



**Experiences of the South African High School classroom:  
A case study of High school English classroom experiences  
of student-teachers of English at a university in KwaZulu-Natal**

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BY

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**September 2016**

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## **ABSTRACT AND KEYWORDS**

The purpose of this study was to understand student teachers' experiences of the high school English classroom, and the impact, if any, of their experiences on their decision to become teachers, especially teachers of English. It is said that the quality of an education system is boosted by the quality of its teachers. Therefore, the purpose of my study is, furthermore to explore if student teachers' perceived ability to function and perform as expected in tertiary studies is informed by their experiences of high school, and if their experiences of high school have anything to do with their decisions to become teachers. The respondents in this study were third year English Major students of the School of Education at a University in KwaZulu-Natal. With its emphasis on experiences, the study utilised a phenomenological framework. Underpinned by an interpretivist paradigm, the study used a qualitative case study method. Data were collected through questionnaires, individual semi-structured interviews and written narrative accounts. This study found that student teachers of English at a university had both negative and positive high school experiences, not just of schooling but of learning English. These experiences were subjective as it was predicated on each individual's unique circumstance and context. Each context was found to be as unique to the individual as it is his/her experience. This study also found a disparity between student teachers' experiences of urban schools and rural/township schools. While most urban schools enjoyed better facilities, quality teachers and teaching, township and rural schools were dilapidated and lacked quality, both in teaching and infrastructure. It also found that these experiences have impacted both positively and negatively on their current learning experiences at the university. The findings revealed that the experiences student teachers had had at high school often prompted them to become teachers. This study therefore concludes that high schools play a vital role in the future life of students, either in

their academic life or in careers. It thus becomes imperative that high schools recognise their impact on students' lives.

Key words: **Learner experiences, Student-teachers, Tertiary Experiences, High school, English language**

## **ACCRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

BICS:	Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills
CALP:	Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency
DBE:	Department of Basic Education
FET:	Further Education and Training
GET:	General Education and Training
LoLT:	Language of Learning and Teaching
OBE:	Outcome Based Education
PGCE:	Post Graduate Certificate in Education
RSA:	Republic of South Africa

## **DEDICATION**

To

My adorable wife, my tigress, my bedrock and my alter ego

Mrs Ifeoma Cecil Deca-Anyanwu

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# CHAPTER ONE:

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

Education, according to Nelson Mandela, is the most powerful weapon with which you can change your world. This implies that education is a great 'equalizer' which closes the gaps that exist between people in order to build a more humane and understanding world order where unemployment, hunger, prejudice and stereotypes are eradicated. To achieve this, it then becomes imperative to look at what happens in our schools, especially high schools, in order to see the possibility of aligning this with the core tenets of education and training.

This dissertation critically discusses education, which according to Bloch (2009), is the key to growing the skills that are needed in changing our world. In buttressing this, he argues that:

Education is about the aspirations and opportunities that young people have. What do they want to make of their lives? Can they think creatively about their future in a rapidly changing world? Can they be the best; do they desire to achieve excellence in everything they do (2009, p.17).

Questions are what experiences are being created for learners in schools and how do these impact or affect their tertiary education by way of discipline choice? How prepared were they before their admission into tertiary studies? Of what importance is language education and how are their choice(s) informed, impacted or affected by the language education given to them at school, bearing in mind the importance of language education on the overall academic, social and mental development of learners? It is mostly bad news, according to Taylor (2006), who notes:

...In South Africa, nearly 80% of schools provide education of such poor quality that they constitute a very significant obstacle to social and economic development, while denying the majority of poor children full citizenship (2006, p.73).

This dissertation will focus on the high school experiences of student teachers of English. It is aimed at ascertaining the effect, if any, that high school has on learners who are currently in their third year of four, of studying to be educators. Many schools have been found to give learners worthy education and experiences in high school while others are not enhancing learners' experiences and preparing them for the world of work or higher learning.

This convulsion of experience inherent in our school system creates a ripple effect as it leaves students with varying experiences that affect or impact on their later choices in life. These experiences go a long way in deciding the career path that these learners choose after leaving high school. The reasons behind this choice and how learners' experiences affect their ability to stay with this choice, are the core subjects of this discourse and hence this study.

The study had to take cognisance of the various policies surrounding teaching in general, and teaching English in particular. The Language Policy in Education (Section 29, 2 of the Constitution (RSA, 1996)) provides for all South Africans "the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions where that education is reasonably 'practicable'". So it is the basic right of learners to be taught in a language as prescribed by the Constitution and enshrined in the curriculum. It is non-negotiable and sacrosanct that learners are taught in a language which is official and as such deemed appropriate, but the manner in which this is done varies from one school to another, thereby creating the variegated and contorted classroom experiences that this work examines.

The Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) document for English language, the document that underpins the teaching and learning of English in schools, establishes among other things, that:

Language is a tool for thought and communication. It is also a cultural and aesthetic means commonly shared among a people to make sense of the world they live in. Learning to use language effectively enables learners to acquire knowledge, to express their identity, feelings and ideas, to interact with others and to manage their world (2011, p.11).

It becomes imperative then that the teaching of language must not only be prioritised but effectively cascaded to bring about positive outcomes, not only in the English classroom but in the general school environment. The teaching and understanding of the English language becomes paramount not only as the language of teaching and learning but also as a language of assessment in other subjects, except other languages. The understanding improves classroom ability, school experience and the desire for further education.

## **1.2 Rationale and Motivation**

The classroom has always been a fascinating place for me and the many years of teaching high school learners in Nigeria and South Africa has kept me abreast of the challenges and realities inherent in the classroom. Being a language teacher made it possible for me to meet as many learners as there are in the school. This is because English, being a compulsory subject, is thus compulsory for every learner, who is expected to pass it, to be able to be promoted to the next grade.

In my years as a teacher, I have seen learners go through different experiences, some self-inflicted, others as a result of the dynamics in schooling and schooling contexts. These dynamics bordered around issues of curriculum, pedagogy, infrastructure and classroom management. It was also about relationships between

learners and teachers, learners and learners, and learners and the whole school system.

The researcher also draws for personal high school experiences which may have impacted on his tertiary experiences and classroom practices. As a contract tutor teaching some English Education classes at a School of Education, my experiences in my lecture room while teaching some classes in English Education, is that students' classroom participation, ability to understand content, and demonstration of understanding of content, are varied. While some students do not have any difficulty with participation, understanding and demonstration of content, others struggle. This is thus the premise on which this study is conceived. It is aimed at finding out if students' current experiences of studying English in the School of Education and their decision to become teachers are affected by their high school experiences.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to understand student teachers' experiences of the high school English classroom, and the impact, if any, of their experiences on their decision to become teachers, especially teachers of English. It is said that the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers. So, further, my purpose is also to explore if student teachers' perceived ability to function and perform as expected in tertiary studies is helped by their experiences of high school and whether their experiences of high school have anything to do with their decision to become teachers.

