused the system. I had cheated because working with my friends limited my exposure to and learning process of being able to handle conflict in a group that did not hold similar beliefs and viewpoints to mine. The other group members seemed to share the opinion that a non-Afrikaans-speaking group member had little or no value to add to the assessment. Although the above was not communicated verbally, it certainly surfaced through body language and a lack of interest or non-engagement, such as nonverbal messages like ignoring my group WhatsApp messages that were aimed at contributing to the presentation, and not engaging with any of my ideas. This was particularly disappointing and difficult for me to accept. As a well above-average student, I believed I had a lot to offer and contribute towards the group assignment. Solórzano et al. (2000) found that [black] African students could feel frustrated and isolated, because their peers did not believe that they were intelligent. Therefore, black students are not approached or preferred in groups.

4.4 My experience as a newly qualified teacher

My initial experience as a newly qualified teacher was gained at two different schools, School A and School B. School A was a school of skills and School B was a combined school (the school included both primary and secondary learners). It is important to note that as a pre-service teacher, I applied for posts available at the time. I had to work differently from my chosen teaching practice selection; waiting for positions at conveniently located schools was not an option. Therefore, I was willing to work at any school within my province.

4.4.1 School A

School A accommodated diverse learners who had mild intellectual barriers to learning. My time at School A initiated my discovery about the ongoing tension between the theory I had learned at university and the practice in schools. Because School A accommodated learners whose abilities were on a differing intellectual spectrum, this meant that as a teacher I had slow learners and fast learners. The slower learners undoubtedly posed a challenge for me because, despite the institution being a school of skills, the curriculum was not flexible enough to allow me to give the slower learners enough attention. I had objectives and topics to cover by the end of each term, even though my slower learners could not keep up with the pace and clearly

required more time. Learners who were less proficient in English required much more time than learners who were first-language English speakers. The only strategy I could devise to accommodate learners who were less proficient in English as well as slower learners was to create extra-curricular support lessons after school. I introduced a one-hour after-school class for struggling learners. My university education theory had trained me to accommodate slower learners by giving them extra support. However, the school principal refused to support this idea despite clear indications that the learners needed extra support. Being at the school outside learning hours would mean that the principal had to budget to pay support staff for the extra hours and it was an expense the school could not afford. He also contended that the learners who would attend the lessons would be teased and bullied by the other learners. I felt a sense of helplessness and failure to support my slower learners. In addition, I had learners who struggled to write the alphabet. These learners were not able to physically write out certain letters correctly. For example, instead of writing 'm', the learner would write 'w'; it appeared that some learners viewed the letters of the alphabet in an upside-down manner. Learners who struggled with writing failed English as a result of a writing barrier. I did not know how to support them; teaching learners how to write had not been part of my teacher education curriculum at university, I had specialised in teaching at intermediate-school level. I remember feeling overwhelmed. As an intermediate-phase teacher, I did not know how to help a learner who could not write the basic alphabet.

Nichols (2021), Stubbs (2008) and Moriña (2017) concur that inclusive education should encourage school systems to accommodate all learners; it should be a space that enables the participation and value of each learner. For equal education to happen, teachers must be well trained to accommodate all learners. I respected all my learners. However, I did not have the skills to assist them by responding to learning barriers such as a writing barrier. By embracing all learners in the mainstream, learners with special needs become part of the mainstream, and this contributes to diversity because it adds to the variety of learners that a teacher must accommodate.

The concept of inclusive education meant that I had learners with barriers to learning in my classroom, and I admit that I sometimes failed to accommodate them, as stated in the previous sections. I was not well equipped with the knowledge of how to manage learners with autism and/or dyslexia in an educational setting. For example, I had a learner who had a learning barrier/medical disorder (aphasia). He would constantly call me by weird names, one of which was "Mrs. Volkswagen". I recall being so bothered and upset, because I kept reporting this to

the school principal and he did nothing about it. Thinking back now, I can identify that my response to the learner's behaviour was a result of my failure to understand that the learner was emotionally challenged and did not reason like I did. The frustration I had must have shown on my face, and it was not a friendly face for my learners. Moreover, the school had no induction programme for new or newly qualified teachers, and I had no teacher to mentor me.

A major facet of learner diversity that I encountered at the school was behavioural diversity. I understood how to manage a classroom and implement different behavioural management strategies. However, I was faced with learners with extreme behavioural challenges. Learners' misbehaviour is normal, and a teacher's responsibility to manage learners is also normal. However, it is not common to have a learner who ignores your instructions completely and threatens you as the teacher when you reprimand him or her. It is a situation some teachers may live a lifetime without experiencing. Hence, I argue that learners who threaten or verbally assault teachers are not just badly behaved, but rather extremely ill mannered. These were learners who evoked a sense of insecurity in me. I did not feel equipped to handle them, because anything I said would aggravate the situation. There was a learner who walked in and out of my classroom and did not acknowledge me as a figure of authority in the classroom. He would not follow any instruction from teachers unless he felt like it. Other teachers seemed to cope by just ignoring him. In this instance, I was faced not only with frustration, but also fear. This learner had threatened me in the past when I called his parents to tell them about his behaviour and request that they assist me. I felt unsafe in his presence, because he seemed not to worry about any figure of authority, including his parents and the police. The school had previously contacted the police, because he was involved in a fight on the school grounds. As a teacher who took pride in being in control of my classroom, it was unnatural for me to accept that my classroom was not completely under my management. I felt deeply anxious every time I had this learner in my classroom. I felt unprepared to manage a learner with extreme behavioural issues despite the expectation that I should be able to cope.

Hair diversity was also prominent at School A. My background had provided an advantage in understanding hair diversity. My view of African hair is that it is beautiful in any form, whether straight or as an afro. I recall being in a school meeting where teachers had complained that black girls use products to make their hair into an afro style and afros were regarded as untidy. From my experience in second-year teaching practice, race diversity was a topic I needed to stay away from, so I said nothing in response to the afro misconception. I did, however, think such criticism was unnecessarily racist and uninformed. In my view, afros are the natural state

of [black] African hair; they are beautiful and not dishevelled. My previous experience of race diversity had resulted in my failure to support the black female learners at the school and to speak up against unjust comments.

From School A, I learned that minor diversity differences are not the cause of diversity conflicts in schools but major diversity variants. For example, a learner with blond hair is unlikely to tease a learner with light brown hair about their hair colour. However, the difference in hair textures evoked a more aggressive form of racism in School A. Learners with dreadlocks were bullied and called “mop heads”, a term that can also mean unclean. After all, a mop is a cleaning tool used to clean a dirty floor. This amplified the issue of race and class in School A. An example of this is in my previous reflections of teachers calling the natural form of African hair untidy. Cleanliness and neatness were associated with straight hair. I quote a black female learner who responded to my question: “You had such beautiful natural hair (afro) without any form of chemicals to make the hair straight, why did you relax your hair”?

Ma’am, I don’t think the natural black people’s hair is beautiful. It is like we are the worst race on earth. The whiter we look the better. I get so many compliments from the teachers and my friends when my hair is straight, that is why I relaxed my hair.

