



Exploring beginner teachers' experience in their first year of teaching at Thabo Mofutsanyane district: Induction programme approach

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Abstract— This study explores the beginner teachers' experience in their first year of teaching before and after the induction programme at Thabo Mofutsanyane district. This study used a qualitative approach through a case study design. Fourteen beginner teachers participated in this study, a representative sample from the Thabo Mofutsanyane district, stratified by gender, age, and level of qualification. The data were analysed through thematic narrative analysis. Before the induction, this study revealed that beginner teachers experienced challenges in their first years of teaching. These included inability to complete class registers, control absenteeism, lack of knowledge to implement the curriculum, ill-disciplined learners, overcrowded classrooms, and heavy workload in their classrooms. After induction, in phase two, there was an improvement. Thus, this study suggested that job satisfaction, motivation, resilience, commitment, peer support, and a sense of belonging could help beginner teachers remain at schools that have induction programmes. This study recommends strengthening induction programmes, which could help beginner teachers to deal with the existing challenges and develop their professional identity.

Keywords: Beginner teachers, Induction Programme, Professional Development, Social Network Theory, Teacher Professional Identity

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I. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

UNLIKE people in other professions, new teachers rarely receive gradual progression opportunities for professional development in the teaching profession. They are expected to assume the same roles and responsibilities as their more experienced colleagues on their first day. Literature reports that many beginner teachers experience challenges and difficulties in their first years, adversely influencing their professional identity development. Thus, this analysis investigates and reports on beginner teachers' experiences, highlights common challenges, and explores how an induction programme can support and develop their professional identity and possibly retain them in the teaching profession.

Beginner teacher challenges-International context

Teaching is the profession that eats its young (Ferrell, 2016, as cited in Halford, 1998, p. 34). According to Schmidt (2017), the census statistics in the United States reported that 24 percent of beginner teachers quit teaching in their first year, 33 percent leave after three years, and 40 to 50 percent leave within the first five years. Unlike their more experienced colleagues, beginner teachers have not yet established and developed a repertoire of skills to turn to when they try to take on and fulfill equal duties as their senior teacher peers. Therefore, this shift shocks most novice teachers (Mamba, 2020). It has also been shown in Belgium that many beginner teachers quit teaching during their first five years (Colognesi, Van Nieuwenhoven, & Beusaert, 2020). A quantitative study conducted in Belgium involving seventy two Flemish primary schools and two hundred seventy-three beginner teachers

linked the reasons for beginner teachers leaving their employment to their degrees of commitment and self-efficacy (Flores, 2017). The author found that beginner teachers' commitment levels and self-efficacy correlated to their intentions to leave their jobs and how they perceived their working environment.

Furthermore, in a Netherlands study, Den Brok, Wubbels, and Van Tartwijk (2017) identified common stressors experienced by beginner teachers that cause them to leave the teaching profession. These include high workload, student disciplinary issues, a lack of support and insufficient teaching resources, poor working conditions, social isolation, and a lack of professional development opportunities.

Based on the international literature demonstrating the difficulties beginner teachers face in various countries, it can be argued that most beginner teachers encounter similar challenges in their first years. However, although beginner teachers globally face similar challenges, they must recognise that they are not constant or permanent; they may vary from school to school, state to state, country to country, and district to district (McGeehan, 2019). To adequately support beginner teachers in their initial years of teaching, it is thus essential to recognise their individual needs and challenges to support better and equip them. Research indicates that beginner teachers who receive adequate support in their first years are more likely to report high levels of job satisfaction, sense of belonging, and self-efficacy than those who do not receive any support (Toropova, Myrberg & Johansson, 2021). Unfortunately, many South African beginner teachers, like their peers in other countries worldwide, abandon the profession during their first few years of employment (Caluza & Niemand, 2019). Therefore, beginner teachers' challenges in South Africa are explored in more detail in the subsequent section.

Beginner teachers in the South African context

Even though South Africa is commemorating its 27th year of democratic governance and the reform and improvement of its educational system, findings suggest that teachers continue to face disadvantages in the teaching profession (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). Before 1994, when South Africa achieved democracy, the educational system was segregated, with each racial group having a separate department of education (Gallo, 2020). Education was uneven and politically motivated; resources were inequitably allocated to various racial groupings, with white ethnic groups receiving preferential treatment (Maarman & Lamont-Mbawuli, 2017). Since 1994, the educational system's stakeholders have worked hard to ensure a fairer and equal system. Seeing that all racial groups now have access to basic education is heartening (Blignaut, 2020).

However, quality education remains an inclusive ideal in South Africa, where the education system is characterised by severe inequalities (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). Socioeconomic and racial inequalities, poor learning outcomes, and high teacher and student dropout rates persist almost twenty-seven years after independence (Wilmot, 2017).