The difficulties or otherwise that student teachers currently face in their academic pursuit cannot be completely dealt with without understanding their previous experiences to ascertain the root causes, hence my study which is aimed at highlighting these experiences with the hope of sustaining positive approaches while discouraging negative methods that hinder progress. This study may be of

interest, not only to independent stakeholders involved in education, but also to the Department of Education, parents and students.

#### **1.4 Location of the Study**

The study will be located in a School of Education at a university in KwaZulu-Natal. The campus where the study is located, is the primary site for teacher education. It is situated in Pinetown and provides initial and in-service teacher education and offers university higher degrees in a wide range of specialisations in education.

#### **1.4 Contextualising the South African Classroom**

South Africa has a chequered apartheid history which grossly affected education and how it was accessed by different race groups. Schools in South Africa are divided into public and private, and the public schools are sub-divided into fee paying and non-fee paying schools. According to Spaul (2015, p.7):

Of the 25,741 schools in South Africa, only 1,135 are former model C schools and 1,168 are independent (private schools) and they together account for only 11% of the total number of schools. Most of the former model C schools which were privileged white schools during apartheid, fall under the former as they are completely or partially funded by fees which learners are expected to pay.

Spaul (2015) further asserts that:

No fee paying schools make up the vast majority of schools in South Africa, ranging from 66% to 88% of schools and almost all of them are dysfunctional, because they do not impart the knowledge, skills and values needed to succeed in life. There are at least ten independent, nationally representative surveys attesting to this.



What this implies is that the poorer schools are performing poorly and the richer schools performing better, which means that experiences in this context could be attributed to economic class differences, giving the poor negative experiences which they might want to correct, and the rich will have positive experiences which they would want to replicate. Spaul (2015) believes that it is wrong for the quality of education to be determined by parental wealth. Rather, there should be an urgent need to find ways of improving the quality of the 88% of schools that are free. This was echoed by Bernstein (2011) and Bertram, Mthiyane and Mukeredzi (2013) when they highlighted the challenges in the supply of qualified and competent teachers and the plight of so many schools which suffer because of large numbers of under- and unqualified teachers.

The breaking up of schools into five quintile groups from fee paying to non-fee paying has been criticised by many practitioners. These quintiles are selected based on whether the schools can generate funds for themselves without much dependence on government for funding. This entails that schools are categorised based on the wealth they can generate which can enhance the schools' ability to procure the needed funds to run independently. This is one of the many problems that affect education in South Africa.

South Africa is a nation of diverse people and cultures, with nearly 52 million people (Statistics South Africa, 2013) and a wide variety of cultures, languages and religious beliefs. Nearly 25 languages are used in South Africa on a daily basis by more than 50 million people (Statistics South Africa, 2003). The majority of South Africans, almost 80% of the population, use an African language as their home language. The distribution of languages is as follows: English 8%, Afrikaans 13%, African languages 78% and others 1% (Statistics South Africa, 2003).

In the South African schooling context, language education is divided into two, namely home language and additional languages. Home language refers to the language that is first acquired by learners and spoken most frequently at home by a learner (Department of Basic Education, 2011). Many South African schools do not offer the home languages of some or all of the enrolled learners but have rather one or two languages offered at home language (DBE, 2011, p.10). The definition of home language above clearly creates a demarcation between home language and mother tongue, where home language speaks of a language which a learner is very familiar with from home as against the language group in which a learner historically belongs to from birth. This means that it is possible for a learner to have IsiZulu as mother tongue and English as home language. For the sake of this research, the researcher will stick to this definition of home language as our point of departure. It is imperative to note that home language and first additional language refer to the proficiency levels at which a language is offered and not the native (home) or acquired (additional) languages (DBE, 2011).

Additional languages are other languages one learns in addition to the home language (DBE, 2011). Learners are allowed to take their home language and at least one additional language. In both home and first additional language, learners are expected to be taught and assessed in listening and speaking, writing and presenting, reading and viewing and in language structure. The mechanism for this is clearly articulated in the CAPS document. The National Curriculum Statement (NCS, 2010), which is the curriculum that guides teaching and learning, has made the same prescription for learners, whether they are in a private or public school, fee or no-fee school, or are home language speaker or taking an additional language. That prescription is geared towards ‘equipping learners, irrespective of their socio-economic background, race, gender, physical ability or intellectual ability, with knowledge, skills and values necessary for self-fulfilment and meaningful participation in society as citizens of a free country’ (DBE, 2010, p.5).

This is aimed at facilitating the transition of learner to higher education or the work place as the case may be.

Despite languages being offered either as home or first additional language, it is English that is the language of teaching and learning after Grade 3, and Afrikaans for a few other schools. This is provided for in the Constitution and further enforced in the Language Policy in Education (found in section 29, 2 of the Constitution (RSA, 1996)). It is believed in some quarters that the use of English as a medium of instruction is one of the major reasons why so many learners are not able to do well academically no matter how much teachers try to inculcate language proficiency in the school and classroom (Kamwangamalu, 2013).

### **1.5 Overview of Key Studies Dealing with the Topic**

While I draw on many studies (as seen in Chapter 2), the following are the key studies which underpin my study.

My study looks into students' high school experiences. Central to such experiences are factors surrounding school management and environment and teacher quality and how such quality promotes or undermines academic progress of learners especially in South African high schools (Statistics South Africa, 2006; Bloch, 2009; Henning & Gravett, 2012). Welch (2002) believes the South African apartheid history disadvantaged some teachers as their training was punctuated by lack of quality and content. Clarke (2003) includes lack of professionalism among teachers, lack of infrastructure and teachers' incompetence among the many ills that create negative experiences in schools, as learners benefit more from teachers whose quality and content knowledge are not in doubt (Rivkin et al., 2005; Bloch, 2009). This is in line with the position of Rivkin, Hanushek and Kain (2005) who claim that a poor child who has a high quality teacher can be transformed in just

five consecutive years. While lack of infrastructure militates against quality education and teaching, it does not make it impossible (Orland, 2001). Kamwamgamalu (2003) and Flemming (1995) agree that creating a dynamic language classroom through innovation, not just of infrastructure, but of personnel, goes a long way in improving outcomes for both teachers and students. This position is corroborated by Valenzuela (1999) who believes teachers are a vital component of schooling and the organisation of schooling is important in examining how learners are schooled.