I remember feeling overwhelmed by the child’s response. Where could I begin building her self-esteem. She was correct in her opinion, as a group of teachers had argued that the natural form of black hair looked messy.

On the same note, Lawrence (2016) reported the following:

Black women have some of the most varied textured hair in the world, ranging from loose curls to kinks and coils. Yet, we’re often ridiculed, and sometimes outright condemned for wearing it in its natural form. Take the recent example at Pretoria Girls’ High, an all-girls school in South Africa where black pupils held public protests over the institution’s code of conduct that implies afro textured hair is “messy,” as reported by *The Cut*. Unfortunately, it comes as no surprise that such discriminatory practices are still in place. A big part of the South African school ecosystem is steeped in whiteness. Twenty-two years after democracy, in a country that’s largely black, black girls go into these systems and are viewed as outsiders.

In accordance with the above statement reported by Lawrence (2016), it is evident that School A was not the only school to grapple with hair policies in South Africa.

Similarly, Tate and Bagguley (2018) concur that there is cultural exclusion through the banning of black girls' afros and boys' cornrows in the United States, the United Kingdom, and South Africa. Tate notes that it is troubling for schools to repudiate black bodies and perpetuate hair discrimination and racism.

The frame through which the analysis of contemporary readings of Black natural hair as 'dangerous' and negatively affective in terms of fear, disgust, contempt, and shame, is perceived as anti-Black institutional racism. Reading 'hair stories' as texts on surfacing racism illustrates the affective entanglements of an anti-Black world shown through attacks on Black natural hair's 'unruly' strands, textures, and styles. There is a normalisation of anti-Black institutional racism through rules of conduct and hair policies of schools.

All the above incidents allude to the mismanagement of hair diversity in schools. It is a form of diversity that I am privileged to understand as a result of my background. In my previous reflections, I have raised the lack of hair diversity knowledge as well as accountability towards the empowerment of learners of 'colour' to celebrate their bodies and hair. It was a misconception that I believed that all teachers understood hair diversity. I observed that there is a lack of hair diversity knowledge among some of the teachers I worked with.

4.4.2 School B

My second position as a newly qualified teacher was teaching English and creative arts at a combined school (both primary and secondary school). I was optimistic about the post and excited to engage with the learners. However, as I started working with culturally diverse learners, I quickly realised how unprepared I was in terms of understanding different norms and cultural practices of the South African ethnic groups. At university, I had studied a module that briefly introduced me to all the official languages of South Africa, but had included nothing about cultural practices and ethnic groups in South Africa. For one thing, there were learners who came to school in traditional attire; these were Xhosa boys who had returned from the mountains after initiation (a Xhosa tradition where boys become men). The boys seemed very reserved when they returned, and I was not sure whether to congratulate them or even mention anything about initiation. Most teachers in the staffroom would refer to them as the black boys that had returned from the Eastern Cape. I remember feeling uneasy about that label, first, because not all black people practice this tradition; secondly, there was a misconception and a lack of interest in understanding the Xhosa ethnic group and how significant the *ukoluka*

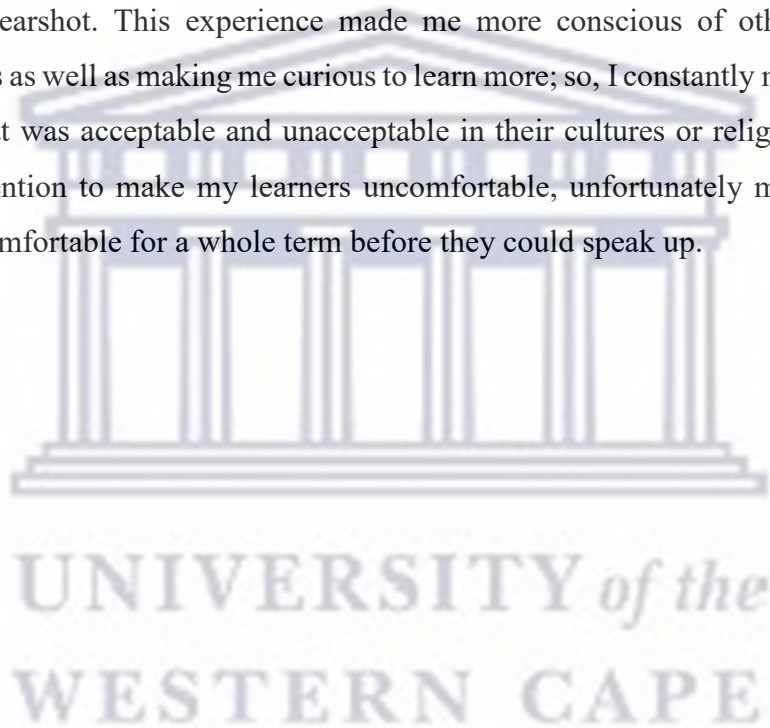
custom was for the Xhosa boys. I had learners who wore beads on their heads. I understood that the beads represented a spiritual African cultural practice; however, I was not sure what was acceptable and not acceptable to say to learners who were embarking on a spiritual journey of becoming a sangoma. There were learners who were absent for many days as a result of spiritual encounters. Because the above learners had no medical certificates, I was unable to provide opportunities for re-examination. Hence their academic results were affected negatively.

At the time I did not know enough about ethnic groups in South Africa. This was distressing for me, so I took the approach of constantly asking learners to tell me about their cultures. I wanted to get to know my learners' cultures better, because I believe that being a good teacher involves understanding my students. Some of my colleagues did not share my sentiments of enriching their knowledge of the cultural groups in South Africa. My new role as the head of discipline pushed me out of my comfort zone and forced me into knowing and understanding my learners better, especially because I had previously struggled to understand learners and how they engaged with me. For example, when a Xhosa learner was involved in a fight, I asked him to explain the sequence of events that had led to the fight. He kept looking all over the room and at the ceiling while talking to me, and never made eye contact. Initially, I had interpreted his actions as being disrespectful and having something to hide. As days passed, the more I interacted with my learners, I began to learn that in some African cultures it is an abomination to look an adult in the eye when speaking to them. Coming into teaching with some knowledge of African norms and cultures would certainly have saved me from judging my learners in this regard.

The responsibility of the educational sector in South Africa post-apartheid is to transform society by providing equality to all, but especially to those groups which were previously disadvantaged (Ebewo & Sirayi, 2018). Our school system gravitated towards Western cultures, with very little exposure to African cultures and norms, in my observation. More exposure to African cultural practices and norms could have contributed towards a more acute awareness of cultural diversity in my case, thus benefiting newly qualified teachers.

Religious diversity posed a challenge for me mostly because some learners are not as vocal as others and may not always communicate when they do not feel comfortable. In my time at School B, I worked as a PE (physical education) teacher. I had Muslim and Christian learners in my classroom. While some female Muslim learners were comfortable dancing or exercising

in front of male students, other female Muslim learners were uncomfortable with dancing or exercising with male learners watching. Later that term, I was called by my head of department (HOD) who informed me that not all female Muslim learners were comfortable exercising with male learners and that they were too shy to tell me. Thinking back, I wish I could have tried to separate male and female learners before assuming that since no one had complained, all was well. This incident made me unhappy about the teachers who had not considered that they had Muslim learners in their class before reading the Bible to their class every morning. I was slowly and unconsciously being nonchalant and ignorant towards my learners' beliefs. I could also have separated the female learners and asked them if they were all comfortable with exercising with male learners. They may have been more inclined to speak up with no male learners within earshot. This experience made me more conscious of other religious and cultural practices as well as making me curious to learn more; so, I constantly made effort to ask my learners what was acceptable and unacceptable in their cultures or religions. Although it was not my intention to make my learners uncomfortable, unfortunately my ignorance had made them uncomfortable for a whole term before they could speak up.