Despite relatively high education funding levels in South Africa, teacher shortages, overcrowded classrooms, and inadequate school infrastructure all contribute to the challenges that most South African teachers confront in the classroom (Meier & West, 2020). Overcrowding, for example, causes disciplinary problems, which causes additional difficulties such as poor student engagement, a lack of teacher evaluation and assessment, and noise disruption. These problems make it difficult for teachers to control their classrooms (Obadire & Sinthumule, 2021). Overcrowded classrooms can easily become unbearable, particularly for beginner teachers who are not adequately trained and appointed according to their training and have a high workload, contributing to beginner teacher burnout (Köhler, 2020; Nkuna, 2017). These findings are supported by a qualitative study conducted in 150 secondary schools across South Africa. Teachers in those schools experienced numerous challenges in teaching and learning due to overcrowded classrooms. Among the challenges are difficulty interacting with students and the inability of students to participate in critical thinking and problem-solving activities (Matsepe, Maluleke & Cross, 2019). Overcrowded classrooms do not impact only teachers but also learners' overall performance. According to Meier and West (2020), overcrowded classrooms are the most frequent causes of didactical neglect. These classrooms incapacitate teachers from paying attention to each pupil's educational requirements. This is corroborated by data from the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) cycles of 2006, 2011, and 2016, revealing that South African students consistently ranked last among 50 countries in reading scores (Mlachila & Moeletsi, 2019). PIRLS is an international assessment to evaluate fourth-grade students' reading literacy (Govender & Hugo, 2020). In South Africa, 78 percent of fourth graders cannot read fully in any language (Mlachila & Moeletsi, 2019). Critical learning abilities are severely deficient among South African learners in their early levels of schooling.

Furthermore, South African teachers have been shown to have the lowest level of subject-content knowledge compared to other sub-Saharan African countries (Nsengimana, Rugema, Hiroaki, & Nkundabakura, 2020). This is a concern since teachers cannot impart or teach knowledge they do not possess or acquire (Taylor, 2021). Teachers cannot appropriately assess students' progress and assist them in progressing forward due to their limited subject knowledge. At the same time, inadequate education and support remain a nationwide issue in South Africa, contributing to the high rate of beginner teacher attrition (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019).

During the study undertaking, there were no formalised induction programmes in South African schools, and those that did offer beginner teacher induction programmes were school-based and varied from

school to school (Daniels, 2019). Therefore, the primary goal of this study was to uncover the challenges experienced by novice teachers during their initial years. The study focused on developing professional identities among novice teachers and investigated how an induction program can address and support novice teachers in South Africa. Previous studies have affirmed that developing a teacher's identity is vital for ensuring their commitment to the teaching profession, ultimately influencing their decisions to stay in the field (Fraser, 2018; Hong, Day & Greene, 2018). To support beginner teachers, stakeholders must first address three fundamental problems in the South African educational system: teachers' lack of preparedness, non-accountability of school managers and teachers, and support to equip beginner teachers as competent educators (Liwane, 2017). Furthermore, stakeholders must recognise the current challenges that beginner teachers face. These include the most conspicuous demands of COVID-19 and the transition to online learning, which posed new challenges and barriers to the identified problems that beginner teachers face, as discussed in greater detail in the following section.

II. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This study explored the beginner teachers' experience in their first year of teaching at Thabo Mofutsanyane district before and after the induction programmes.

III. METHODS

Research approach and design

This study used a qualitative methodology to enhance knowledge and thorough understanding of the subject matter through beginner teachers' first-year experiences. Qualitative research investigates how people act and attribute meaning to their lives (Cosgrove, 2018). This research sought to analyse a social phenomenon; hence, a qualitative technique was deemed the most suitable and best suited for this study. The qualitative approach was ideal since it elicits a clear understanding and reveals more comprehensive information about the topic under inquiry than data gathered only from a questionnaire (Alase, 2017). Furthermore, this methodology is widely used to uncover what people know and think and how they behave and feel about a certain phenomenon. A case study design was utilised to explore the firsthand experiences of novice educators. Qualitative research, an interpretive approach that seeks to elucidate researchers' interpretations of what they observe, hear, and comprehend, guided the choice of employing a case study design. This approach is deemed suitable for delving into the impact of induction programmes on the professional development of new teachers and understanding the unique challenges and experiences they encounter during their initial years in the teaching profession (Munthe-Kaas, Glenton, Booth, Noyes, & Lewin, 2019).

Additionally, the theoretical framework that underpinned this study is the Social Network Theory (SNT). The SNT posits that humans are interdependent and embedded within social network structures (Gašević, Joksimović, Eagan, & Shaffer, 2019).

Social interactions, collaborative relationships with colleagues, and the developmental opportunities accessible through professional networks substantially influence beginner teachers' professional identities and decisions to remain in the teaching profession (Azizi, Soroush & Khatony, 2019). The development of their professional identity is impacted by these connections and engagements, which are referred to as their social network structures (Van Waes, Maeyer, Moolenaar, Petegem, & Bossche, 2018). The SNT and the interpretive paradigm are of the ontology that contends that an individual's social reality is not objective or distinct but rather influenced by social context and human experiences (Cuthbertson, Robb & Blair, 2020). The ontological view that people's social reality is understood by the words they construct in their minds and how they interpret a social phenomenon through personal experiences impacted this choice (Berryman, 2019).

