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Exploring Threats to Novice Teachers' Development in Selected Secondary Schools in South Africa

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Abstract. Newly appointed teachers in the profession encounter challenges that impact their professional development possibilities and potential. The first five years in the teaching profession are delicate and fragile. This is the era where growth and development are gathered through classroom practices. This article seeks to explore any potential threats to these teachers' development prospects. This can be incomplete without perusing related literature and teacher development theories. This study is qualitative and interpretive in nature and involved 23 participants who were novice teachers, school management team members and school principals. The theories of teacher change and social learning theory were used as the theoretical framework. Teacher change theory argues that change can happen when teachers come across valuable experiences and knowledge in the course of life. Empirical evidence was authenticated through interviews from purposively selected schools in the Mopani district in South Africa. This paper was authored to help education authorities, teacher unions, and school management hierarchies with relevant teacher development practices that can mitigate threats to novice teacher development. One compelling finding was that most of the difficulties accompanying novice teachers' development were beyond the novice teachers' control while in certain instances; teachers' attitudes need to improve. The participants affirmed the need to introduce school-based development programmes that are unique to individuals. The need to regularly monitor and support schools cannot be over-emphasised. The study recommended that the Circuits and the Districts need to take control of their responsibilities for novice teacher development programmes. They should ensure that all programmes are regularly monitored, and schools are allowed to introduce programmes that address their unique professional development needs. Recommendations for future research on the subject are made.

Keywords: novice teacher; induction; mentoring, management, NTD threats

1. Introduction

The crux of this article is to share frustrations, challenges, and threats experienced by the education authorities in carrying out teacher development mandates within the broader South African society and the global world. After acquiring teachers' qualification at a teachers' college or university, many still lag behind in upskilling themselves to face the 'practical' or 'real' teaching and learning environment. According to Akcan (2016), teacher development programmes entail activities initiated by both the government and non-governmental organisations with the aim of enhancing subject teachers' skills in critical subjects like Mathematics and Sciences. Reviews on teacher development by the likes of Timperley (2011), Little (2012), and Postholm (2018) suggest that effective teacher development strategies can lead to successful whole-school improvement. However, these authors underplay the factors that pose as threats to novice teacher development as well as the challenges outside the school milieu. According to Buthelezi (2021), teachers' professional and personal well-being is important for teaching and learning. Unfortunately, many teachers have resigned or absented themselves as a consequence of finding it difficult to teach disruptive students in their classrooms without adequate skill and support.

Most teacher training programmes give beginner teachers theoretical knowledge they must implement in real-world settings. Teachers appear to struggle with this shift, making it challenging for students to put their knowledge into practice. They find it hard to deal with the real-world practicality of teaching (Buthelezi, 2021). Successful and effective novice teacher development strategies (which include mentoring) are dependent on the nature of the relationship between the mentor and the mentee(s). Upon entry into the profession, orientation to their work environment is also fundamentally important.

2. Literature review

Defining novice teacher development (NTD) has been seen to be a challenging exercise. According to Makoa and Segalo (2021), who affirmed Head and Taylor's (1997) suggestions, putting NTD into context could be used to identify features that characterise it. The researchers argue that NTD should encompass the development of novice teachers in their totality where aspects like knowledge, attitudes and professional practices are paramount. The aforementioned aspects should be addressed in such a way that novices are encouraged to become critical thinkers and lifelong learners in line with the Gestalt theory of development. Head and Taylor (1997) consolidated Rossner's (1992) work by highlighting four critical features namely:

- Addressing the range of individual teacher's needs and wants.
- Evaluating teachers' expectations, strengths, needs, and any potential threats.
- Addressing language teachers' information, communication and technology (ICT), cultural, self-esteem, and mediation skills.

- Adopting a bottom-up approach in dealing with teachers' needs where individual teachers take an active role in identifying and tackling their developmental needs.

However, it is critical to indicate that novice teacher development can take a variety of forms. It can be school or government-initiated as expressed in Mancosa (2017).

2.1 Teacher Development Strategies

Mentoring is viewed as the most effective method of developing teachers in line with the proposals of the National Teacher Development Policy Framework (NTDPF). According to the Department of Education (DoE, 2008), mentoring is "the process by which knowledge, skills and selected experiences are transmitted to another employee in the organisation for purpose of growing that employee for greater efficiency and effectiveness" (p. 13). Although mentoring is often preferred by most principals as the ideal NTD strategy, only 22 percent of novice teachers have an assigned mentor, on average, according to the Organisation for Economic Development and Cooperation (OECD) Teaching and Learning International Survey (Watson, 2013).