In schools, learner experience is also affected by poor English language skills which create a barrier (Jupp & York, 1995), and this becomes an impediment to learner progress, as highlighted by Carrasquillo et al. (2004), Anderson (2004) and Mgqwashu (2007). Cummins (2000) proposes code switching as a panacea to English language understanding. This helps to create independence in understanding as learners, in many cases, lack self-belief and self-reliance (Nieto, 2000). It is also proposed that it is important to appropriately school black learners in the use and understanding of English, as many black learners see English as a tool, which affects how they receive it and use it in a classroom context (De Kadt et al., 2003). Mgqwashu (1999) and Balfour (2000) agree with this position while buttressing the importance of competent language education in schools. Learners' lack of understanding of English creates room for failure and learners are thus held back in school (Chisholm, 2004), a situation popularly referred to as "gate keeping", where learners are not promoted to the next grade, especially in the Further Education and Training (FET) stage.

Discipline or lack of it can also affect learner experience (Msani, 2007). Ill-discipline is detrimental to not just a learner's academic experience but the learner's overall school experiences (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). For Gordon (1998), schooling is not just about teaching and learning in class, but about inculcating

core tenets and values, which is consistent to Bloch's (2003) position that education is vital to the growing of skills needed in the world.

Knowles and Holt-Reynolds (1991) believe it is vital to study the experiences of student teachers with the aim of improving their current experiences so that they benefit the learners at the schools where they will be employed. This could result in creating positive and life changing experiences for their learners, hence this study.

## **1.6 Research Objectives and Questions**

### **1.6.1 Objectives**

The objectives of this study are:

Objective 1: To understand how student teachers of English at university experienced learning English in the South African high school English classroom.

Objective 2: To ascertain the extent to which student teachers of English at a university in South Africa believe that their experiences of their high school English classrooms played a role in their decisions to become teachers of English.

Objective 3: To determine the extent to which student teachers of English at a university in South Africa believe that their experiences of their high school English classrooms affect their current experiences of studying English.

### **1.6.2 Questions to be Asked**

1. What experiences do student teachers of English at a university have about learning English in South African high school English classrooms?
2. To what extent do student teachers of English at a university in South Africa believe that their experiences of their high school English classrooms played a role in their decisions to become teachers of English?
3. To what extent do student teachers of English at a university in South Africa believe that their experiences of their high school English classrooms affect their current experiences of studying English?

### **1.7 Overview of the Research Process**

For this study, the interpretive paradigm, which aims to understand the subjective world of human experience, was employed. The case study design was used to obtain rich insights into particular individual situations, events, and in this case classrooms, making it a useful tool in my research. My research approach was qualitative, as my aim was not to generalize but to capture the phenomenon as deeply as I was able. Questionnaires, interviews and written narrative accounts were used as means of data collection from a purposive sample of student teachers of English.

### **De-limitations**

The study explores the high school experiences of student teachers who major in English in a university in KwaZulu-Natal. Clearly, the scope of this study and the size of the empirical sample used is far too small to provide sufficient evidence to justify a generalizable position. However, this small scale study presents some preliminary data on student teachers' experiences of high school which precludes other high school experiences of students outside the English department and who

are not within the third year of study. There may be other experiences which might be close to or different from the ones experienced by students within the purview of my study, but those are not the subject of my study even though it can be extrapolated outside my participants and the demography covered by my study.

## **1.8 Organisation of the dissertation**

This study is divided into five chapters. The division of the study into chapters is listed below.

**Chapter One:** This chapter comprises the introduction and explains the background, purpose, and rationale of the study. It also provides an overview of the key studies dealing with the topic, the research process, research objectives and questions, and the delimitation of the study. This chapter provides the background information that frames this study and explains how the dissertation will be organised.

**Chapter Two:** In this chapter the theoretical framework that informs my study is explored. The approach used was Phenomenology, which helped to elaborate on the situation under review and highlight the experiences of the participants in an objective way. Further in this chapter, existing literature is used to sketch the topic of the study and issues around high school experiences, especially as it affects student teachers of English, and how their experiences affect their choice of English as a major and their decisions to become teachers. This draws on the writings of experts within the fields and people who have done related studies to create a link with the study I undertook.

**Chapter Three:** In this chapter the methodology used is under focus. The chapter unpacks the research paradigm, research approach and research design. The

sampling method is explored, the data collection methods are explained and the process involved in the analysis of the data is discussed. Issues of credibility, trustworthiness, rigour, ethics and limitations are also explored here.

**Chapter Four:** This chapter includes the data analysis and discussion. In this chapter the presentation, analysis, interpretation and discussion of the findings are provided in light of the key research questions and the literature reviewed.

**Chapter Five:** This chapter provides the summary of findings and conclusions of the study. It also provides the significance of study, areas for future research and implications of the study for teaching and teachers.



## CHAPTER TWO

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Introduction

The chapter provides a discussion of the theoretical framework that drives the research. Phenomenology was used, which looks at how human's lived experiences, circumstances and interactions are interpreted by those in the situation in order to make genuine sense of their world. I then embarked on the literature review which looked at high school experiences of student teachers, the peculiarity of the South African schooling system and how it contributes to this experience and how or if these experiences informed the decision of these students to be English language teachers. Furthermore, I considered the possibility that these high school experiences may affect student teachers' current studying of English.

#### 2.2 Theoretical Framework

For the purpose of my research, I used phenomenology as a theoretical framework. "The purpose of the phenomenological approach is to illuminate the specific and to identify phenomena through how they are perceived by the actors in a situation" (Lester, 1999, p.1). The aim of phenomenology then is to help convey the experiences of participants in the most objective way possible making sure that biases and prejudices are not being brought into the analyses (Moustakas, 1994). This presupposes that to find out what experiences my participants went through there is no better way to do that than to ask them; they should be the best conveyors of their high school experiences, hence my use of phenomenology. Moustakas (1994, p.1) believes the aim of phenomenology is also, "to determine what the experience means for the people who have had the experience. From there general meanings are derived." My study then critically looks at the high

school experiences of student teachers who major in English with the aim of ascertaining how their experiences may have necessitated their choice of English as a major. This study also looks at juxtaposing their experiences in high school with their current experiences with the aim of drawing a workable parallel that would help ascertain if there is a correlation.

Any manner in which participants can describe their lived experiences can be used to gather data in a phenomenological study. This description is based on 'intersubjectivity' because any person's experience of the world is with and through others (Wilson, 2002, p.3). To this end then, Lester (1999, p.2) submits that the establishment of a good level of rapport and empathy is critical to gaining depth of information, particularly when investigating issues where the participant has a strong personal stake.