This study aimed to understand how an induction model programme affects beginner teachers' professional identity, prompting the researcher to conduct this study within an interpretative paradigm. It explored how beginner teachers' experiences may have influenced their self-identification and the obstacles they encountered during their first years of teaching.

Participants

Fourteen beginner teachers were selected purposively in the first round of interviews (T1) in January 2021. Only eight participants responded to the second phase. Participants were beginner teachers selected for two training sessions, one in February 2020 in Bethlehem and another in October 2020 in QwaQwa in the Thabo Mofutsanyane district. They participated in the induction programme. All participants were beginner teachers in their first three years of teaching.

The participants were invited for a second round of interviews (T2) in August 2021, involving a mix of telephonic and in-person interviews. A third round of interviews was planned for 2022 as part of the larger project. The initial round of interviews investigated beginner teachers' experiences before the induction programme. The subsequent round of interviews investigated the development of beginner teachers' professional identity during induction. Specifically, it explored the impact of various components of the induction model, including commitment, self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and job satisfaction, on their professional identity development. It is important to highlight that this study considered the influence of gender and diverse racial groups.

Research Site

A collaborative effort between the Free State Department of Education and the Flemish Association for Development Cooperation and Technical Assistance (VVOB) led to an induction programme to pilot a one-year induction model for first-year teachers in the Free State province. This study was conducted in schools in the Free State province, specifically in the QwaQwa and Bethlehem regions of the Thabo Mofutsanyane district.

The researchers specifically interviewed participants from the Bethlehem region, aligning with the decisions of other Master's students who covered the QwaQwa region. This choice was deliberate, considering proximity and cost-effectiveness in travel. However, practical limitations, busy schedules, time constraints, and COVID-19 precautions led to fourteen interviews in the initial round. Despite challenges, the researcher gathered comprehensive data to address the research questions, supplementing it with data from other participants in the broader sample.

To ensure data accuracy, a professional transcriber converted interview data into text. Although interviews occurred in different areas, the researchers shared the data among the three researchers. Consequently, during data analysis, they accessed all interview transcripts from the larger sample of 14 participants, offering a robust foundation to answer their research questions.

Data Collection procedure

This study employed the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Inclusion criteria are attributes or knowledge the target population should have for researchers to answer their study questions (Patino & Ferreira, 2018). Some of the most frequent inclusion criteria include geographic, demographic, and ethnic factors (Hornberger & Rangu, 2020). Certain criteria were put in place to ascertain eligible participants for the study. Beginner teachers had to be considered in their first three years of teaching. They had to have a teaching certificate and affiliation with South African Council for Educators. Beginner teachers must have consented to participate in a trial run of the Free State Department of Education induction model programme in the Free State province. To be eligible, beginner teachers were also required to participate in funded research on the induction field test (a collaboration between Gent University and the University of the Free State: UFS), of which the current study form's part. Exclusion criteria are distinctive features of potential research participants who meet the inclusion criteria that may increase the likelihood of negative results or obstruct the study's efficacy

(Patino & Ferreira, 2018). Eligible participants who frequently skip meetings, provide incorrect information, have risk factors that might distort study results, or have a higher risk of adverse consequences (which is more appropriate for intervention studies) had to be excluded from participation (McCashin, Coyle & O'Reilly, 2019).

For this study, the criteria for exclusion were as follows: Beginner teachers in their first year(s) of teaching in the Free State who did not participate in the induction field test were excluded; beginner teachers who were not teaching in the Thabo Mofutsanyane district, specifically Bethlehem and QwaQwa regions, from the Free State province were excluded. Beginner teachers who had agreed to participate in the induction field test were also excluded but not in the research collaboration between Gent University and the UFS on which I am working with the two other master's students. Lastly, beginner teachers who could not participate in follow-up interviews during the school year were also excluded.

An exploratory field test of implementing the induction model was undertaken as part of the larger project. The induction model included school mentoring, peer support, training sessions, and a personal development plan. The 47 selected beginner teachers were asked to fill out the scales for the four indicators, which offered an overview of how these indicators changed during the school year. These measures have been globally recognised for influencing beginner teachers' self-efficacy, motivation, work satisfaction, and sense of belonging to teaching (Richter, Lazarides, & Richter, 2021). Participants in the induction programme were given a brief survey from the larger project to assess these components, which was done during the training sessions. Two training sessions were conducted. Only five teachers completed the survey in the first training session in Bethlehem in February 2020. In the second training session in QwaQwa in October 2020, 42 teachers completed the survey. Thus, forty-seven teachers in the Thabo Mofutsanyane district participated in the induction programme and completed the baseline survey. These two training sessions were held far apart due to the lockdown limitations in South Africa, which prevented everyone besides essential workers from travelling. Thus, the training sessions were rescheduled to comply with the COVID-19 regulations.

The main objective of this short survey was to determine which parts of the induction model were regarded as crucial and which were considered less interesting (as this is important to have an idea to improve the model further). Participants were given a questionnaire to complete and were required to manually fill out the brief questionnaire, which was then collected. This was done to ensure no technical issues or malfunctions prevented anyone from completing the survey.

