Novice Teachers' Experiences of Challenges of their Professional Development

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This research study explored novice teachers' experiences of their professional. Novice teachers are described as newly qualified teachers with less than five years of teaching experience. It is important that novice teachers can adjust quickly to the teaching environment, like situational contexts, such as a different culture, environment, and learner backgrounds. A whole teacher professional development theory or the gestalt was used to argue for a holistic novice teachers' professional development. How, novice teachers adapt to the professional ethos could be a precursor of their professional development. An interpretive qualitative research approach was used in this study. A purposive sample of seven (34) novice teachers was used. The sampled novice teachers were based in five different schools in one district of education in Gauteng, South Africa. Nineteen (19) female and sixteen (16) male teachers with age mean of and average teaching experience of three years. A semi-structured interview was used to collect data which was thematically analysed. The findings of the study revealed that novice teachers who had attended different teacher professional development programmes organized at school level experiences some major challenges such as continuity of the professional programme, the high cost of training, among others which inhabit the whole teacher professional development.

Key words: *Novice teachers, professional development, whole teacher development, professional ethos.*

1. Introduction

This research study investigated novice teachers' personal experiences of their school based professional development. Over the last decade there has been an increased demand for the development of novice teachers in the teaching profession (Borko, 2004, South African Council for Educators' Act, 3, 2000, Saches, 2016). The higher education sector has gone through numerous changes in curriculum development for the training of teachers, the introduction of new training facilities, schools of education; housed in the faculties of humanities, and faculties of education in a number of traditional, comprehensive and technology universities offering initial teacher education training and continuing professional development for novice teachers (Ono & Ferreira, 2010, Sockett, 1993). With the new model for the provision of teacher education and professional development, institutions such as colleges of education which had the mandate of providing training specifically for teachers had been discontinued (Krishnaveni, & Anitha, 2007; Gewirtz, Mahony, Hextall & Cribb, 2009; Korthagen, 2004). It is in this regard that the research intends to explore the school-based professional development challenges as experienced by novice teachers of their professional development.

2. Theoretical framework on teacher professional development

This study draws on the Whole Teacher Professional Development (WTPD) approach, alternatively, referred to, as the Gestalt (Korthagen, 2004, Korthagen, 2001). The Gestalt as a theorical framework provides a departure from the traditional approach of professional development that speaks primarily to teachers' acquisition of knowledge and skills. The Gestalt or the WTPD emphasizes and addresses the salience of promoting all aspects of a teacher's development which encompasses attitudes, knowledge, and practice. Duff and Marriot, (2017) argue that educators should develop as lifelong learners, reflective thinkers and ethical leaders exemplifying the ideals of literacy and scholarship. Korthagen, (2007) has grouped the characteristics under three categories, namely, skill, concern for others and concern for self.

To understand the impact of complete professional development on novice teachers. in view of the Gestalt objectives, teacher's quality become central and topic in the teacher education and education milieu. Numerous research studies indicate that the key to increasing teachers' proficiency in teaching is their continuing development and learning through effective professional development (Gurevich, Stein, & Gorev, (2017). Effective PD updates teachers' content knowledge, exposes them to new teaching strategies and methods, sustains their teaching effectiveness, and prompts continuous growth (Kothagen & Vasalos, 2005). Novice teachers might face challenges of workplace adjustment, poor mentoring and absence of professional collegiality which might inadvertently delay their achievement for the required professionalism development.

3. Teacher professionalism

The meaning of teacher professional development is challenging for the main stakeholders in the educational world with many terms used reciprocally in literature – *staff development, lifelong learning and continuing professional development* (De Wit, 2016, Diko & Letseka, 2009, Mahau, 2012). Some consider them all to be the same, while others attribute different meanings to them depending on the paradigm they are coming from. Saric and Steh, (2017) and Geldenhyus and Oosthuizen, (2015) distinguish between teacher professionalism and teacher professionalisation. They argue that teacher professionalisation is a sociological project that focuses on the authority and status of teaching as a profession. On the other hand, they are of the view that professionalism is a pedagogical project that focuses on what Diale, Pillay & Fritz, (2014) refer to as internal quality of teaching as a profession. According to Naidoo and Naidoo, (2018) teacher professionalism could be construed as the ability to reach students in a meaningful way, developing innovative approaches to mandated content while motivating, engaging, and inspiring young adult minds to prepare for ever-advancing technology.