Coaching could be coupled with mentoring when experienced teachers identify weaknesses in the new teachers and provide impromptu advice albeit in a formal setting. In addition, the NTDPF emphasises that teacher development should be carried out in two complementary phases: the early teaching phase and continuous professional development (Department of Education, 2008).

2.2 Related teacher development theories

Purpose-driven development initiatives are paramount in addressing teachers' needs and challenges. Among relevant development theories are the theory of teacher change (Guskey, 2002; Watson, 2013) and the social learning theory (Bandura, 1969).

2.2.1 Theory of teacher change

Guskey's (2002) theory of teacher change mentions that teachers transform not only by conforming to a particular set of beliefs or course of action, but change can happen when teachers come across valuable experiences and knowledge in the course of life. For example, when a certain development activity is initiated, this can lead to a change in teaching and learning practices. Ultimately, the learning outcomes are affected and so are teachers' beliefs and attitudes.

2.2.2 Social learning theory

Senom, Zakaria and Shah (2013) relying on Bandura's (1969) social learning theory, indicate the importance of addressing teacher development initiatives in line with both social and environmental factors. Their findings were anchored on the premise that teachers' knowledge, their social, contextual, and self-efficacy factors contribute to their development. In the process of acquiring new and

relevant teaching skills, novice teachers can sometimes be affected by social and other related factors. Taking these factors into consideration can be pivotal in ensuring effective teaching and learning.

2.2.3 Significance of the study

Novice teacher development is an emergent concern and it has gradually been threatened by a number of factors. It has become evident when new teachers are employed, NTD affects their professional duties on a daily basis. Research by Mweli (2021) was undertaken to evaluate the system and to identify and address teacher development needs in numeracy/ mathematics and literacy/English first additional language for all phases. Mweli (2021) highlighted subject-based and issue-based Professional Learning Communities NTD programmes in schools in South Africa as threats challenging current NTD programmes. The current study evaluates the complexity of these threats in schools located in the Sekgosese East Circuit in Limpopo Province with the aim of understanding them in detail and making suggestions that may assist in minimising the danger accompanying these threats. Among other things, Mweli (2021) mentioned weakened teacher knowledge and practice standards, compromised Foundation-Phase teacher provisioning and questionable capacity of teacher education institutions in developing new teachers.

2.3 Conceptualisation

2.3.1. Novice teacher as a concept

Novice teacher development has also been called continuous teacher development and staff development (De Wit; 2016; Naidoo & Naidoo, 2018). According to Naidoo and Naidoo (2018), NTD involves the use of professionalisation as a way of assisting newly appointed teachers to manage the anxieties of the profession. Measures in this regard involve developing, influencing and motivating these new teachers to prepare for ever-advancing technological demands involved in the profession. According to the 2019 Teaching and Learning International Survey report which covers 37 countries across the world, the entire teacher population consists of 19 percent novice teachers. Their existence is more prevalent in schools where socio-economic factors are unfavourable – the percentage there is 22 percent. The OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey as an international, large-scale survey on teachers and school environment, further highlighted teachers' poor self-confidence levels which can weigh heavily on the teaching and learning programmes in schools. Teachers need to be skilled at multitasking as they respond to many different learners' needs all simultaneously. They operate in diverse and dynamic teaching environments.

Literally, the term “threat” the possibility that something unwanted will happen’ (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022). In some instances, threat may seem to be synonymous with “hazard”, which refers to something dreadful, thus having the potential to inflict or pose danger (Oxford English Dictionary, 2016).

2.3.2. Novice teachers' support

Garcia and Weiss (2019) emphasise the growing need to support novice teachers on a continuous basis in the United States of America (USA). They further argue that NTD should occupy an essential position in any school development plan. Novice teachers who experienced effective support are likely to exhibit higher job contentment and high morale. In addition, their self-esteem and enhanced instructional performances will surface (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

2.3.3 NTD strategies

According to Naidoo and Naidoo (2018), much emphasis has been placed on strategies like mentoring, induction, action research and team teaching, among others, with little attention to possible remedies to the threats. According to Tsotetsi (2013), there are threats to both programme formulation and implementation. Central to the success of NTD is the planning phase. Effective strategic planning meetings involving principals, school management team (SMT) members and teachers at school should be held with the support of departmental officials. Support granted to all teachers and the schools at large also play important roles, leading to teacher collaboration. Arnett-Hartwick and Cannon (2019) found that there were issues related to classroom management challenges, insufficient resources and lack of administrative support that threaten existing NTD programmes.