Even though this study is qualitative, I drew on some data from the baseline survey to sketch a background picture of what components beginner teachers deemed critical to their professional development as beginner teachers. These included self-efficacy, a sense of belonging, job satisfaction, and motivation. These components of the induction programme are essential measuring scales linked to beginner teachers' professional identity (Flores, 2017). The researcher thus drew on these elements as part of the study since they are linked to the focus of the research topic. A more comprehensive analysis and discussion of traits that hinder or support beginner teachers' professional identity and problems could be undertaken. Although not residing in Bethlehem during the study, the researchers established familiarity through follow-up visits and sustained communication via phone calls and WhatsApp messages. Similarly, Adam (2019) acknowledged the need for qualitative researchers to invest substantial time in understanding the subject matter based on participants' real-life experiences.

Instruments

This study employed semi-structured interviews in phases 1 (T1) and 2 (T2) as instruments for data collection. This involved gaining insights into potential changes during the induction year in the relationship with beginner teachers. Depending on the researcher's aim, this technique requires the interviewer to ask questions (DeJonckheere & Vaughn,

2019). It was vital as it allowed participants to express themselves (Vasileiou, Barnett, Thorpe, & Young, 2018). This technique is guided by pre-determined questions, including open-ended questions allowing participants to answer in any manner (Evans & Lewis, 2018). Researchers asked follow-up questions and inquiries as necessary (Sim & Waterfield, 2019). This technique was ideal for this qualitative study because it provided flexibility and allowed participants to bring their experiences and personalities to the topic. The study drew primarily on interviews to learn about beginner teachers' challenges and how the induction programme influenced beginner teachers' professional identity throughout their induction. This helped me gain insight and better understand beginner teachers' experiences in their first years at schools before and after the induction programmes.

Procedure

Data collection was done in phases 1 (T1) and 2 (T2). The T1 was conducted before induction, and fifteen beginner teachers from the Thabo Mofutsanyane district were invited to participate. Data was stratified by gender, age, and level of qualifications in the T1 in January 2021. The second phase (T2) was conducted in August 2021 with eight participants. Some were interviewed face-to-face, while others were interviewed telephonically due to the COVID-19 restrictions.

Initially, all interviews were to be conducted face-to-face. However, the plan was revised due to COVID-19 and South Africa's lockdown limitations. Therefore, the first round of interviews (T1) was conducted telephonically and lasted approximately fifteen minutes per interview. The second round of interviews (T2) lasted about 30 minutes per interview and consisted of both telephonic and face-to-face interviews. This was done to accommodate all participants, as some found it impossible to meet in person due to a lack of time due to the increased workload resulting from COVID-19. The third round of interviews (T3) was scheduled for January 2022 but is not included in this study because it fell outside the study's timeframe, which was concluded in November 2021. All interviews were recorded and transcribed to prevent the data from being lost or distorted.

Furthermore, recording each interview was critical since it allowed for reviewing the data multiple times during the analysis process. Since all the interviews were done in English, a language barrier was recognised as a limitation. Sometimes, questions were asked repetitively before the message became clear. This may have been due to the participants' restricted ability to express themselves clearly and freely during the interviews because English is their second language.

Data analysis

This study employed thematic narrative analysis for analysing qualitative data. According to Elliott (2018), early data analysis lowers data overload issues and prioritises critical components for future attention. Good data analysis depends on various factors. For Mohajan (2018), it depends on the researcher's understanding, displaying, and discussion of collected data.

Thematic analysis entails categorizing data into themes, phrases, frequently used terms, or patterns (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019). It is a versatile way of analysing, identifying, and reporting themes and falls under the purview of interpretative qualitative research (McAllum, Fox, Simpson, & Unson, 2019).

This technique contextualised the data by constructing narratives encapsulating participants' shared experiences (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). This method added a layer of realism, emotion, humanity, values, and points of view to the study of how participants' school networks affected the development of their professional identities. Notably, it facilitated the identification of recurrent patterns, themes, or phrases within the data (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). It involved colour-coding the data and employing inductive and deductive approaches, with themes and subthemes emerging during the examination (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019). The comprehensive data analysis encompassed transcription, review, editing, analysis, interpretation, and verification (Williams & Moser, 2019).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Ethics Review Committee at the University of the Free State (UFSHSD2019/1371/2110). The Free State Department of Education granted permission. Approval was obtained from the principals to access the schools' premises. Participants were not subjected to mental or physical harm throughout the data collection process (Roth & Unger, 2018). The researcher ensured that participants signed their informed consent form for the study. Before signing an informed consent form, participants were provided information about the study's aims, objectives, and relevance. Participants were informed in advance that their participation in the study was completely voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. The researcher emphasised that whatever information they disclosed was strictly confidential and would be treated as such. Under the supervision of the researcher's supervisor, the data were safely preserved on a password-protected laptop.