For this research, the researchers examined the use teacher professional development as understood in the South African context, defined in Section 5 (b) of the South African Council for Educators Act, 3, 2000. While it is not always advisable to transpose a system of one country with another, as the contexts might be different there is always great value in examining educational practices of other countries for benchmarking purposes. However, the researcher proposes to focus the research on the development of novice teachers in the South African context, with reference to the role of SACE in developing the novice teachers.

Many newly qualified teachers enter the system, not having the required skills and professional ability to cope in the teaching profession, thus resulting in many of novice teachers' not coping in the classroom or altogether leaving the teaching profession (Bernadine, 2019; Steward, (2014). This can be avoided, by recommending alternative ways in which SACE can be responsive to novice teachers across the country, build-up support structures for novice teachers and provide adequate professional development training programmes.

4 South African Council for Educators (SACE)

South Africa Council for Educators Act 3, 2000 mandates the South African Council for Educators to establish a professional assistance facility for teachers about the promotion and development of the education and training profession, among others must do the following,

- promote, develop and maintain a professional image,
- advise the Minister on matters on matters relating to the education and training of teachers,
- establish the requirements for promotion within the education system on educator professionalism,

- research and develop a professional development policy,
- manage a system for the promotion of continuing professional development of all teachers,
- develop resource materials to initiate and run, in consultation with an employer, training programmes, workshops, seminars and short courses that are designed to enhance the profession,
- establish a professional assistance facility for teachers,

This function has not been realised to its fullest because of the lack of resources and capacity to implement it (Bernadine, 2019; Steward, (2014, Tschannen-Moran, 2009, Whitty, 2002). For the past few years SACE has been inundated with number of professional requests and queries that necessitated the establishment of the facility.

Like all professionals, novice teachers need to grow their knowledge and skills throughout their careers. Most professional bodies are tasked to engage their members in professional development activities. The Continuing Professional Teacher Development (namely the CPTD), is a system which has been designed to help teachers and in the context of this study, novice teachers to achieve their maximum professional development (Mestry & Singh, 2007, Nantanga, (2014; Geldenhuys & Oosthuizen, 2015). SACE is mandated to manage the CPTD program, thus making it the main role player in teacher development.

The following three kinds of development activities are stipulated in the CPTD document (South African Council for Educators Act, 2000):

- Educator priority activities that are chosen by teachers themselves for their own development and the improvement of their own professional practices.
- School priority activities that are undertaken by the school leadership and staff collectively, focusing on Whole School Development and the institutional conditions for the improvement of improve teaching and learning.
- Profession priority activities that have directly to do with enhancing the professional status, practices, and commitments of teachers in areas of greatest need.

The research question

Considering the importance of professional development at an early stage of a teaching career, the researchers asked the following question:

What are the challenges novice teachers faces towards their school-based professional development? The following section discusses the research methodology that sought to answer the research question asked in the above.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

According to Leedy and Ormrod, (2005) interpretive research is based on the assumptions that human beings, like novice teachers can be understood from within their experiences of their school-based professional development, Thus, the interpretative qualitative research approach in the context of this study provided the researchers with multiple perspectives from the novice teachers who are the research participants.

In this study, a purposeful sampling of 34 novice teachers was employed. The purposive sample was chosen because novice teachers are likely informed of the challenges, they face related to school based professional development (Maree, 2007), Botha & Rens, 2018). Of the thirty-four newly qualified teachers who participated in the research study nineteen were female and sixteen were male teachers with a mean age of twenty-five of and average teaching experience of three years.

The researchers used the dialectic method of research in this study. Dialectic is derived from the word dialogue, meaning that a dialogue was created between the researchers and the novice teachers who are the participants in this study Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson & Spiers, (2002. The nature of the dialogue was dialectical in nature to elicit data focused on their professional challenges of novice teachers' face of school-based professional development challenges they face in their professional journeys. using the semi-structured interviews Bashir, Afzal & Azeem, (2008). Again, Bashir, Afzal, & Azeem, (2008) highlight the importance of a conversation between the researchers and the participants to understand the novice teachers' life worlds of professional development. Thus, through dialectical process the researchers can discover subjective narratives of the participants with regards to their work situations, collegiality, professional cursory and hopes.