4.5 My perception of a diversity-competent teacher

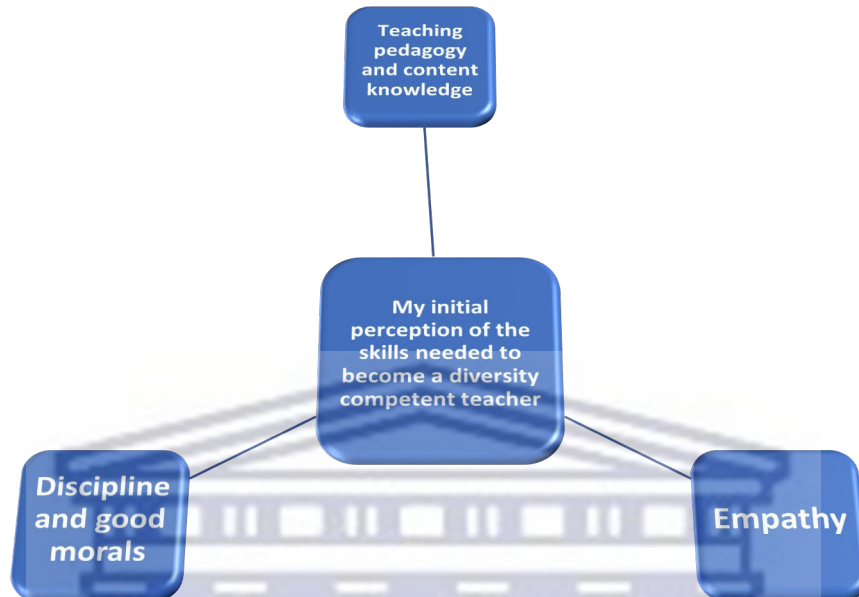


Figure 4.1: My initial perception of the skills I needed to be a diversity-competent teacher

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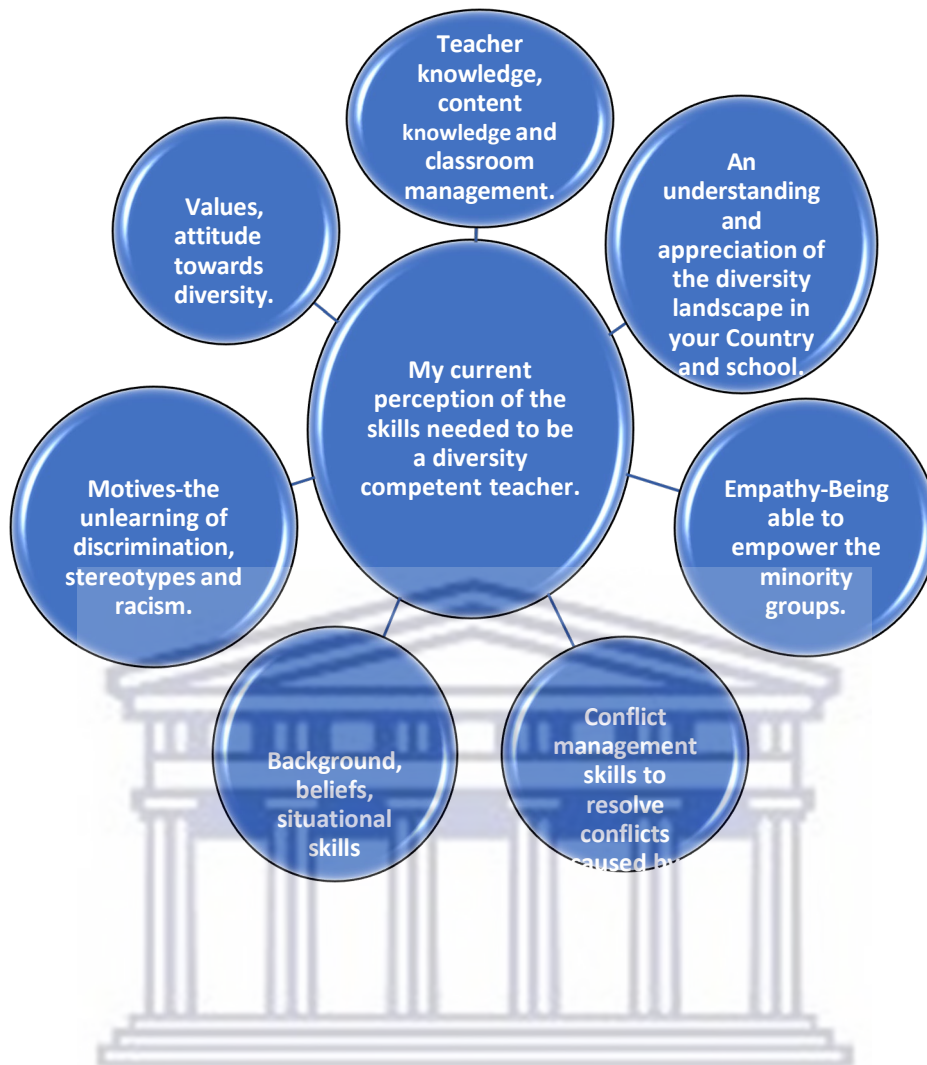


Figure 4.2: My current perception of the skills needed to be a diversity-competent teacher

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4.5.1 My initial perceptions

If someone had asked me, “What are the skills needed to be a diversity-competent teacher?”, as a newly qualified teacher I would have responded, “You need to have empathy for your learners, be disciplined with good morals, illustrate good teaching pedagogy, and have a good understanding of content knowledge,” because I believed that knowing, embracing, and accepting the diversity landscape of your learners was all a teacher needed to handle diversity.

However, as a result of my experiences of diversity as a pre-service teacher and newly qualified teacher, I have come to understand that diversity competency goes beyond my initial understanding.

4.5.2. My current perceptions

- **Values and attitudes towards diversity**

Harrison and Klein (2007) state that diversity is part of the nature of life. Naturally people are categorised in variables such as race, religion, ethnicity, eye colour, gender, social status, etc. Again, the classification in human beings is a natural process of life. Therefore, a diversity-competent teacher should possess values that reflect the naturalness of difference. Hence, a positive and natural attitude towards all learners regardless of their diverse backgrounds is important. As per my reflections, I find that my attitude towards learner diversity did not always reflect the naturalness of diversity, mainly because I lacked knowledge of certain cultural norms. I also lacked exposure to different racial groups. A good example of this was the feeling of discomfort whenever I was in a setting that did not reflect my own racial classification.