IV. RESULTS

PHASE 1 (T1): BEFORE INDUCTION PROGRAMME

Beginner teachers' experiences of their first years of teaching Preparedness for challenges

A few participants indicated that their university teaching practicums (practicals) prepared them for the challenges they were likely to face in the classroom:

"Well, it was not so challenging due to the practicals we had at varsity because, from our second year up to our fourth year, we have been going to practicals" (T1: Participant 1)

Although a few participants acknowledged their teaching practicums' beneficial impact on their transition into the teaching profession, most participants lamented the difficulties they faced in their first year. This is seen in the responses of the following three participants:

"It was so difficult; it was very difficult. I completed my studies in 2018, neh? I got the job two months later" (T1: Participant 9).

"It was difficult to get along with the children because we did not get induction. I did everything myself" (T1: Participant 8).

"I did not even teach for the whole year. In October, I was diagnosed with major depression. That was how difficult it was for me in my first year of teaching" (T1: Participant 9).

Lack of knowledge about the completion of class registers

This study showed that beginner teachers could not complete the registers and control classroom absenteeism. As mentioned above, this often challenges some while confirming others, as illustrated by two participants:

"I did not know anything about registers or to control absenteeism; at university, we were not taught how to complete a class register. So, there was a lot of shock for me" (T1: Participant 9).

"I think it was implementing the curriculum, process, and planning into the real class environment" (T1: Participant 1).

Inability to implement curriculum

Some participants attributed their difficulties to curriculum issues, such as not knowing how to implement the curriculum. Others emphasised the real shock they experienced when faced with responsibilities such as completing class registers and controlling absenteeism, which they were never taught in universities during their undergraduate studies. Furthermore, aside from the challenges they indicated, participants also emphasised the lack of support and mentorship:

"I was just given a class to teach without a mentor or somebody to show me how things work, and, you know, as a new teacher in a school, I think you need someone who will work next to you as your mentor, who will show you the way, how to do things, how to teach – I did not get that" (T1: Participant 13).

"We just had to get in class and do without being mentored" (T1: Participant 5).

Gap between theory and practice

Regarding being faced with the reality and shock of teaching in real-world settings, participant 2 said:

"Learning that teaching was not what I expected was a shock. I was thrown in the deep end" (T1: Participant 2).

This finding concurs with that of Botha and Rens (2018, p. 5). Following what this participant remarked, another participant confirmed the gap she felt:

"I think there is a gap between what we are taught at the university and what we experience at school" (T1: Participant 8).

These findings are consistent with those of other scholars who asserted that most beginner teachers experience reality shock in their first years, often leading to additional challenges if inadequately prepared. Some participants indicated they had to do everything independently during their first year as they navigated their way into teaching.

However, it is essential to note that the first round of interviews was in January 2021, before the induction program began, despite the two introductory training sessions and workshops held in 2020 due to COVID-19. The induction programme was not implemented until February 2021, when mentor teachers were trained and assigned to beginner teachers.

Lack of support

Most participants indicated that they did not receive support or mentorship. Most of their support narratives and experiences are based on their educational experiences. Even though most participants lamented a lack of support through mentorship in their schools, a few stated they were inducted.

"We were inducted, it was not that difficult" (T1: Participant 2).

Receiving developmental opportunities and informal support

Others indicated receiving developmental opportunities and informal support through workshop programmes and from their Heads of Departments:

"What went well was that I got workshop support" (T1: Participant 5).

"I had a very supporting Heads of Department, who was helping me work, who made things much easier for me" (T1: Participant 3).

This finding is consistent with that of Günes and Uysal (2019). They state that beginner teachers should be adequately supported and equipped to address first-year challenges through professional development opportunities and social contacts with other teachers through collaborative workshops, reflective practices, and seminars.

Evidence shows that professional support from colleagues can positively influence beginner teachers' attitudes and retain them in the teaching profession (Craig, 2017). As such, the Social Network theory perspective also correlates with this assertion that beginner teachers can gain support by exchanging resources and knowledge with other teachers, mentors, principals, and heads of departments.

Furthermore, the development of beginner teachers' professional identity should be viewed as a learning process through which beginner teachers engage with, observe, participate with, and learn from their senior teachers to aid them in developing their professional identity (Marz & Kelchtermans, 2020). Accordingly, as a theoretical lens, Social Network theory considers learning a social process in which teachers can develop knowledge and skills by engaging with other teachers in their network circles (Sannen, Ferbuyt, De Maeyer, Struyf, Van Avermaet, & Petry, 2019). Thus, developing beginner teachers' professional identity is crucial for securing their motivation, job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and sense of belonging (Karaolis & Philippou, 2019).

Contextual challenges

Overcrowded classrooms

The results indicated that overcrowded classrooms could challenge beginner teachers in their first years. The most prevalent challenge experienced by participants was the issue of overcrowded classrooms:

"What we were taught in university, like, was not the same exactly from what we experienced in class; for example, like, when we were doing practicals, the classes were not overcrowded as they were in school, so I was a bit scared and nervous" (T1: Participant 12).

"For me personally, when you get into the classroom as a first-time teacher,

you find 42 learners, and you are on your own; and so, you know, it was a little bit tricky because you are even afraid to discipline these learners because you are told that you must not be too strict, you must not do this, you must not do that" (T1: Participant 2).