Watson (2013) claims that novice teachers are introduced into the profession without effective pre-service training. When generic teacher development programmes are run to address some gaps, new teachers are left out of the equation; hence, the concept of the "deficit approach". The deficit approach means that new teachers engage in teaching and learning activities without sufficient support. Their work environment is left compromised as a result. Therefore, it remains critical to mention that schools should be granted the opportunity to initiate programmes that complement departmental initiatives.

Novice teacher development that aims only at teachers' behavioural and intellectual wellbeing can have serious detrimental effects if their attitudinal and emotional enhancement is ignored (Watson, 2013). It is probably the most frustrating gap in NTD principles which school principals will have to be aware of on a daily basis in order to achieve their schools' developmental goals (Mancosa, 2017). Goodwin (2012) and Watson (2013) suggested that another deficiency of NTD is the top-down system used during planning and implementation phases. Teachers' inputs are often ignored. This affects teachers' overall morale.

2.4 Summary of the literature

From the aforementioned, it is obvious, therefore, that NTD programmes are threatened by factors that involve factors at schools, Department of Basic Education (DBE) and teachers (Goodwin, 2012; Ingersoll & Strong 2011; Mancosa,

2017; Tsotetsi 2013; Watson 2013). This should not be viewed as a system collapse but a wake-up call. It is on this basis that NTD programmes should be varied and unique to address individual schools' needs. Programmes should be on-going and monitored regularly.

3. Research Design and Methods

The study was carried out in Sekgosesse East Circuit, a circuit situated about 120 km north-east of Polokwane in Limpopo Province, South Africa.

A qualitative approach was used in this research project to explore participants' experiences regarding novice teachers' workplace challenges. No written reports or recorded observations were provided as in case studies. Only transcribed interviews constituted the data (Maree et al., 2017). The advantage of qualitative research revolves around its capacity to deliver complex textual accounts of how individuals view a particular research phenomenon. The participants' viewpoints are expressed fully. Conflicting individual beliefs, feelings emotions and relationships are revealed (Neumann, 2000).

This qualitative study was undertaken with 23 participants in seven semi-structured focus group discussion sessions, with nine novice teachers and nine SMT members separately. Five school principals' interviews were conducted on a one-on-one basis. In this research, a sample of the population was selected for the study. The research objectives and the characteristics of the study population (such as size and diversity) determined which participants that were selected and how many. The sampling method in this research was purposive sampling. From five schools, nine novice teachers, nine SMT members and five school principals were chosen and interviewed. The principals, SMT members and novice teachers from the sampled schools were purposefully chosen to provide insightful viewpoints on the NTD programmes. The participants were men and women from three primary and two secondary schools in the circuit.

All participants mentioned were interviewed because of their relevance to the study and availability of many novice teachers in the circuit. The participants were interviewed in their natural environments. Data was collected through semi-structured focus group interviews with the novice teachers and SMT members while the principals of each school were interviewed individually. All the discussions and interviews took place in COVID-19 compliant venues on three separate dates. The venues were cleaned, masks were worn, and 1.5 to 2 metres social distancing was observed. All devices used like books, pens, computers were also cleaned and 70 percent alcohol sanitiser was provided at the entrance and during the interview proceedings. Participants remained sanitised until the completion of each session. All interviews were audio-recorded with permission from the participants, and the details of the interviews were captured verbatim. The interviews provided a descriptive picture and basis for interpretation. An interview schedule was used to ascertain the quality of the interview, the

interviewer's observations and the characteristics of the respondents. As the researchers, the authors ensured that all questions were fully answered. The participants' perspectives on and understanding of the NTD programmes were beneficial for this study. The research questions focused on the threats to NTD programmes and possible remedies.

As noted by Creswell (2012), in qualitative research, data collected should come from the participants' backgrounds where the problems identified are supposedly experienced. The participants were identified as "fit for the purpose". Interviews for novice teachers, SMT members, and principals revealed the potential threats to NTD programmes.

3.1 Ethical considerations

An approved consent letter of the five schools to participate in the research was obtained from the District and Provincial Office of the Limpopo Department of Education. Consent letters were also directed to the five principals of each for their authorisation to conduct the study. Consent was also sought before recording all the proceedings. Anonymity was also guaranteed before the commencement of the interview.