- **Teacher knowledge and classroom management**

Tulodziecki et al. (2004) agree that some of the aspects to measure general pedagogical knowledge for teachers working in diverse classrooms are the structuring of lessons, classroom management, adaptivity and assessment. I offer that based on my experience; being able to plan lessons and devise assessment tools that cater to all learners would have been an important skill. My honest experience is that I was not equipped to handle learners outside of the mainstream in this regard.

De Ketele (1996) proposes that competency should be based on human interaction, capacity of attainment, and the ability to problem solve. Therefore, when a teacher is competent to do his or her job, he or she has achieved a state of teacher competency. Where diversity is concerned, the teacher should be able to not only manage a classroom effectively but also display adaptive skills for different scenarios that are recognisable and verifiable to a particular community of teachers.

I argue that based on the above definition, my initial perception of diversity competency was not sufficient as it failed to consider many variables, including the ability to transfer skills and knowledge to new situations and environments regardless of the complexities.

Education plays a role in assisting diversity management. Leonardo and Hunter (2007) concur that transformative education allows both white and non-white students to understand one another by understanding their histories better as reflected by other groups' struggles, thus

underscoring the importance of the sophistication of being educated about other cultures in an attempt to be more open-minded and progressive.

My tolerance and accepting nature of all religious and cultural groups without judgement is a result of my high school education in the subject Life Orientation. This is a skill that was carried out even as a teacher.

- **Understanding and appreciation of the diversity landscape**

In my reflections, I refer to the observation of some of my colleagues who were not interested in learning about the learners' cultures. Banks (2015) notes the importance of a rich educational experience. I argue that pre-service teachers should be exposed to different types of schools and communities in order to better understand and appreciate diversity.

A culture that promotes the love and importance of learning about local community norms is pivotal for teachers.

- **Empathy – Being able to empower minority groups**

In the previous sections, this study noted the importance of teachers being able to respond to the needs of their learners regardless of whether the learners are the majority or minority. I found that minorities can easily be overlooked. I recall the refugee students who were unable to use their mother tongue to express themselves along with schools that overemphasise language even though all their learners do not understand the language.

The empowerment of all cultural groups in schools remains crucial for social cohesion (Burns et al., 2018). Learners from different countries who are part of the education community in South Africa need better management and empathy as per my observation that schools should be sites that provide learners with support and that afford teachers the opportunity to make positive impacts in the lives of all their learners (Reygan, 2019). Foreign learners need a sense of identity or belonging in schools. In my own experience, I had to lose my own identity to feel accepted.

- **Conflict-management skills**

According to UNESCO (2009), diversity is often a source of different tensions and complications among societies. Schools are reflections of their communities and socio-

economic tensions tend to spill into schools and classrooms. In my reflection, I mention multiple conflict incidents that took place in the schools I worked in as a result of learner diversity. An example of this is the bullying of learners. In most cases, the bully picked on a variety of differences in the victim outside of that community norm. As a child I was beaten for not speaking the same language that other children spoke in the orphanage I had been placed in. Therefore, if diversity variations tend to cause conflict among learners, then the people who manage and educate learners such as teachers should have conflict management skills in a way that supports all the learners involved in the conflict. While the education departments of South Africa may provide conflict management skills in schools, teachers are not well trained in conflict management. Nkomo et al. (2020) found that the teacher curriculum lacked conflict resolution skills – skills that empower teachers to engage without taking sides, skills that encourage children to interact with adults in a positive way. In my case, my tertiary education did not emphasise the importance of this skill, nor did I feel well equipped to manage conflict in schools. My first instinct was to call for help. Competency in conflict management among learners would have contributed towards my diversity competency.

- **Background beliefs and situational skills**

With a background of being part of the previously marginalised group, I have not been of the mindset that I am of a superior race, ethnic group, or gender. The latter mindset has shielded me from any sort of discrimination or abuse towards my learners. Therefore, my background has in some way contributed towards some competency, whereas perhaps a teacher from a different background from mine may have had to unlearn generational beliefs towards other races, ethnic and gender groups. Leonardo and Hunter (2007) state that projecting diversity classifications negatively is not a new notion in the world. This is the same society that people who become teachers are part of. In the earlier reflection I shared a story of a black student who thought black people formed the worst race in the world. It is easy for notions like this to persist in a professional environment, if unlearning and correction do not take place.

My background of being a refugee, foreigner and asylum seeker has always put me at an advantage of being accepting towards people from other countries. It has given me insight and easy empathy and understanding of this variety group. I have always taken extra precautions and shown sensitivity towards handling learners with the above background. While I may have not handled some diversity variation groups well because of a lack of knowledge and exposure, I certainly feel well equipped to respond to the diversity-competency requirements of handling

learners who come from a refugee background. I note that this competency comes as a result of experience and background.

- **Motives – the unlearning of discrimination, stereotypes and racism**

In my earlier introduction of myself, I express that I come from a non-perfect family, a family that is quick to embrace stereotypes and discriminate against other groups. Over the years I have practiced unlearning many of the stereotypes I grew up listening to. Shah (2021) claims that teachers have different beliefs and backgrounds, ranging from personal, religious, and political to educational beliefs, which are influenced by experience and may influence their job. Brown and Buthelezi (2020) state that teachers' perceptions of learner diversity classifications that are not within the norm such as same-sex sexual orientations are based on various ideologies influenced by background. Being a teacher has put me in a position to constantly self-evaluate and remain self-aware. This study has repeatedly claimed that violence, racism and discrimination remain part of the society we live in. Therefore, teachers have a formidable task to unlearn any negative stereotypes they may have been exposed to in their own lives or communities. This has been very challenging for me, but I believe that my efforts are worth it.

4.6 My diversity competency according to Blömeke's framework

Blömeke's (2017) framework suggests that competency is multi-faceted and includes analytical resources as well as motivational resources. Moreover, teacher competence cannot be measured against a single variable, but considers various aspects such as professional knowledge as well as affective motivational characteristics (background, beliefs, motives, values, and situational skills). Using the framework, I have attempted to determine what competencies in dealing with diversity I had as a newly qualified teacher, while considering the multiple aspects of competency. These are resources such as skills, beliefs, motives, values, and knowledge in respect of diversity (Blömeke, 2017).

While my background, life experience and a small part of the teaching curriculum may have contributed to some form of diversity competency, I lacked major aspects of being competent in handling diversity as a newly qualified teacher.