"We had many learners and were sort of overcrowded ... It was like 80 learners in one class. And it was quite challenging, especially when disciplining and sharing duties and everything, so it was quite hectic" (T1: Participant 1).

This finding corroborates the literature on overcrowded classrooms being a common problem for most South African primary and secondary school teachers (Matsepe et al., 2019). Overcrowded classrooms can quickly become unbearable, especially for beginner teachers with limited experience and inadequate training while dealing with high workloads (Köhler, 2020; Nkuna, 2017). This finding is reflected in the comments of participants who faced large classes.

Ill-disciplined learners

Ill-disciplined learners exacerbated learner disciplinary issues, as participants mentioned being afraid to discipline learners because they were told not to be too strict, which proved difficult, especially in a class of eighty learners.

Heavy workload

The results showed that beginner teachers experience heavy workloads in their first years of teaching. They mentioned that they control and mark learners' books: the extract below from a participant illustrated this point.

"It was so hard for me to manage such a huge number of learners and control the books because when you are still at varsity doing practicals, it is so easy to control the books and mark them. We used to teach a few learners and mark the books, and when I came to work, there were 50 to 60 learners. So, it was hard for me to get used to them and mark all of them" (T2: Participant 4).

Nonfunctional school management

The participants' responses suggested that school management was nonfunctional.

"Ja, I feel good, but not 100%. I feel like the management is a lot – okay, how can I put it? – The school's management is not managing the school the way... in a good way. I can say that" (T1: Participant 4)

"They do not design programmes, and there is no way you as a teacher can question your senior unless you want to work in a new environment" (T2: Participant 3)

Similarly, others pointed out school policies that led to student disciplinary problems:

"It is like the policies ... or the policy of the private schools versus us, and I think the policies are not the same. For example, where I am teaching, some learners misbehave. For example, when I arrived, some learners were vandalising the school bus after several times, but they were still there because they said that ... the department and the what-what allowed them to be there with the school bus" (T1: Participant 8).

This study highlighted those contextual challenges, such as overcrowded classrooms, ill-disciplined learners, heavy workloads, and nonfunctional school management, could cause problems for most beginner teachers. Even though not all participants experienced these issues, they were highlighted by most participants and hence were investigated further.

New Teacher Induction Programme: Expectations

The opening prompt in the first round of interviews inquired about participants' expectations for the induction programme. This was before induction had started, and mentors were assigned in February 2021. Participants shared their expectations of the induction programme in their narratives:

"My expectations: I think maybe I expected to be inducted because this is my second year; I am still new, so I, maybe, when I heard the word induction, I expected a formal induction, maybe programme, yes" (T1: Participant 3).

Formal induction programme

In their narratives, participants anticipated a formal induction programme with a particular emphasis on the curriculum and the teaching profession:

"I thought it would be based more on, like, maybe, the curriculum" (T1:

Participant 2).

"Oh, my expectation was to be given more knowledge about the teacher profession, like what is expected from a teacher" (T1: Participant 4).

Similarly, some participants expected the induction programme to address their concerns about learner misconduct and supervisors, for example, the appropriate course of action if their supervisors mistreated them.

"I expect this new teacher induction model will tackle our daily challenges as teachers. We do not know much about the misconduct, whether if our supervisors mistreat us, we do not know what steps to take" (T1: Participant 11).

Receiving emotional support

A few participants also indicated a desire to receive emotional support and advice to help them deal with the difficulties they face since they found it challenging to communicate with their older peers:

"As a new teacher, there are things that we go through, and I feel like we need emotional support due to the things that involve education and everything. I think we are okay because we have our immediate supervisors, we have educators that we work with, we have peers, we have Heads of Departments. But due to emotional support, I do not think we can open freely because some of our Heads of Departments are way older, and we cannot interact in such a way that we are free" (T1: Participant 1).

Finally, some participants anticipated receiving help in coping with overcrowded classrooms as well as practical suggestions for addressing real-world problems in schools:

"Maybe they can just tell us more about handling these clustered classrooms because that one is hard, and you have to produce results in a clustered classroom" (T1: Participant 5).

"I expect it to be more practical like to give us practical ideas that we can apply in real-life situations which we face in a school environment" (T1: Participant 4).

In general, participants had high hopes for the induction programme. Firstly, participants expected the induction model to be formal. They expected to gain knowledge and skills on properly executing the curriculum in their class presentations. Second, they expected the induction programme to help them manage student disciplinary issues and overcrowded classrooms. They also expected the induction programme to provide a forum to discuss their challenges and grievances openly. After sharing their expectations of the induction programme, participants were asked about the four components of the New Teacher Induction Programme: school-based mentoring, peer support, training sessions, and a personal development plan. These components have been proven to improve teachers' motivation, commitment, job satisfaction, and resilience. Therefore, they were included in the induction model. The interviews' findings concerning the four components are presented and discussed next.