This process involves the gathering of information that is both rich and deep mostly used in qualitative research methods; this information is then represented from the perspective of the participant (Lester, 1999). Phenomenology studies experience through the world-view of the participant while taking for granted any assumptions that might impede the authenticity of the information given. To this end, I have used interviews, written narrative accounts and questionnaires as they are capable of bringing out the experiences of the student teachers in my research. It makes it easy for them to narrate their experiences as much as they can remember due to the dynamism in the data collection method. In doing this, the story would not be my story but that of my participants whose experiences are the subject of this study. Moustakas (1994) calls for a focus on the wholeness of experience and a search for essences of experiences while Perreira (as cited in Simon & Goes, 2011) advocates for thoroughness in phenomenological research as the validity of such a study is dependent on methodological congruence which involves rigour and other appropriate procedures.

Further to the discourse, Christensen, Johnson and Turner (as cited in Simon & Goes, 2011) argue that the primary objective of a phenomenological study is to explicate the meaning, structure and essence of the lived experiences of a person or a group of people around a specific phenomenon. The work of the phenomenologist then is to understand human behaviour through the eyes of the participants in the story. My study is aimed at understanding why the students had the experiences they had, how their experiences impacted on their choice to become teachers and also their current experience of studying English at the university. The major challenge for many researchers with phenomenological research is the large quantity of data that it generates, all of which has to be analysed (Lester, 1999).

My research was conducted to describe the experiences of my participants based on their reflections and interpretations of their stories. The questions we raise about persons are shaped not only by “prescientific” encounters with people and on the other, but by notions about them that we have come to accept in the course of our endeavours (Churchill & Wertz, 1985, p.1).

Churchill and Wertz (1985) admit that we are immersed in a world of experience in which the lived is always greater than the known, meaning that we know more than we can tell, presupposing that life both precedes and exceeds our very efforts to grasp it. In as much as I have tried to articulate the experiences of my participants, I might still be unable to capture those experiences in entirety, as they are convoluted, nor would I completely interpret them accurately. Through triangulation, I have tried to make sure the experiences of the participants are exhaustively navigated with the aim of highlighting those that speak to my research which centres on the high school experiences of my participants and what

roles these experiences played in my participants' further education and career choice.

Heidegger (1962, p.17) sees phenomenology as letting that which shows itself be seen by itself which inadvertently speaks to the researcher's posture or leaning towards the phenomenon to be that of "open-minded generosity and non-interference." To achieve this, the researcher would need to put aside preconceived notions about a phenomenon either in his capacity as a person who has had the same or similar experience(s) as his participants, or due to personal biases so as to allow him/her to experience first-hand the process of discovery of the phenomenon through direct contact or intuition. The researcher's personal bias and circumstance should not affect the outcome of the research or interpretation of data. My experiences should not interfere with the experiences of my participants even when they are similar or diverge as my study speaks to my participants' experiences rather than mine.

To do this, I have employed different data collection methods in order not to allow for intrusion of personal biases or be prejudiced by my participants' accounts of events. There should not be expectations on my side regarding outcomes to make sure my expectations come out of the data and its analysis. It is almost impossible to completely suspend all of one's assumptions because one draws upon language that is latent with many implicit assumptions, but the researcher is expected to let his/her conceptuality be informed by the phenomenon rather than dictating based on assumptions and preconceptions (Heidegger, 1962).

The above position notwithstanding, Churchill and Wertz argue: "bracketing or putting aside of preconceptions does not mean, however that what has thus been 'placed in abeyance' is forgotten, let alone denied" (1985, p.5). The researcher remains focused on the data from the outset from the point of view of general

guiding notions. However it does not aim to classify or explain or compress the experience into categories already provided by other disciplines; it aims rather to suspend opinion (the phenomenological epochè) which leads from a world of redefinition to a design of reality based on recognition of truth (Mancuso & Tonelli, 2014). In addition, it aims to curb the arbitrariness of the personal experience through recourse to reason as a fundamental ideal. The intention of phenomenology is to shed light on the subject so that it can manifest itself by itself and show us how it is (the Greek term “*phainomai*”, from which ‘phenomenon’ is derived means coming to light, to manifest) and that leads to the ultimate truth (Mancuso & Tonelli, 2014).

The phenomenological method is empirical and as such refers to the kind of evidence which is subsumed in experience; it apprehends the object of its research in a direct, concrete, face-to-face way, which reaches and possesses what actually exists in its own fullness (Churchill & Wertz, 1985).

### **2.2.1. Intentionality**

Husserl enacted the concept of ‘intentionality’ which is aimed at explaining the consciousness at the root of lived experiences including perception, imagination, expectation and remembering, as well as thinking, feeling and social behaviour (Churchill & Wertz, 1985). It is the intention of my study to understand the reasons behind my participants’ experiences and how they interpreted those experiences whether in high school or in their current study. Humans have varying ways of relating to their environment as perceiving involves a perceiver relating to a perceived and seeing is a function of what one is looking for. This concept does not imply that all modes of experiences are lived in a very clear explicit way; on the contrary, it emphasizes the vagueness of much of the individual’s relations with society as multi-coloured, multi-faceted and arbitrary as well (Churchill & Wertz, 1985).

### **2.2.2. The Life World**

We often fail to notice much of our everyday experience because it has become so commonplace to us. We simply take it for granted. A phenomenological study can help us to see that which surrounds us with renewed awareness (Cohen, 1987 as cited in Munhall, 1994). The world is an ever-changing place for every individual and as we move from perception to existential realities we find that the perceived is a function of both the world as given and the person as an illuminating presence to the world (Churchill & Wertz, 1985). Phenomenology differs from almost every other science in that it attempts to gain insightful descriptions of the way we experience the world. Experiences had by individuals are always affected by context. The role played by context then changes the dynamics of not just the experiences but how they are internalised and interpreted. According to van Manen, phenomenology "offers us the possibility of plausible insight which brings us more contact with the world" (Van Manen, 1984. Pp. 37-38).

The world of everyday life then is a personal world that differs for each individual even when they share common social structures, as such is their experience and their interpretation of their experience. Each person's world is socially constructed and one of the ways he/she interrogates meaning in his/her world is through language, that is a system of meaning shared by many (Churchill & Wertz, 1985).