My knowledge of diversity did not include African practices. I was not well guided in how to better teach and assess slower learners who have learning barriers. Even though I was not racist,

I failed to assist learners who looked up to me by being bold and contributing to the school's hair policy and being more intentional and vocal about addressing subtle racism among the staff members. My background as a female black and previous asylum seeker contributed to empathy towards similar diversity classification, but I performed poorly in taking into consideration minority religious groups in my classroom. A huge part of my incompetency was a result of poor conflict management skills. Therefore, the competency I had towards handling diversity as a newly qualified teacher was limited.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has provided reflections on my experience as a pre-service teacher as well as a newly qualified teacher dealing with diversity. The chapter commences by providing reflections from my first teaching practice session during my second year of study, which was my initial introduction to how some schools and teachers handle varieties of diversity in the classroom. My experience gained at this school was an eye-opener to the realities of how diversity issues, specifically racial issues, can be swept under the rug and ignored. I then provided reflections on my experience during my second year of teaching practice. During this year, the school I was at had a broader diversity landscape, which provided for a more meaningful experience on how to deal with diversity in the classroom. Reflections from my final year of teaching practice opened my eyes further to the realities of classroom diversity and the role the teacher should play in ensuring that inclusivity is attained in a diverse classroom. Finally, the chapter outlined highlights from my experiences as a newly qualified teacher at two different schools. This experience exposed me to learning more about ethnic and behavioural diversity.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided a narrative into my journey of becoming a teacher as well as my experience of diversity both as a pre-service teacher and a newly qualified teacher. In addition, Chapter 4 discussed the diversity landscape that I encountered during my journey, interrogated the knowledge of diversity I was exposed to, and analysed my experience of diversity during teaching practice and how that experience influenced my diversity competency. The chapter also applied Sigrid Blömeke's conceptual framework (2017) of competence to provide a lens for understanding teacher competency and a newly qualified teacher's proficiency in navigating diversity.

5.2 Overview

This chapter represents the final phase of this auto-ethnographic study that aimed to answer the main research question: What is a newly qualified teacher's competency in handling diversity? In this closing chapter, the pieces of the major themes in this thesis are assembled, bridging the gap between theory and practice by triangulating a newly qualified teacher's reflections with the relevant literature. The aim is not only to offer insights into the findings of the current state of newly qualified teachers' diversity competencies, but also to illuminate the way forward for educators, policy makers and researchers concerned with fostering cohesive educational institutions by offering recommendations emanating from the findings of the study. Moreover, the limitations to the study are discussed.

5.3 Diversity

This study found that diversity represents an inherent facet of human existence. This assertion is in alignment with the perspectives of Harrison and Klein (2007) as well as Reygan and Steyn (2017), who assert that diversity essentially entails distinctions in human categorisation. Notably, in terms of variety, diversity can be regarded as a mechanism for self-identification. Hence, this research underscores the inherent normalcy of differing classifications among human beings. Nevertheless, despite the innate nature of diversity, it remains a significant catalyst for substantial global conflicts, a viewpoint corroborated by UNESCO (2009) and Arbatli et al. (2020).

The latter statement emphasises the issue that this thesis has engaged with: the competency of handling diversity, more specifically the competence of newly qualified teachers in their handling of diversity. The acceptance of the normalcy and presence of diversity steers us towards the agency to reflect, analyse and actively produce an accurate framework of diversity management. Hence, this study suggests that competency in handling diversity may contribute to the reduction of violence and conflict by fostering a cohesive community, especially a cohesive school community.

5.3.1 Violence as a result of diversity

This investigation discerns that the state of diversity, both within South African schools and on a wider scale, is characterised by challenges and complexities. One notable marker of the struggling state of diversity is the presence of internal discord, often manifesting as violence in various school communities and social environments. Regrettably, violence persists as a central concern within the South African educational context (Brown & Buthelezi, 2020). The theme of violence in relation to diversity consistently emerges throughout the reflections in this research project. I have personally witnessed instances of violence stemming from diversity-related issues during my early years as a newly qualified teacher and, in addition, carry the trauma of such violence from my childhood. Consequently, it is imperative for all educators and community leaders to possess the competence necessary for the effective handling of issues arising from diversity to reduce violence accruing from such issues. This competence is essential not only to model, teach and handle learner diversity, but also to assist school learners in embracing diversity.

Reygan and Steyn (2017) assert that there is a growing need for a more socially just and diversity-literate education, one that demands a robust analytical orientation for interrogating power, privilege, and difference. In the pursuit of a comprehensive understanding of diversity in the South African educational landscape, Reygan and Steyn highlight the field of teacher training as a critical area requiring enhanced approaches to prepare educators in addressing diversity-related issues within education, issues that may result in increased school violence and a lack of social cohesion. Hence, the need for better diversity education for teachers is indicative of the possibility that teachers may lack the necessary skills to manage learner diversity in South Africa effectively.

5.3.2 Mismanagement of diversity and social cohesion

As previously elucidated in this research project, management of diversity holds paramount significance for fostering social cohesion. Failure to embrace and manage diversity effectively can potentially yield adverse consequences, notably catalysing conflicts and undermining social cohesion. This is particularly important in educational institutions, because when teachers do not manage diversity-related violence adequately, social cohesiveness in schools may not be realised (Nkomo et al., 2020).

In the story of Elvis Nyathi, a Zimbabwean national who was burned alive in a South African township for not providing a passport, one witnesses the consequence of a lack of social cohesion. The story of Elvis is an example of how a community can become intolerant and destructive towards other groups. In the Elvis scenario, conflict as a result of diversity was not managed well and consequently manifested in murderous violence. “Conflict is [a] major social construct happening in most communities where people of divergent or different backgrounds find themselves inhabiting a common environment. Schools formulate [a] habitat with semi-seclusion from the rest of society and [the] conflict that arises needs to be managed” (Nkomo et al., 2020, p. 33). The above scenario is not just specific to communities, but also to schools. First, this is because schools reflect their communities (Nkomo et al., 2020), and secondly, because violence within school communities is constantly rising, particularly in South Africa where school violence is almost becoming a norm (Chitsamatanga & Rembe, 2020).

Nkomo et al. (2020) echo Reygan and Steyn (2017), who also contend that adults who engage with children need specialised skills and training, aspects that regrettably do not find integration within the conventional teacher teaching and learning curriculum. In a deeply personal anecdote, I have recounted an instance where a caregiver chose to isolate me for being a victim of bullying as a result of language diversity, rather than addressing the actual bullying incident.

These exemplifications collectively constitute a body of evidence, as presented in this thesis, to substantiate the contention that diversity management remains problematic within both society and the educational sphere, particularly in the context of South Africa. This study has emphasised the importance for teachers to be competent in managing diversity in order to avoid scenarios of diversity-related violence.

Inclusive education is a major contributor to understanding diversity, and therefore also needs to be foregrounded in teacher education programmes. The competency of handling diversity must include the sensitivity to and awareness of learners with learning barriers. This aspect of diversity management is crucial to creating equitable learning environments. The teaching profession is already a demanding one, and with the introduction and implementation of inclusive education globally and in South Africa, more challenges have been created for teachers (Engelbrecht, 2020). Forlin and Chambers (2011) found that a major problem facing inclusive education was that teachers who had learners with intellectual disabilities in their classrooms had concerns about being able to help their learners, largely owing to time and economic constraints. There have been many important initiatives related to equity in teacher education in countries throughout the developed world; however, educational inequality continues to be a major problem (Forlin & Chambers, 2011). It is clear that there is still a critical and crucial need for teachers to understand and be able to handle the range of diverse learning styles within their classrooms.

As with diversity management and social cohesion, “inclusive education is based on the philosophy of social justice, where education is seen as a basic right for every child, aiming to ensure that equal access to education and opportunities are given to all, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, cultural background, ethnicity and any other differences” (Pit-ten Cate et al., 2019, p. 3). Teachers play a key role in the success of inclusive education; thus, their attitudes and beliefs towards the policy are crucial (Pit-ten Cate et al., 2019). Attitudes and beliefs also contribute to the competency framework of educators, as noted by Blömeke (2017).