PHASE 2 (T2): AFTER INDUCTION PROGRAMME

Job satisfaction

The findings suggest that participants were satisfied with their jobs since they all stated that they loved their jobs, with the most enjoyable aspect being just teaching and doing things with their students. They cited their primary source of motivation for working as their students:

"I enjoy teaching, even if my job was all about teaching just to stand in front of learners teaching" (T2: Participant 3).

"The part of being in class and doing things with the learners" (T2: Participant 2).

Motivation

The findings revealed that participants were motivated to do their jobs after the induction sessions.

"Seeing my learners that happy to see me motivates me a lot, even if sometimes I feel small and I belittle myself, I do not feel confident about myself, I am someone they can look up to" (T2: Participant 5).

Resilience

Furthermore, participants showed resilience and believed they had the necessary skills to succeed. In their narratives, they characterised themselves as life-long learners who are open to learning new things as

they gain new experiences:

"Yes! I believe I have what it takes to succeed as a new teacher because every day, I am gaining more experience, and I reflect on my teaching" (T2: Participant 4).

"I think I have what it takes to succeed as a beginner teacher because we live in a technological world. We know more about projectors and the means of finding information from the internet, so I believe we have what it takes" (T2: Participant 4).

Commitment

The participants exhibited unwavering commitment, displaying strong devotion even in enduring challenges. Demir (2020) noted that commitment is a profound and affectionate sentiment influencing individuals' dedication and willingness toward their occupations. This dedication stayed the same, even when they did not get enough help, had to ask mentors or Heads of Departments for help, or had to deal with problems independently, as seen in their accounts:

"Mentorship was not available; guidance was not available. I had to do everything by myself. So, every day, I had some experiences I had to learn very hard because I did not have any guidance, mentorship, or support from management or the Heads of Department. So, it was a bit hard. There is still no support, just that now I am used to everything" (T2: Participant 1).

"I had one experienced teacher, so he helped me with lesson planning, using the CAPS documents and all those things, and we had peer support. Ja, where we have all the teachers teaching the same subjects, we had meetings quarterly, we discussed, ja, all those things, ja. So, for peer mentoring, I would say it did work for me" (T2: Participant 14).

"I had to go to my Heads of Departments class for about three months, for the first quarter, for the whole quarter. I was in her class, and she showed me how to plan and implement the curriculum and interact with my colleagues, the learners, and the faculty staff" (T1: Participant 1).

Peer support

One of the aspects that manifested success in the induction programme was peer support, a facet emphasized by participants as contributing to the growth of novice teachers in their professional journey. As Rahman (2019) asserts, peer support holds significance in the professional development of teachers, providing a platform for the exchange of lessons, teaching resources, assessment practices, and collaborative problem-solving. This was evident in the narratives of beginner teachers who participated in this study:

"Most of my support I get it from my peers. For example, it is my first time teaching creative arts, so I talk with teachers who taught it before, how they are doing it, and what I should do. So, most of the support I get is from my peers" (T2: Participant 2).

"What I have achieved is so much compared to the fact that I am new in the field, and I had no supervision, no mentorship, but I did achieve great things because, during my first year in grade 12, my learners got 100 percent pass, in 2019 my learners got 100 percent pass and last year only one learner failed. So, it was about 95 percent passed, with a few distinctions among them. So, even though I am a beginner teacher and have no mentor, I see some great things up to so far. I think my results speak volumes" (T2: Participant 1).

Sense of belonging

The findings revealed that most participants felt a sense of belonging in their schools.

"Yes definitely, we are a family at our school. Maybe it is because we are a small group" (T2: Participant 2).

However, a few participants reported a sense of disconnection from their schools:

"What demotivates me a lot is the disconnection here at work. Sometimes I feel like I do not belong here; most teachers call me the last born; I am the youngest here. I am not sure if I belong here or not" (T2: Participant 5).

V. DISCUSSION

Beginner teachers' first-year challenges included reality shock, whereby novice teachers were solely responsible for teaching large classes on their first day. This proved challenging as they lacked prior experience handling such sizable groups, having been accustomed to

smaller classes with mentor teachers present during their practicums. Additionally, some participants expressed reality shock due to uncertainties in implementing the curriculum and managing tasks like handling absenteeism and maintaining class registers. Many participants also conveyed difficulties in navigating day-to-day challenges in teaching, encompassing issues such as teaching strategies, curriculum execution, coping with overcrowded classrooms, managing unruly students, and handling excessive administrative workloads.

This is consistent with Botha and Rens' (2018) findings. They assert that, although beginner teachers are equipped with fundamental skills during their teaching practicums, the practical and implementation aspects in the classroom are often seen as the most challenging for beginner teachers with no previous teaching experience. When beginner teachers are not adequately prepared or supported, they may experience praxis shock as their confrontations with the realities and responsibilities of being classroom teachers are put to the test (Gaddy, 2020).

The results indicate that although not all participants received school-based mentoring or adequate support, most of them stated that most of their support was peer-based through informal collaboration with their fellow beginner teachers and experienced teachers.