A faithful interrogation of any human experience shows that it is not an isolated event, but is, according to its immanent structure, a moment of the ongoing relation between a whole "personality" and the "world". This larger order unity outside of which no single human activity can be understood is generally referred to by phenomenologists as "the real world" (Churchill & Wertz 1985 p.14). It is important to note, as Spiegelburg (1983) argues, that phenomenological analysis

is “analysis of the phenomena themselves, not expressions that refer to them” and his view is corroborated by Churchill and Wertz (1985, p.4). The subject’s description functions as a medium through which, as the meanings of the subject’s experience begin to resonate within the researcher’s own experience, the researcher gains access to the world of the subject and at the same time grasps this world as a function of the subject’s presence, or intentionality. How each individual participant makes sense of his/her experiences will be personal as well as the understanding and interpretation of the same.

Phenomenological approaches are based on a paradigm of personal knowledge and subjectivity (Lester, 1999) and this notion lends credence to the importance of personal perspective and interpretation to any research in which phenomenology is employed as a framework. It helps in gaining insight into people’s lived actions and experiences thereby cutting through assumptions taken for granted and also dismisses conventions, and by so doing, allows the emergence of reality specifically buttressed by the players involved in the discourse under scrutiny. The phenomenological method is empirical in that it includes that type of evidence that is given through experience where the researcher allows the phenomenon to appear concretely in its own self-givenness and then proceeds to reflect on and describe its appearance as best he/she can without the intermediacy of theories and hypotheses (Churchill & Wertz, 1985). Qualitative research hinges so much on “verifiability” which looks at the extent to which another researcher will arrive at the same conclusion were he/she to use the same standard and paradigm as another previously used, and as such agrees with proposed insights as possibilities of interpretation that illuminate discussions under study (Churchill & Wertz, 1985).

### **2.3 Review of Literature**

For many decades, the process of becoming a teacher has been extensively studied and discussed in the scientific and academic community worldwide. The richness and complexity of this phenomenon has generated much discussion and debates (Michail & Anastasiou, 2010; Lachat, 2001). According to Henning and Gravett (2012) most teachers would have a tertiary and a professional qualification before they start to work as teachers but that rarely happen in our context, as teachers' qualification most times are not linked to the subject which they teach.

However, that is not the case in many South African schools (Bertram, Mthiyane & Mukeredzi, 2013). This situation has created room for a convoluted student classroom experience aided in no small measure by the apartheid history, where teachers across races received different teacher training (Welch, 2002) and to a larger extent by issues of resources and management which bedevil South African public schools (Bloch, 2009). In the context of my study, I cannot fail to highlight the multi-ethnic, multi-racial and highly diverse nature of most South African classrooms and the fact that teachers set the mark for success or failure, as corroborated by Nieto (2000, p.43) who opines that: “students perform according to the expectations of their teacher.”

The onus of creating a conducive and all-inclusive environment for learning falls on teachers despite the evident complexities towards its achievement. Teachers as classroom managers cannot shy away from this task. The classroom should be guided by the curriculum into becoming a place where teacher and student come to know each other as they explore a reality outside of themselves, their local community or perhaps a faraway place (Silin, 2010) into what Wenger (1998) calls “belonging”; where teacher and student begin to be incorporated into a wider frame of discourse. Student teachers are not excluded from this cacophony of practical and ideological mismatch in our present-day schooling vis-a-vis teacher education.



Galton, Steward, Hargreaves, Page and Pell (2009) regard perception of ability as the motivating factor towards students' desire or apathy towards hard work and success in a given task or subject. Hargreaves (as cited in Galton et al., 2009) argues that the way this perception is managed, creates an impression of subtle inclusion or alienation, and "alienated pupils are supremely indifferent to most school lessons and regard the school day as an excellent opportunity for social interaction with friends" (2009, p.17).

It is believed that early personal histories in education are strong influences on the thinking and practices of student teachers (Knowles & Holt-Reynolds, 1991). Walkington (2005) corroborates the argument that the kinds of beliefs and experiences that students bring to the teacher education course provide a context to discuss ways to enhance the learning for them and for the system. Valenzuela (1999) argues that it is important to examine how students are schooled rather than focusing only on how they learn, because the organisation of schooling can be just as consequential to their academic progress as pedagogy. The time spent by teachers in helping students find their voice and play a role in their education will be a key to unlocking their potential.

Walkington (2005) argues for close collaboration between high schools and universities, as such collaboration could help in improving the quality of what happens in high schools. When school experiences are viewed through the eyes of student teachers, it helps everyone involved to come to a clear understanding of "the personalized and contextualized journey of learning" (Walkington, 2005, p.4) and this can further highlight most of what is wrong or right with our educational system. At the core of a student's desire to become a teacher are experiences and what Walkington (2005) calls "core beliefs" which the student brings to the situation. It then becomes important for the university and the

providers of in-school experiences to acknowledge these beliefs as part of the learning process. These beliefs are the link between current and future learning, the basis for challenging and changing ideas (Walkington, 2005).

At university, student teachers are challenged to look at education in different ways. They are introduced to the “groundwork” of teaching, and they are encouraged to question, find alternatives and to reflect. In the professional experience components of the course, they are expected to keep interrogating practice through immersion in the school, mastering methodology and content, learning about teaching and themselves as teachers, as well as learning to teach (Walkington, 2005). This fact also enhances how they translate or transmit their early experiences into tools for further education for themselves and others. These belief systems, in turn, work through the lens of past memory, as they are translated into teacher practice, with an eye on what happens in the classroom.

Loughran (2006) admits that students sometimes do things they feel they need to do to fit in, even if it is contrary to that which they would prefer to do. However, they (students) argue that in doing so they discover alternative identities and learn more about themselves. In an interview conducted by Eick and Reed (2001) on perceptions of her high school classroom, Sheily (pseudonym) noted that she learned best by observation and concept mapping rather than understanding of historical facts like in history. She later captures her ideal classroom by noting that she learned most when her teacher made information accessible and when they were doing things as compared to when teachers were giving them information or teaching. Eick and Reed (2001) argue that a vividly remembered positive role model, positive and negative classroom experiences, and a personal need to learn through inquiry and constructivist practices all informed Sheily’s identity as a beginning teacher. “These experiences, as part of her personal

history, all supported her image as an inquiry-based teacher” (Eick & Reed, 2001, p.8).

Student teachers bring their belief systems to their practice during student teaching. However, they have little or no teaching experience or identification with the role of a teacher to shape their belief system. They bring a professional image of their ideal self as teacher that is created from past experiences as student (Kagan, 1992; Knowles, 1992). These images, originating in lived experience, are founded on personal beliefs, values and fantasized views of self as teacher (Hawkey, 1996; Helms, 1998). This socially constructed self or identity performs the role of teacher as an extension of past biography within contextual expectations from all parties (Branaman, 1997).