Berniker and McNabb, (2006) refer to ethics as prescribed standards or rules within a particular professional organisation, regulating the conduct of its practitioners.   In the context of this research, ethics that were observed in relation to novice teachers were, ensuring that anxiety and distress of novice teachers' is not unnecessarily aroused, that they are not being exploited, their participation was anonymous, their dignity was upheld, ensuring that the publication of the findings of this research study are not falsified, informed consent agreements from participants, the purpose of the research were stated,

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings in this research study was done by peer review process where one researcher checked whether the reported findings in the study correlates with what the novice teachers alluded to (Newton, Rothlingova, Gutteridge, LeMarchand & Raphael, 2012; Richards & Schwartz, 2002). Again, trustworthiness was ensured by the degree of consistency which was assigned to the same category by the two researchers at different occasions (Bulpitt & Martin, 2010). Lastly, the use of intext referencing by means of

literature review was used to establish similar of different patterns from previous study in the context of the current study.

The responses from the together with evidence collected through a semi-structured interview and were thematically analysed into categories that elaborated on and responded to the research question posed. Data categorized into themes are now discussed in the section that follows.

6. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The overall finding of the newly qualified teachers' perceptions of the challenges they face of their professional development experience were noted as being, lack of opportunities, the high cost of training, external professional overload and sustaining changes to professional development.

Theme 1: Lack of opportunities

All the participants agreed that their professional development experiences had a positive impact on their teaching practice. They also identified professional dialogue and professional learning communities (PLC) as important forms of professional development where they can share best practices with each other. However, the participants raised some concerns that they had, for example the lack of opportunities to engage in such activities in the school being studied (Krishnaveni & Anitha, 2007). The participants aimed that they had problem finding suitable times to formally meet and discuss issues related to their practice with their colleagues. As one participant pointed out:

"The PLC, it was scheduled once every fortnight, but things crowded in. But when we had it and being quite focused on it and keeping to the timetable, it has been quite helpful. But it's just that. Again, in schools, things crowded out but when we had it, it was really useful"

The participants further highlighted some of the barriers identified as limiting the opportunities available for teachers to engage in more school-based professional development. The biggest barrier identified is time. This is evident from the following quotes:

"It's still challenging because you still got to be in your own classroom unless you can get somebody to look after your class to do that. So, that's quite difficult"

The school contexts in South Africa, such as, overcrowded classrooms are one the many factors that might inhibit a systematic novice teachers' professional development. Another factor is the increasing demand on schools to excel academically, 'leaving no child behind'. Ono & Ferreira, (2010), Sockett, (1993); Diko & Letseka, (2009), point that the dynamics of the school system context such as low morale among teachers as well as reluctance of the teachers' labour

unions be a waste of time for novice teachers to have a proper focus on the professional development.

Theme 2: The high cost

The participants were aware of their specific professional development needs. As they feel that their professional development experiences failed to address their need or their students' needs, some of the participants have made it an effort to fill that gap elsewhere. This is evident from the teachers' comments that they made the effort to seek some forms of personal professional development in the areas they need to help them do their jobs better.

Some of them also expressed their intention to apply for study award to pursue postgraduate qualification while some other participants mentioned the high cost of having professional development that addressed the issues that they have with their teaching practice. It became very clear that the cost of having professional development that addresses their specific needs had impeded them from having such experience.

"Unlike the GDE Bursaries or the study grants, it's very carefully weighed up because of the cost. Since our money situation is quite critical, so I'm always conscious of that. So, I haven't been on many courses lately because of the money consideration. It can be quite a barrier too"

However, stress arises when the teachers commit themselves into some form of professional development own their own. The teachers relate that they are often faced with various obstacles during the professional learning undertaken. Among the most common obstacle faced by the teachers is the fact that they struggle to find the balance between work and their studies. In one study Gurevich, Stein and Gorev, (2017) highlight that novice teachers struggle to integrate their professional development with their teaching profession when there are rapid changes in the curriculum. For example, Geldenhys,& Oosthuizen, 2015, Gurevich and Stein, 2017 alert that novice teachers might face challenges to use teaching technological devices if the learners they teach do not have access to those tools as well as lack management support to avail the resources needed to motivate novice teachers to maintain their professional development.