Most participants without mentors identified peer support and collaborative relationships in the workspace as important factors. Guided by the SNT as a theoretical lens, it has been demonstrated that positive interactions and relationships between colleagues within social network structures increase beginner teachers' self-efficacy and sense of belonging (Bjorklund, Daly, Ambrose, & Van Es, 2020). The extent to which beginner teachers and teachers are committed, motivated, and satisfied in their jobs and how they overcome day-to-day challenges and experiences are profoundly influenced by their beliefs, social practices, and interactions with others (Mansfield, 2020).

The positive influence of beginner teachers' network structures and interactions within the workplace positively influenced their job satisfaction, motivation, resilience, commitment, and sense of belonging to schools. Beginner teachers' sense of belonging in their jobs and the extent of support they receive are critical components of developing and maintaining their professional identity. Beginner teachers who have positive relationships with their peers and receive adequate support within their network circles, for example, exhibited an increased sense of belonging, as evidenced by the findings of this study. As such, a stronger sense of belonging in their network circles increases their motivation, job satisfaction, commitment, performance, and involvement in development opportunities, culminating in the development of their professional identity (Bjorklund et al., 2020).

Additionally, beginner teachers with a sense of belonging are more likely to seek support if necessary. They are more committed, resilient, and motivated to pursue developmental opportunities and remain in their job. Overall, there is strong evidence that the four induction model components (self-efficacy, work satisfaction, motivation, and sense of belonging) are linked and essential in developing beginner teachers' professional identity. Despite the reported challenges, all participants indicated they felt they had the resilience and commitment necessary to succeed. Furthermore, as an analytical lens, SNT proposes that beginner teachers' learning opportunities are moulded in their teaching-network circles, recognising the significance of formal and informal learning as key drivers for ongoing development towards the development of beginner teachers' professional identity.

Therefore, the social network structures of beginner teachers should be seen as a web of relationships in which people both constrain and receive development opportunities (Bjorklund et al., 2020, p. 3) and thus should be further analysed.

For example, beginner teachers who are not adequately supported and do not have collaborative relationships with their peers may be disconnected in the workplace and have lower levels of job satisfaction, commitment, motivation, and self-efficacy. This consequently inhibits their professional identity development (Barni, Danioni & Benevene,

2019). Thus, through their network structures, beginner teachers may be provided with developmental opportunities to develop their professional identity, or they can be constrained, adversely impacting their professional identity development. This study revealed that beginner teachers who receive peer support exhibit increased motivation, self-efficacy, commitment, and a sense of belonging.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to improve beginner teachers' teachers' professional identities as an essential condition for professional learning through the implementation of an induction programme. Put differently, the aim was to get a better understanding of the challenges that beginner teachers experience and how their professional identity develops during their first years of teaching. The significance of developing teachers' professional identities is rooted in the understanding that these identities, encompassing personal beliefs, viewpoints, and perspectives, profoundly influence their decisions concerning retention, job performance, and, most notably, their students' achievement and learning within their network structures (schools). The beginner teacher induction programmes are vital in supporting and preparing novice teachers to develop their professional identity to secure them into the teaching profession through implementing formalised induction programmes. This study is one of the few in South Africa that provide insights into how beginner teachers can develop their professional identities through induction programmes to help them transition smoothly from students to school teachers.

The New Teacher Induction Program findings revealed a robust correlation between the professional identity of novice teachers and the four components: job satisfaction, motivation, self-efficacy, and a sense of belonging. Peer support from fellow teachers and Heads of Departments and professional development opportunities like workshops and the IQMS model emerged as crucial components. These elements played a vital role in fostering participants' professional identity and positively impacting their ability to overcome contextual challenges. Many participants emphasised the significance of developmental opportunities and support in shaping their professional identity, particularly through workshops and the IQMS model, as well as peer-based support from colleagues (beginner teachers, senior teachers, and Heads of Department). Notably, mentored participants expressed dissatisfaction with mentoring programmes, suggesting a need for prioritising mentor training, whether for Heads of Department or designated mentors, to ensure a thorough understanding of the mentoring process before guiding beginner teachers.

Furthermore, they recommended the incorporation of mandatory mentoring in schools nationwide as part of the induction process, aiming to assist novice teachers in navigating challenges during their first years of teaching. To conclude, this study highlights formal and informal aspects (peer-based support, personal development plans, and training sessions for both mentors and BTs) while considering the interplay of the four characteristics of BTs – job satisfaction, sense of belonging, motivation, and self-efficacy – in one study. The study aimed to provide a more comprehensive understanding by analyzing quantitative and qualitative data. This research will benefit local stakeholders, including the Department of Basic Education, the Free State Department of Education, novice teachers, mentors, and trainers. The insights gained from the induction model's mentorship and professional development components can help them enhance the model to support novice teachers' professional identity development better. Considering that this marks the Department of Basic Education's inaugural pilot field test of the induction model in the Free State, the findings of this study will play a crucial role in shaping the future implementation of induction programmes in other provinces that have not yet conducted field tests, such as KwaZulu-Natal and North-West. The department will be better equipped to plan induction procedures, assign mentors, and provide training to individuals responsible for

mentoring beginner teachers, whether they are Heads of Departments or designated mentors in respective schools.

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