Further to this discourse is the fact that student teachers can, through recourse to experiences, employ chosen practices and more effectively negotiate the contextual difficulties that arise in the classroom environment. Student teachers with weaker role identities lack a consistent vision of their image as teacher. When faced with contextual difficulties in the classroom, they fall back on remembered patterns of teaching,

“A strong teacher role identity, in practical terms, means that the individual has a much larger repertoire of appropriate and well thought out teacher actions on which to fall back; an accumulation of countless hours observing positive role models and reflection upon strategies that best suit their personality and perceived needs” (Knowles, 1992, p. 136).

A study of immigrant language learners involving five students in Canada was conducted in the early 1990s over a twelve-month period with the aim of investigating the relationship between identity and language learning, focusing on

language learning in the home, work place and school. It was found that students react differently to the same classroom situation (Norton, 2000). This is a result of what Norton (2000) calls “participation as against non-participation”. The students had different expectations of non-participation, imagined communities and the language classroom outside a formal language class because of their unique experiences of natural language learning outside the classroom. They looked to the formal language classroom to complement the kind of learning that took place in other sites. Therefore students who come into the classroom with specific language needs look to the formal language classroom to complement the kind of learning that took place in other sites (Norton, 2000).

Even though past experiences play a huge role in student teachers’ resolve to become teachers, there are factors like motivation and knowledge/expertise which might also be influential to this decision. According to some authors such as Caires and Almeida (2005), Korthagen (2004), Lamote and Engels (2010) and Timmerman (2009), deep and holistic understanding of this process may be compromised by the frequent disregard of its phenomenological and idiosyncratic aspects: “Who” are these teacher candidates (their educational background, school biography/early school experiences, reasons for choosing the teaching profession)? My study will be geared towards answering some of these pertinent questions. Early childhood experiences, teacher role models, family and the environment are biographical elements that may contribute to the process of professional identity formation (Sugrue, 1997).

In research conducted in Grade 4 classes in three urban primary schools in a large South African city, Vandeyar and Killen (2006) found that black learners were not treated as citizens with cultural capital as they were expected to assimilate into the predominantly white culture of schools in which they studied (Soudien, Carrim & Sayed as cited in Vandeyar & Killen, 2006). The research was reduced

to seven key areas which included seating arrangements in the class, language, teacher interactions with learners from other cultural backgrounds, body language of teacher, non-academic related interactions, responsibility and leadership roles and belittling the culture of some learners. They surmised that the model being applied in South African schools is basically desegregation, which is mechanical as instead of bringing together members of different groups it merely tolerates them (Vandeyar & Killen, 2006).

This runs afoul of integration, which implied “going beyond creating physical proximity and headcounts, to interrogating the quality of contact, personal attitudes and institutional arrangements” (Vandeyar & Killen, 2006, p.10). This is important to my study as the multi-lingual and multi-racial nature of most South African teachers and students have added to the multi-faceted nature of classroom experience evident in present day South Africa. To what extent this diversity exacerbates or alleviates these experiences either negatively or positively and the extent to which these experiences can be extrapolated to their decision to become teachers and their current English experience will be a subject of my interrogation in this study.

The South African constitution enforced a Language Policy in Education found in section 29, 2 of the Constitution (RSA, 1996), which provides for all South Africans “the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions where that education is reasonably ‘practicable.’” Looking at the hours allocated to home language from Grade R to Grade 3 you would find that learners whose home language is English seem to have an advantage as they will seamlessly move into Grade 4 where English is the language of teaching and learning. This then means that schools where learners’ home language is not English need to do more to make sure their learners are given quality education especially in English and through the use of English. The

question of being “practicable” becomes contentious as there are no genuine barometers to measure the practicability of language study and education from one school to the other. It is believed in some corners that the use of English as a medium of instruction is the genesis of why so many learners are not able to do well academically no matter how much teachers try to inculcate language proficiency in the school and classroom. They argue that this situation creates a lopsided classroom that favours some at the detriment of others. Kamwangamalu (2003) observes that this has been more so because decisions about language often lead to benefits for some and loss of privilege, status and rights for others. Kamwangamalu (2003) further states that the decisions that are often made relating to language in most cases are political.

### **2.3.1 Teaching English in High School**

In teaching English emphasis should be placed on creating a platform that improves listening, speaking, reading, viewing and writing as this creates competency to achieve what Cummins (2003) calls CALP (cognitive and language proficiency), which enhances competence in language usage and syntax, as against BICS (basic interpersonal communication skills) which one imbibes by being part of a language community. The manner in which language is taught in schools determines the percentage of students who are able to be competent in the language and use it in other subjects being offered at school. The reality is that so many schools, especially rural schools and non-fee paying schools, lack the resources, personnel, competence and infrastructure to bring about a classroom and school where learners are competent in English (Bloch, 2009). Teachers are also of importance in achieving cognitive competence in schools as grammar is not given enough weight (Bloch, 2009), which is part of why children do not speak the English language accurately. Orland (2001) adds that the physical condition of the work place, teachers’ lack of motivation, the tradition of the workplace and

the dynamics among the group of teachers functioning as professional staff are determinants of genuinely well-functioning schools and centres of academic excellence. Carell, Devine and Eskey (1998) added that central to English education is how reading is administered. The manner in which reading is administered and taught go a long way in helping learners improve their understanding and use of the English language.

Mgqwashu (1999) and Balfour (2000) have shown that the teaching and learning of English in Black schools in South Africa still, and for some time, will remain a formidable challenge for the present and future governments. The problem of English teaching is not only exclusive to English but to teaching and schooling in general. Schools that encourage creativity, originality and intolerance to injustice create citizens who can challenge and transform society's hierarchies rather than accept them (Bloch, 2009). Creative ways like group work can go a long way in improving a classroom situation, adding flair and dispelling boredom. Group work is defined as a form of social organisation to prepare for either an examination, classroom assessment or understanding of the topic of the day. It also functions more as a learning support and encouragement for learners than as a help during assignments (Davis, 1993, 2002). Positive learner-centred pedagogy and methodology is not all that is needed for an effective classroom practice, as a whole school-based approach goes a long way in creating efficient and effective school experience. It is not only schools though, but a teacher's integrity, knowledge and competence, as Bloch (2009) argues that so many teachers get away with not being able to teach, while others engage in anti-social and anti-educational activities backed by their unions.

Furthermore, according to Clarence-Fincham (as cited by Mgqwashu, 2008) pupils in Black schools were taught by a second generation of second language speakers who themselves do not have the linguistic resources or the confidence

to take the pupils beyond what the textbook had to say. This affects learners negatively as they do not imbibe the content and quality needed to excel in the highest level. It is again not completely the fault of some schools that they have teachers who are not competent or not qualified whereas private schools and former model C schools (former model C schools are government schools that are administrated and largely funded by a governing body of parents and alumni) can employ who they deem fit. Most non-fee paying schools have teachers thrust upon them. Situations like this exacerbate the crises bedevilling schools and schooling rather than palliating them (Jansen, 2011).