Theme 3: External professional development overload

Another factor identified to have influenced the teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of their professional development experiences is amount of time given to assimilate the new knowledge into their teaching practice. A participant for example pointed out that she was expected to embed the new knowledge gained into her practice within a short period of time. She said:

"Sometimes I feel like I don't have the time to actually consolidate the knowledge, or consolidate my new learning"

Similarly, other participants also agreed that professional development that is longer in duration would allow teachers more time to practice and to have the new knowledge embedded into their practice.

"I think that it is really important when you do some new learning that you actually go away and put it into practice. It is about being downloaded with more stuff to try and more stuff to do. You don't get time to get that into your practice and that can be quite frustrating"
The participants interviewed also expressed their frustration with some professional development programmes that they had experienced which they believed were being hastily done to them. A participant said:

"The frustration is often over some ideas that you want to put in place and you don't have the time to get it embedded in your practice"

The comment made by these participants indicated that time is an important determinant to successful professional development. Adequate time to practice the new knowledge and skill learned will result to sustained change in teaching practice. As sustainability is perceived to be the essence of effective professional development for teachers,

The participants reported that they are currently being overloaded with various external professional development initiatives. This is evident from the following quotes:

"We have been bombarded by tremendous amount of external PD because we have been a school that has a low quintile rating... I think there are many low quintile schools just like us, coming from learners from low-socio economic situation that we are all in the same boat. We are doing the best we can. We need the support, but the PD has been packaged and dumped on schools"

"Making sure we have bits of everything, it gets too sort of haphazard. We need a good block. If it's just literacy and that's all we do, and it's scheduled and there is a real focus and you sort of immersed in it"

Moreover, the participants expressed their frustration of being overloaded with professional development. The following comment is a representative of the participants' view of the issue:

..." the fact that you might be doing or receiving some PD and get lots of ideas and strategies that you would like to try. But if you don't have the time to consolidate it and to go and try it before you are given a whole new package of strategies, you sort of become overwhelmed"

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Botha and Rens, (2018), Uusiautti, Harjula, Pennanen and Määttä, (2014) warn that in the implementation of novice teachers' professional development programmes policy makers must be aware of the culture shock novice teachers are faced with in the real teaching environment. For example, Botha and Rens, (2018) state that extended responsibilities on novice teachers might exert more pressure and stress on their staring teaching careers. The following theme is from the participants on sustenance of their professional development in teaching.

Theme 4: Sustaining changes to teaching practice

Another finding on the challenges or difficulties faced by the teachers is the time factor. As reported earlier in the finding from the above-mentioned theme, the participants believed insufficient amount of time given to them as the key factor that affects their ability to sustain changes to their teaching practice.

"One thing I find with PD is that sometimes we don't get time to consolidate it. Yes, we have done it. We might try bits and pieces of it, but we don't seem to have a review later down the line to see how it's working for us"

The participants also mentioned the lack of continuity and follow-up in the review process which affected their ability to sustain changes to their teaching practice.

"I like the sort of reviewing how we are going to sustain the changes over a period of longer time too. Not just of one quick thing. There were very big gaps. So, we have a bit of PD and then there would be a big gap, then have a bit of PD and then another big gap. The gaps were too long that you lost momentum. You get all enthusiastic and you want to transfer that into your practice, but you sort of over time lost your momentum. You lost engagement because there was that lack of continuity"

The above-mentioned except suggests their professional development goals should be designed in way that addresses their specific needs. The failure to address teacher specific pedagogical need might render the professional development programme futile and frustration as well lost of time. Musanti and Pence, (2010), found that continuous teacher professional development

is likely not to be sustained if teachers feel that their needs are not aligned to the professional development programme. Another view is shared by Bernadine, (2019) reflecting that teachers become reluctant to engage in their teacher professional development programmes if they are not empowered to have a greater say on how they want to be assisted in their professional journeys.

7. CONCLUSION

Novice teachers participating in this research study highlighted that it would be more effective if they were to experience one professional development at one time. Providing early entrant teachers with adequate time to consolidate their new knowledge into practice and to apply it into the classroom is said to be more effective and helps to boost teachers' confidence with their own practice. New practices can further be reinforced through professional learning communities where the teachers are encouraged to share their knowledge and experiences with each other and to support their professional learning experience. The novice teachers also stressed that professional development for teachers need to address their specific needs so that the experience becomes more meaningful and not viewed as a burden.

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