The research purpose was clearly outlined to all participants, and they were informed about their freedom not to participate in the study if they so wished but they all agreed to contribute. There was an induction stage where participants were alerted about their choice to pull out if they were uncomfortable in the interview. The respondents were also advised about data retention plans, availability of research findings to fellow researchers, and confidentiality until the end of the interview process. Given the existence of COVID-19, all participants were guaranteed no harm. There were break periods in between to freshen up. An attendance register was used during the process on which pseudonyms were recorded. The interviews were conducted after the close of the school for the day to avoid classes disturbances. The novice teachers' and SMT teachers' interviews each lasted for 20 minutes while principals' interviews lasted for about 10 minutes. Pseudonyms were used to conceal participants' identities and their respective schools. The novices were identified as NOVI 01-09, SMT-3-A as school management team member number 3 of school B and principals as PRINCIPAL A-E.

4. Findings

4.1 Threats to successful NTD programmes

4.1.1 Novice teachers' responses

The novices' group showed that there are crucial skills that are uncovered in existing NTD programmes. One novice teacher (NOVI-09) remarked that:

"Technology has advanced recently and there is a need to address the 4th Industrial Revolution."

The same feeling was echoed by NOVI-01 who said:

"We should learn ICT skills."

The majority of novices, seven out of nine (78%) complained about the level and quality of resources to support them. Classroom management is a critical sub-theme for effective curriculum management. Revelations by novices mentioned above affirm literature by (Senom, Zakaria & Shah, 2013). These authors were of the view that teachers are effective when their classroom management practices are in order.

4.1.2 SMT members' responses

Senior management team (SMT) members are entrusted with the responsibility to nurture upcoming teachers' potential. The study revealed that some SMT members are dissatisfied with existing NTD programmes.

SMT 03-(B) said:

"It is true. Every process is likely to meet challenges and so is NTD. In my opinion, the obvious challenge can be teachers' attitudes. If teachers are not ready to be developed, the intended objectives are doomed to collapse. Another element can be associated with lack of support from the higher authorities like Circuits or Districts".

On the other hand, SMT 07-(C)said:

"Novice teachers show lack or deficiencies in various skills. New teachers should be given support on subjects' didactics and content matters. Their teaching methods need to be improved to make them better teachers. They also need assistance on extracurricular matters especially on sports management".

In addition, SMT 4-(A) said:

"My take is that we teach in environments where all learners with varied backgrounds are mixed together. I would appreciate if there can be workshops on inclusive education and teaching children with barriers to learning like in Learners with Special Needs Education (LSEN)".

The SMT members interviewed agreed that if novice teachers' attitudes were positive, Circuits and Districts providing the necessary support could run NTD programmes smoothly. This should also be coupled with school-initiated NTD programmes where all related development matters are addressed. The SMT members interviewed generally agreed that there should be regular intensive engagements with novice teachers especially on areas where weaknesses in teaching and learning were observed.

4.1.3 School principals' responses

According to the *South African Schools' Act of 1996*, section 16, (Republic of South Africa, 1996) and its accompanying amendments, school principals are entrusted with the directive to deliver professional guidance and management for a school. Their responsibilities include planning, implementing, and monitoring effective teacher development programmes (integrating beginners). When asked about possible threats to NTD, Principal of school A (PRINCIPAL-A) responded by saying when asked about possible threats to NTD:

"Novice teacher development can be successful if there is support- staff appointed to monitor its implementation. Again, there should be sufficient workshops for the principals to implement them. A notable challenge can sometimes be inconsistency in implementation."

On the same question, PRINCIPAL-D said:

"In my opinion, the challenges towards the successful teacher development are among others, lack of intervention strategies by the department to address the recommendations for development identified during integrated quality management systems evaluations."

It is against this background that school principals' revelations on the nature of existing NTD programmes become crucial to evaluate their effectiveness. The five principals interviewed attest to the *Action Plan to 2014 – Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2025* that, as leaders, principals need to own up to the process of developing their subordinates and inculcate sound work ethics and a collaborative spirit among all stakeholders (inside and outside). Principals interviewed in the study showed agreement on the ineffectiveness of the current teacher development programmes and strategies. They wanted to establish school-initiated development programmes with regular monitoring and support.

Burns (2015) mentioned unfavourable that unfavourable working contexts like lack of acceptable teacher identity, poor teacher efficacy and lack of professionalism in schools can threaten effective teacher development. Critical to mention is that poorly designed professional development initiatives can lead to slow progress. This can happen in cases where policies and support seem inadequate while at worst some groups may feel excluded. These findings are affirmed by findings revealed from interactions with the above participants. According to Day (1999), the capability of organisations like schools to perform their duties and roles in line with the expected standards is critical in advancing successful teacher development endeavours. Schools' capacity and their unique contexts can often threaten teacher development.