In the long run the inequalities in schools and schooling and funding creates a resultant inequality that threatens the stability and comforts of all young people (Bloch, 2009). Bloch concludes by stating that:

“Most children find that the education system fails them, penalises them and almost rationalises their ongoing exclusion from the fruits of democracy and change. Education seems to reinforce inequality and shuts children out rather than being inclusive in its aspiration and effects” (Bloch, 2009, p.25).

Learning methodology has come into question even though learning cannot be exclusively reduced to outcomes, as according to Barr and Tagg (1995), learning outcomes include whatever students do as a result of a learning experience. Any measurement of students’ products from an educational experience is a measure of learning outcome. The need for a change in university English curriculum becomes imperative then to accommodate the diversity.

As according to Mqgwashu (2008) access to higher education has been made open to every citizen regardless of class or race which makes English departments to re-think the position of language teaching as the need increases and ways in



which language teaching and learning can be cascaded has changed to accommodate broader aims with university education in mind.

The need to implement a curriculum that caters strategically for the language of teaching and learning in both content and methodology is of paramount importance and must be given a priority place in our education system. This will go a long way in closing the gaps currently existing between schools and among individual learners in schools. The improvement of a school and enhancement of the culture of teaching and learning is not only the function of a teacher in the classroom but also of the school leadership, notably the principal.

### **2.3.2 High School Experiences**

For most adolescents, school life is the most important part of their lives, and it significantly influences their psychological well-being in ways such as general emotional health (Liu, 2015). For many students of colour, schools have become sites of resistance, alienation, silence, and ultimately failure (Fine, 1987; Ford & Harris, 1999; Nieto, 1992, 1994; Sola & Bennett, 1985). Dewey (1938) brings the element of continuity into the discourse by arguing that to the extent in which a circumstance or situation lasts, the more chances of people in the situation imbibing elements of those experience and extrapolating the same and even more into their life going forward. Dewey presupposes that every experience both takes up something from those who have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those who come after. As an individual passes from one situation to another, his world, his environment, expands or contracts. He does not find himself living in another world but in a different part or aspect of one and the same world. What he has learned in the way of knowledge and skill in one situation becomes instrumental for growth or otherwise. High school is mostly the start of so many experiences that shape the individual person not only as an adult literate citizen but also as a fully functional person.

Experience also affects ideas, and as Dewey (1938) succinctly puts it:

“Ideas are not fixed and immutable elements of thought but are formed and reformed through experience.....learning is described as a process whereby concepts are derived from and continuously modified by experience. No two thoughts are ever the same, since experience always intervenes” (p.35, p.44).

In Hegel’s phrase, “Any experience that does not violate expectation is not worthy of the name experience” (Kolb, 1984, p.17). This presupposes that experiences cannot be pre-meditated but is about the unfolding of events which are sometimes facilitated by situations and circumstances outside an individual involved in an experience.

In a writing about her high school experiences, Anderson (2013) has this to say:

“Many of us struggle in high school trying to figure out who we are, building relationships, coming into adulthood. It is not easy. It is hectic. It is messy. It is draining and exhausting in every sense of the word. For me? High school was one of the worst experiences of my life. First, the struggle was that I wasn't feeling challenged in my classes. I felt that the teachers on campus were only there so that they could get a decent pay check. I had friends, but I was never in the popular crowd -- I was stuck” (p.4).

This goes to show how some teenage learners navigate through high school and how those experiences make or mar them either as academics or as persons. Anderson (2013) went further to state that she wittingly or unwittingly tried blocking out her high school experiences, by so doing, obfuscating the import and impact of those experiences to her life and development. These experiences are not only exclusive to students but impact those who choose to become teachers, as Hammer and Coffey (2009, p.1) contend: “pre-service teachers arrive with

beliefs and images based on their experiences as students.” It becomes imperative that an understanding of these experiences as varied as they may be should be prioritised by teachers as classroom facilitators because learners also come with their own experience of school and home which is as convoluted as it is dynamic and carries individual meaning for each learner (Warren & Rosebery, 1995).

The importance or effect of teachers to this discussion cannot be overemphasized. There can be no discussion on high school education that will leave out teachers and the Department of Education as they are not only stakeholders but policy makers and policy implementers in the education of children and in creating a worthwhile education experience. Teaching means providing those around you with a continuous example of leadership, social adroitness and moral fortitude (Gordon, 1998) which presupposes that a lack of these core tenets can negatively skew learner experience against the core tenets on which the teaching profession is based. These core tenets (Clarke, 2003) are the building blocks or foundation for stability and positive influences towards achievements, values and goals.

In a comparative study between India and England in which they analysed young children’s perception of their school experience, Kanyal and Cooper (2010), using Bronfenbrenner (1979), capture how, “micro-system (family), meso-systems (preschool and school), macro-systems (economic and social policies) of cultures and societies and the chrono-systems (time) influence conditions for children’s learning” (2010, P.7).

The difference in ideological systems affect how learners perceive or experience their high school years from one country to another or one locality to another in order to fully understand children’s experiences in schools, therefore all these systems need to be considered as integrating with each other (Kanyal & Cooper, 2010).

However, Sheridan (2007) makes a call for a participation that does not leave the child with decision-making but one that involves the child in the decision-making process. This can be applied to learners in a high school situation “to make them feel that they are competent to participate in decision-making processes by communicating with them, asking questions, listening to them in order to encourage them to develop skills and a desire to argue for their standpoints” (Sheridan, 2007, pgs. 204 and 205) and should be the goal of every school and classroom to initiate and sustain. Despite all the effort at bringing about a school experience that is both accommodating and understanding, Kanyal and Cooper (2010) believe not much has been achieved, and their argument is succinctly captured in the following by Clarke who argues that, “While there are observable changes in the classroom in the use of instructional aids and activities during instruction, the essential characteristics of traditional practice, namely rote and repetition, have not changed much” (2003, p.13).

According to van Manen (1995), the teacher teaches with the head and the heart and must *feelingly know* the appropriate thing to do in ever-changing circumstances with children who are organised in groups but who are also unique as individuals. This entails a lot of focus and attentiveness from the teacher as a learner’s supposed experience might be disrupted as a result of the presence or absence of this care and focus. It is the intention of most teachers to provide a viable learning environment but the unintended outcome is a situation where students are at variance with teachers on what is best for them on matters of curriculum, methodology, assessment and classroom management. This creates a very convoluted scenario where the professional relationship between the two suffers making it difficult for communication and understanding to happen. Teachers with all their professional qualifications and experiences are sometimes

unable to predict what their experience will be on a school day and so it is for the learner:

“How else can one explain the awkwardness one feels when the great lesson plan fizzles? When the class seems unresponsive? When you feel that the kids do not seem to like or respect you? When, instead, one feels like a stranger, a fake, an outsider? When one simply does not know how to deal with situations that change before you had a chance to actually realize what was going on?”