5.4 The current state of diversity in schools

The current state of diversity in South African schools reflects the complex tapestry of the nation's history, demographics, and ongoing challenges (Reygan & Steyn, 2017). South Africa is known for its remarkable diversity, encompassing a wide range of racial, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, socio-economic, geographical and religious backgrounds, as well as sexual orientation and many more aspects. “Schools are classified as more challenging if more than 10% of students speak a native language different from the language of instruction or more than 10% of students have special needs or more than 30% of students live in low socioeconomic environments” (OECD, 2014, p. 12). It is noteworthy that the recent statistics and findings by

the OECD indicate that diversity still poses problems in schools, a statement that this thesis has consistently upheld.

The following are some key aspects of the current state of diversity in South African schools:

5.4.1 Racial and Ethnic Diversity: South African schools serve a diverse population comprising different racial and ethnic groups, including black Africans, coloureds, Indians, and whites. Although apartheid has officially ended, the long-lasting effects are still felt where race and ethnic diversity are concerned. Some of the challenges race and ethnic diversity face are inverse racism and the lack of knowledge. Knowledge of how other races function as well as knowledge of the ethnic landscape in the country is limited. However, when empowered through knowledge, teachers and learners can assume the responsibility of challenging old oppressive ideologies of inequalities and advance a new democratic education system (Reygan & Steyn, 2017). The lack of diversity knowledge towards racial diversity is underscored by the findings in this thesis, as explained in my reflections. White teachers at school A, for example, were found not to understand the distinctiveness of black hair texture. As a result, school policies display a poor consideration of other races when drafting their hair policies. Similarly, the open discussion of a racist teacher that was avoided by my mentor teacher during my time as a student teacher endorses this claim. Teachers are models for children (Van der Wildt et al., 2017), and when racism goes unaddressed, it may send the wrong message to learners. In the South African context, failure to address racism further expands the inequality status quo. The challenges faced by South African schools in dealing with racism and inequality exacerbate and contribute to the negative impact on black African children (Reygan & Steyn, 2017).

Moletsane et al. (2004) concur that South African teachers are not competent in the comprehensive knowledge of all the ethnic groups in schools. In the study of Moletsane et al. (2004), teachers from rural schools were unable to easily identify different ethnic groups in their classrooms and regarded all black students as “just black”. Hence, their learning experience did not cater for different ethnic groups. On the same note, as stated in Chapter 4, a newly qualified teacher experienced some teachers’ apathetic attitudes towards learners’ ethnic groups at School B.

5.4.2 Language Diversity: South Africa is multilingual, with 12 official languages. Schools often use English as the medium of instruction, but many students speak their mother tongue at home. This linguistic diversity poses challenges for educators and calls for inclusive language

policies. In Rusznyak (2018), most of the participants indicated that they had witnessed sidelining of students with language difficulties. Hugo (2018) suggests that teachers are not monolithic in different forms of diversity, such as language diversity. Being a multilingual teacher can be achieved, especially when teachers are encouraged to learn new languages. As I revisit my third-year teaching practice reflection, I am enveloped by a sense of warmth. The mentor teacher assigned to me was excellent in ensuring that all learners were treated equally; he used the advantage of being multilingual to further build a connection with his learners. The classroom atmosphere embraced all the languages that learners spoke, affirming their identities and embracing language diversity. Despite positive findings such as the above, language diversity still presents major challenges in the context of South African schools (Botha & Baxen, 2018). Similar to the results of the Du Plessis and Sunde (2017) study, participants expressed dissatisfaction with the inadequate training given in preparation for having to teach subjects in vernacular languages (Botha & Baxen, 2018). Therefore, this thesis finds that despite some progress in the field of language diversity, learners' language diversity is not handled competently as some teachers still indicate unpreparedness in teaching learners from different linguistic backgrounds.

5.4.3 Cultural Diversity: South Africa's cultural diversity is rich and varied, with numerous cultural traditions, practices, and belief systems. Schools strive to incorporate cultural sensitivity into their curricula and foster cultural exchange among students. However, as noted by Moletsane et al. (2004), teachers reported that they did not consider ethnic or multicultural diversity in the classroom as they felt it had little relevance in their classrooms and schools. However, on further questioning, teachers and SGB (School Governing Body) members admitted that there were learners from diverse cultural backgrounds at the school. Moreover, the SGB of the school in the study had mentioned that sexual violence towards learners was a problem. Here, diversity within the teacher population is foregrounded and it is pertinent to highlight the finding that teachers are not monolithic in terms of cultural diversity. Hence, it is found that teachers admitted to teaching without cultural diversity awareness and they did not give it due consideration.

5.4.4 Socio-economic and Geographical Diversity: Socio-economic disparities persist, and schools can vary significantly in terms of resources and infrastructure. Schools are spread across urban, peri-urban, and rural areas. Rural schools often face greater challenges, including limited access to resources and experienced teachers. This economic diversity can affect

students' access to quality education and extracurricular activities. In South Africa, a large proportion of the country's budget is allocated to education (Du Plessis & Sunde, 2017). Yet, South African teachers encounter numerous challenges that stem from a lack of resources and parental involvement (De Jager, 2017; Reygan & Steyn, 2017). In my earlier reflections on my third-year mentor teacher, I mentioned the strategies he used in his classroom to ensure he accommodated learners who lacked resources as a result of their disadvantaged social economic backgrounds.

According to Reygan and Steyn (2017), there has been a significant change in the demographics of South Africa since 1994. However, despite the number of legislative and policy enactments to provide equal/equitable opportunities to all learners, rural schools still have poor infrastructure and limited resources. This means that teachers are expected to have the necessary skills and abilities to discern their students' different learning styles and needs, and to accommodate this learning, geographical and social economic diversity into their pedagogical decisions. This has a direct impact on the responsibility that is placed on the teacher. The importance of acknowledging individual student's learning styles and needs increases the complexity of teachers' work (Pit-ten Cate et al., 2018).

5.4.5 Religious, Faith and Sexual Orientation Diversity:

South Africa is home to various religious groups and faiths, including Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and traditional African religions, inter alia. In my experience, teachers are not particularly sensitive to the religious groups present in their classrooms. In my third year, I recalled observing a teacher who continuously read Bible verses every morning, disregarding the fact that there were other religious groups in his class. This teacher's actions seemed to make Muslim students uncomfortable.

In addition to religious diversity in South African schools, sexual diversity is also present in schools. Unfortunately, although schools are making efforts to create safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ+ students, Brown and Buthelezi (2020) found that school learners who do not observe heteronormative expressions are subjected to homophobic brutality and discrimination and are often excluded from school activities. This study therefore recommends that teachers should be competent in understanding the different types of sexuality among their learners. Yet, Brown and Buthelezi's (2020) findings are that schools in South Africa have not fully embraced sexual orientation diversity in a cohesive and inclusive way. In Chapter 4, I presented

the finding by Brown and Buthelezi (2020) that the state of sexual orientation diversity in schools is poorly handled, even by student-based support team members who do not take cognisance of the fact that learners with diverse sexual orientations need care and support, and non-responsiveness in the event of discrimination and prejudice faced by learners with diverse sexual orientations is detrimental to their learning experience. According to Brown & Buthelezi (2020, p. 472), “some educators within the school are perpetrators of homophobia and violence”.