4.2 Summary of the Findings

The findings collected from the interviews conducted with all participants showed that most participants were dissatisfied with how NTD programmes are carried out. In particular, novice teachers complained about insufficient support

because they became involved in different school activities on their own. This gives the impression that most senior teachers and Departmental Heads (HODs) show reluctance to assist where required. In some circumstances, it seems school principals had to intervene in addressing these frustrations among novice teachers. Some of the novices were left alone to do whatever seemed right to them, especially on academic and classroom management matters. Discouragement among novice teachers and negative attitudes among some experienced teachers are issues for concern. Some felt that support from Department of Basic Education (DBE) needs to be enhanced. Monitoring from the side of the DBE also needs to be enforced. In brief, the study revealed that most of the difficulties accompanying NTD were beyond the novice teachers' control while in certain instances, teachers' attitude needs to improve. The DBE also needs to implement effective NTD programme monitoring mechanisms, especially at the District or Circuit levels.

4.3 Discussion of findings

The study recognised that novice teachers' development programmes are challenged by some serious threats in some schools as revealed in this study. The major challenge that was discovered from the study was the issue of the DBE not providing sufficient support in enhancing NTD programmes. The lack of proper monitoring on the part of the DBE was mentioned as a serious challenge by some of the participants. In addition, participants complained about the lack of school-initiated NTD programmes that can best address individual schools' NTD needs. Good leadership will assist greatly in managing the tensions and problems that might be directly facing the school. Teachers' negative attitudes were often mentioned as a serious contributor to the non-implementation of NTD programmes. The novice teachers believed that they were sometimes left without any help from their seniors on both curricular, extracurricular, and governance issues. If all SMT members were prepared to assist novice teachers, there would be no complaints levelled against them. Departmental support measures seem ineffective as novice teachers realised that they had to fend for themselves, leading to sloppiness in executing their professional duties. Principals and teachers need to establish their schools' NTD and provide monitoring. Indeed, the participants affirmed the research of Yin (2011) and Watson (2013) who indicated the importance and regular NTD support mechanisms and current 4IR-related NTD programmes respectively to address NTD threats.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

NTD programmes encounter many threats among many schools in Sekgosesa East Circuit of Limpopo Province. Among others, insufficient DBE support was a cause for worry. The results of this study showed that novice teachers were not given sufficient support, and this may have detrimental effects on their professional duties. The South African Skills Development Act emphasizes the need to empower and up skill all public servants including novice teachers. It was obvious that insufficient support from seniors not only contributed to underperformance

by novice teachers but also instilled bad conduct among learners as a result. Furthermore, the study confirmed the effect of the senior teacher's attitudes on the careers of novice teachers. In some cases, novices put more trust in their seniors than the school principals. They view them as advocates and thus emulate them. Their assistance in this regard is quite crucial. It is of great significance to facilitate school-initiated NTD programmes that will best deal with novice teachers' needs. DBE support on NTD was another cause for concern. Circuits or Districts need to take responsibility for NTD programmes. They should ensure that all programmes are regularly monitored and schools are allowed to introduce NTD programmes that can address their unique professional needs. Novice teachers need to know and understand everything that concerns their profession. All threats related to novice teachers should be attended to in full. All these could be resolved if all stakeholders rendered their roles and showed support for one another.

5.1 Study Limitations

This was a qualitative study on novice teachers' development programmes in Sekgosesa east circuit, Mopani district in Limpopo Province of the Republic of South Africa. The study findings were collected only from novice teachers, SMT members and school principals of both primary and secondary schools. No information was sought from other stakeholders like fellow experienced teachers, circuit or district officials on the subject. Data was collected through the use of semi-structured interviews using the aforementioned participants.

5.2 Recommendations and Practical Implications

The following recommendations are made:

- The Department of Education should introduce school-based (initiated) NTD programmes.
- Novice programmes should be integrated into the Quality Management System (QMS) Resolution 8 of 2003 to improve quality management in education,
- Schools should be encouraged to introduce their development endeavours which cater for their specific needs rather than rely solely on government initiatives.
- More emphasis should be placed on classroom practices and curriculum development
- Programmes for novice teachers should be geared towards improving their efficacy in classroom practices and curriculum management.
- School-based development programmes should be strictly monitored.

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