5.4.7 Challenges and Inequalities:

Despite progress, significant challenges remain in schools as far as diversity is concerned. Historically disadvantaged areas or groups often face resource shortages, and educational outcomes can vary widely. Addressing these inequalities is an ongoing effort.

In summary, South African schools grapple with the complexities and opportunities presented by their diverse student populations. While significant progress has been made in promoting inclusion and diversity, challenges related to socio-economic disparities and historical legacies persist. This study recommends that ongoing efforts are required to ensure that South African schools truly reflect the principles of equity, inclusivity, and respect for diversity. Educational institutions and educators have a huge responsibility to reduce diversity tension by handling diversity in a competent manner. Unfortunately, while some teachers may have some diversity knowledge, they still require more competence in the handling of diversity (Brown & Buthelezi, 2020).

5.5 Newly qualified teachers’ knowledge and experience of diversity

As a newly graduated teacher, I initially harboured a sense of sanguinity pertaining to the capacity to facilitate the learning experiences of a diverse spectrum of students. However, my comprehension of learner diversity at that time was rather limited when seen in the context of the full spectrum of diverse learners I encountered during my early teaching experiences. Upon completing my teacher education, I held the belief that effectively addressing learner diversity primarily involved treating all students equally and adjusting my lesson plans to accommodate their varying learning paces and styles. I acknowledged that learners possessed different forms of intelligence, including auditory, visual, kinaesthetic, and practical aptitudes. Furthermore, my personal background had always instilled in me a sense of sensitivity towards learners from historically marginalised communities. As a result, I was relatively safe from expediting racist

behaviour. In addition, I possess a basic understanding of cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and geographical aspects of diversity within the context of South African students whom I would eventually instruct.

Nevertheless, even with this foundational knowledge of learner diversity, when compared to the comprehensive diversity-competence framework introduced by Sigrid Blömeke, which this thesis has heavily relied upon, it became evident that my level of diversity competency was insufficient to effectively manage the challenges posed by learner diversity in my classrooms. Reflecting on my experiences now, it is clear that I required more extensive training in the field of diversity in order to better address the varied needs of my students.

Marshall (2017) and Pit-ten Cate et al. (2018) indicate that newly graduated teachers are genuinely optimistic about teaching diverse learners. However, similar to my own experience, Marshall and Pit-ten Cate et al. also found that the lack of professional knowledge and competency in handling diversity continues to be a challenge for newly qualified teachers. Nkambule and Mukeredzi (2017) concur with the above finding; they maintain that the lack of diversity knowledge stems from pre-service teachers' curricula, schools, and school systems that may not foster the development of diversity competency. Marshall (2017) suggests that newly qualified teachers' preparedness to handle diversity must be an aspect that helps to form the framework of teaching and learning outcomes for teacher training institutions. Regrettably, Marshall (2017) finds that the teacher training curriculum framework does not rigorously work towards diversity competency for teacher graduates.

There is a huge gap between theory and practice within the field of diversity. The gap is indicated by the output of what newly graduated teachers expect learner diversity to reflect in their new ventures at school versus their experience of diversity in schools, alongside the intentions of government diversity policies. Engelbrecht (2020) notes that while the law in South Africa promotes human rights and diversity, there are still major improvements needed, including the enhancement of equality awareness and provision of better access to education. As it stands, knowledge and experience of diversity reflect doubts, poor diversity management skills, and lack of resources, including, but not limited to, human, technical and financial resources that are needed to successfully implement the policies.

Some of the challenges that newly qualified teachers face is: the implementation of inclusive teaching, lack of resources, lack of training, poor attitudes towards inclusivity from parents,

school management and other major educational stakeholders, an unrealisable curriculum, and the lack of collaborative and interdisciplinary orientation (Rajendran et al., 2020). All these challenges result in increased stress levels which negatively impact educators' ability to teach effectively and essentially have an impact on teacher retention rates (Hagermoser Sanetti et al., 2021). Spătărelu (2020) states that newly qualified teachers need most support in their early years of teaching, as encountering the challenges mentioned above so early in their careers may result in poor diversity management. As a result of diversity challenges, the reality for some individuals such as those in same-sex relationships or those with learning disabilities in South African society does not reflect the country's diversity legislation and policy (Phillips & Chetty, 2018).

Ajani (2021) found that the investment of continuous professional development has seen countries rise on the list of best quality education systems. Pre-service and in-service teacher professional development programmes which are structured well have the potential to help teachers develop the necessary skills required in a diverse classroom, and this can be a good foundation to address diversity competency (Ajani, 2021).

5.6 Teacher training programmes

The purpose of teaching practice is to ensure the development of knowledge about diversity, to gain professional experience, to develop the ability to produce the required results, and to develop adaptability and flexibility skills that can be used in any diverse school setting (Moosa, 2018). Nkambule and Mukeredzi (2017) sought to investigate whether or not teaching programmes were achieving their purpose. The main observation from my study is that pre-service teachers have had little to no support from their mentor teachers while doing their teaching practice, an aspect that teacher training institutions should handle by offering greater support to mentor teachers. Moosa (2018) agrees with the latter finding, and indicates that mentor programmes in South Africa are unfortunately not well structured, as there is a lack of alignment between the vision of TP programmes and the expectations of mentor teachers. Similarly, Gravett and Kroon (2023) found that pre-service teachers could not use the theoretical knowledge gained through modules to apply to contrasting situations, a challenge that mentor teachers are mostly unable to engage with in order to better educate the pre-service teacher.

This study has also recorded the lack of diversity content knowledge in the teacher training curriculum. For instance, there have been concerns over the quality of pre-service training

gained through the Postgraduate Certificate in Education programme owing to the short periods are given to develop their professional teaching knowledge and be exposed to real-life classroom teaching. I argue that perhaps teacher training institutions should consider the readiness of newly graduated teachers in handling diversity. Pit-ten Cate et al. (2018) indicate that perhaps teacher training institutions need to update and strengthen their programmes in order to produce diversity-competent teachers. Similarly, Mampane (2019) argues that when diversity is mismanaged in an educational institution, it can lead to a demographically skewed institutional profile and create unnecessary conflicts.

While this thesis has continued to highlight the point that the Constitution of South Africa promotes social justice and diversity, Nkambule and Mukeredzi (2017) and Adams et al. (2022), maintain that the goal of social justice should be democratic and participatory, respectful of human diversity, and affirming of human agency and inclusivity. Therefore, the process of reforming diversity frameworks and teacher curricula where diversity is concerned within teacher training institutions cannot become a periodically lengthy one to maintain the agency and social justice aspired to in our Constitution, more especially because research continues to indicate the mismatch of diversity management and policies promoting diversity.

Rusznayak (2018) argues that pre-service teachers seem mostly to attend schools that are within their communities or schools that they are familiar with. During my teaching practice, I chose schools that were in my comfort zone, neglecting to factor in the potential variance in cultural and demographic diversity that alternative schools might have afforded. It is important to note the above guidelines in teacher training practices because, after graduation, teachers typically choose any school that has a vacant post and it is not always the type of school that their teaching practice has exposed them to (Gravett & Jiyane, 2019). Phillips and Chetty (2018) and Pit-ten Cate et al. (2018) found that teacher training programmes need to give serious consideration to the learner diversity that teachers will be exposed to, more particularly with regard to exposure to children who come from previously marginalised communities. Botha and Baxen (2018) state that there was a lack of placement reported in rural schools, implying that teacher training institutions are not taking the importance of teachers adapting to a rural environment into account.

A significant finding in terms of gaining professional knowledge is that the teacher training process lacks adequate knowledge of diversity, especially where African cultures are concerned. In my reflections, I highlight the lack of interest in and misconceptions about

African hair and practices that I encountered as a newly qualified teacher. The latter is a result of how the teacher programmes are Westernised, and do not always consider education related to African bodies, cultures and ethnicities.

Roose et al. (2019) find a positive correlation between teachers' beliefs about diversity and their ability to interact positively with their learners, as well as a positive correlation between their beliefs about tailoring their teaching styles and their ability to do so in practice as is reiterated in this concluding chapter; this is a concept that was overlooked in my experience as a pre-service teacher. The teaching programme simply assumes that it will produce graduates that are positive towards diversity.

5.7 Factors in teacher diversity competency

This study highlights the following important factors in teacher diversity competency:

- **Violence as a result of diversity** is a complexity associated with diversity in South African schools and globally. Violence remains a persistent issue in South African education. Teachers' diversity competency can play an important role in managing diversity and reducing violence stemming from diversity-related issues.
- **The management of diversity** is crucial for fostering social cohesion, particularly within educational institutions. Failure to address diversity-related issues can lead to conflicts and may undermine social cohesion.
- **The state of diversity in South African schools** is categorised by its historical context, demographic composition, and persistent societal complexities. South Africa stands as a vivid example of diversity, encompassing a broad spectrum of racial, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, socio-economic, geographical, religious, and sexual orientation backgrounds. The study found evidence of diversity-related challenges within South African schools.
- **Newly qualified teachers' optimism** towards diverse learners is met with the realisation that their understanding of learner diversity was limited in comparison with the broad spectrum of diversity that they later encounter in their jobs. Newly qualified teachers require more support in the field of diversity to improve their diversity competency.
- **Teacher training programmes** have extensive work to do towards producing diversity-competent teacher graduates. There is a notable gap in diversity content knowledge within the teacher training curriculum as there is a strong foregrounding of

content knowledge, given the complexities with regard to academic literacy and preparedness of students for higher education studies. The other factor is the limited time students have to develop their professional teaching skills and gain exposure to real classroom teaching experiences. This study suggests that teacher training institutions should consider the preparedness of newly graduated teachers in handling the wide repertoire of diversity with regard to race, class, language, sexuality, abilities, etc.

5.8 Recommendations

This study offers the following recommendations towards enhancing newly qualified teacher competency of diversity.

- Diversity specialists and stakeholders should establish supportive diversity management frameworks, strategies and policies in order to guide teacher training intuitions in enhancing their diversity agenda.
- The encouragement of cultural exchange programmes, dialogue, and educational initiatives could help in promoting understanding and respect among diverse groups. It is crucial for future teachers to gain relevant experience with regard to diversity.
- Community leaders and school staff members need diversity management training to support learners to gain social cohesiveness skills.
- Teacher education institutions and the provincial education departments should facilitate teacher development workshops and seminars on new knowledge on diversity. This will assist teachers with strategies to handle diversity in schools. Pre-service will also benefit from the knowledge and skills of mentor teachers during their practice teaching. Thus, experienced teachers would be good role models for pre-service teachers where diversity is concerned.
- Diversity competency should be a cross-cutting skill across all modules in teacher education programmes. This is critical, given the many issues that we experience in South African schools, particularly the intersectionality of race, class, gender and socio-economic background.
- Teacher training institutions should redesign their teacher training practice to include requirements that expose pre-service teachers to different schools, especially schools in poor communities. Where pre-service teachers are unable to attend diverse schools as a

result of logistical constraints, institutions could consider providing community engagement opportunities for pre-service teachers to gain rich exposure to different varieties of diversity, for example, working with differently abled children.

- Teacher training institutions must carefully select and train mentor teachers, and with the assistance of school principals, show greater commitment towards the education and development of pre-service teachers. Mentors should be provided with explicit instructions on their roles and responsibilities towards their mentees.
- Where motives are concerned, the criteria for studying teaching should be based on a calling or strong passion and desire to be in the field, rather than a way to make ends meet.
- Pre-service teachers should be encouraged to report and discuss any form of aggression they may encounter both on campus and during teaching practice. Newly qualified teachers should be provided with training in the diversity landscape of the specific school where they are appointed to teach for the first time.

5.9 Gaps and limitations of the study

Despite the fact that this study has included an account of a single teacher's experience with diversity and an assessment of the relevant literature, it did not critically evaluate the teacher education curriculum with regard to diversity. Furthermore, there are gaps in the knowledge of the extent to which teacher educators influence, engage with, and assist pre-service teachers in handling learner diversity or whether teacher educators are competent in terms of knowledge about the various forms of diversity. Hence, there is a limitation in this study on ways to fully understand how diversity-competent teachers can be trained.

5.10 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the critical gap in teacher competency regarding the management of learner diversity, particularly among newly qualified teachers in the South African context. Despite the global emphasis on diversity in education, the study reveals that current teacher training programmes inadequately prepare newly qualified teachers to effectively handle the challenges associated with diversity in real-world classrooms. The findings underscore the need for a comprehensive review and enhancement of teacher training curricula and practice programmes to ensure that pre-service teachers receive sufficient knowledge, experience, and exposure to diverse learner profiles. This research contributes valuable insights for teacher

training institutions, education policymakers, teachers, and academics, offering a foundation for addressing the deficiencies in preparing educators for the diverse educational landscapes they will encounter.



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ANNEXURE – ETHICS LETTER (UWC)



UNIVERSITY of the
WESTERN CAPE



15 October 2021

Ms A Rukondo
Language Education
Faculty of Education

HSSREC Reference Number: HS21/8/13
Project Title: A newly qualified teacher's competency in addressing diversity: An autoethnography
Approval Period: 14 October 2021 – 14 October 2024

I hereby certify that the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Western Cape approved the methodology, and amendments to the ethics of the above mentioned research project.

Any amendments, extension or other modifications to the protocol must be submitted to the Ethics Committee for approval.

Please remember to submit a progress report by 30 November each year for the duration of the project.

For permission to conduct research using student and/or staff data or to distribute research surveys/questionnaires please apply via:

<https://sites.google.com/uwc.ac.za/permissionresearch/home>

The permission letter must then be submitted to HSSREC for record keeping purposes.

The Committee must be informed of any serious adverse events and/or termination of the study.

*Ms Patricia Josias
Research Ethics Committee Officer
University of the Western Cape*

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FROM HOPE TO ACTION THROUGH KNOWLEDGE.