(Van Manen, 1995, p.4).

The unpredictable chaos that can break out in class is most times rarely envisaged and this same unpredictability can be situated outside of the classroom between learners and their peers. The mass collection of these whole scenarios build one's experience; sometimes some of these experiences are negative and sometimes they are positive and even the labelling of these experiences are in themselves subjective. Interpretation of experiences are as arbitrary as the individuals involved in the experiences which entails that an individual experience might be perceived or construed differently by individual learners involved in that specific experience, which happens mainly because they come into that circumstance from the backdrop of individual life experiences from home or their previous schools (Bloch, 2009).

Many factors may affect or shape the experiences of a learner, some of these factors include physical impairment or disability, home circumstances, the social environment and the school environment, and then teachers and how teaching and learning is cascaded. In some instances:

“Children come to school hungry, become dull in morning sessions, they are sleepy, they are cold when it is cold, or do not wear warm clothes, they stay with grandparents who depend on a government grant that is

not adequate, their parents are in Durban and some parents have passed away” (Chisholm, 2004, p. 219).

Situations such as these make it difficult not just for the learner to achieve his/her intended purpose of going to school but also for the teacher to achieve his/her intended outcome. Learning can only happen when learners start valuing efficient work habits and desist from having low expectations of their own ability. Every learner brings something to a school situation that can be tapped into for his and others’ benefit. If a teacher is paying attention to the substance of student thinking, students are more likely to pay attention to the substance (Warren & Rosebery, 1995).

Teacher preparation then is key to building worthwhile experiences for learners at school but teachers’ classroom methods have largely been teacher-centred from instructional methods to management strategies. This calls for more emphasis on self-reflection and identity formation which have become very difficult for teachers whether experienced or not. It is even more problematic for novice teachers as studies like Bullough (1991) found among other things suggestions that novice teachers may encounter frustrations that drive them out of teaching. This is in line with a study on African American high school students’ perceptions of their academic identities and college aspirations which found among other things that students suggested that the greatest influence on their college prospects and academic identities were parents and family, teachers and school counsellors and their overall interest in school and college (Howard 2003). It then behoves on teachers to make greater effort in enhancing the experiences learners are exposed to in high school as those affect their continued academic progress.

My work aims to understand the effects of high school experiences of student teachers of English and if their choice of becoming teachers of language is, in any way, affected by those

experiences. This is so as to find out how the positive experiences have helped, and for those with not so good experiences, to ascertain the strategies these student teachers have used in their effort to succeed and move forward despite their chequered academic past amid what Howard (2003) terms: “a plethora of beliefs and practices that say they cannot succeed.”

The importance of teachers to the overall experiences of students cannot be overemphasized as one cannot be separated from the other. So many issues contribute to the adverse experiences some learners experience in high schools despite efforts by all involved to militate against that. One issue in focus is the issue of discipline. The lack of discipline has remained a cog in the wheel of progress in teaching and learning and the methodology used in this regard. Teachers’ verbal hostility or use of disciplinary practices that are particularly punitive and shaming contribute to students’ negative self-image as well as peers’ negative perceptions of the student dynamic which may lead to a vicious cycle that can reinforce symptoms or problematic social relationships in school (Cameron, 2006).

Clarke (2003) believes the issue of ill-discipline among others is one of the many ills within the education system that make it difficult for students to have positive life impacting teaching and school experiences. One of the reasons he deduced for this is teacher-intensive training where teachers are given crash courses to qualify as educators. This doesn’t prepare them well enough to manage learners who come to the classroom with diverse experiences, cultures and traditions. Their classroom practices “consisted of children watching, listening, copying, reading aloud or memorising textbook information” (2003, p.6). These activities were all teacher-centred and based on a “hierarchical relationship between teacher and students characterised by fear and deference” (Clarke, 2003, p.6). Interaction between students was always discouraged. This classroom situation has the

tendency of giving students different experiences that affect their academic future for better or for worse.

Schools have long been viewed traditionally as a centre for the development of democracy and an egalitarian society, an “equalizer” of a sort (Howard, 2003), but that view is fast eroding for a different one that sees schools differently and as unable to fulfil the desire for which learners enrol in the first place. Ford (as cited by Howard, 2003, p.4) has uncovered, “The persistent rate in which many gifted African American students intentionally underachieve because the display of superior academic competence requires the abandonment of their own cultural and ethnic knowledge and integrity.”

His findings are echoed by Kohl (as cited by Howard, 2003, p.4), who reiterates Ford’s research by claiming:

“Many disenfranchised students consciously make the decision to “not learn” in schools when they feel their cultural knowledge and identity are invalidated, disrespected, and not viewed as a conduit to their learning. And to the extent an experience; the revealing accounts of students' resistance to school ethos, curriculum, and teacher attitudes, and the conflicting theories on the purpose and function of schools suggests the need for an insider’s level of school analysis.”

This calls for greater understanding of learners and their background and why their views of schools runs afoul of the norms and standards as enshrined in the constitution through the curriculum. Howard (2003), lending credence to researches elsewhere, highlights the dissonance that exists between schools and learners’ culture as the primary reason for the academic underachievement and social maladjustment of racially diverse students.



In the above study, Ebony, a junior at Brookwillow High, explained that her teachers perceived her as unable to get good results because she was Black and they were perceived as coming from the ghetto and as such incapable of making good grades. She believes her teachers never tried to teach them, never cared and never gave them a chance to show them how good they were, and as such, she gave up trying, as that amounted to nothing (Howard, 2003). Giovanni echoes the same thought as Ebony as he argues that they not being allowed to enrol in regular English class amounted to a very negative racial profiling that made him feel inadequate right from the beginning of high school and made it impossible for him to show his capabilities. Many of the Black learners in this research were bored of school and never felt any need to work beyond the basic minimum their teachers asked of them, as they believed they were discriminated against and already stereotyped because of their background, culture, race, where they live, how they talk, the music they listen to and the way they dress. The bottom line, is according to Giovanni:

“That we have to convince ourselves that we are smart, and that we can go to college, we can own a business, or be whatever we want to be. Once we do that, then we can let all of their negativity bounce right off of us. It's like a big tug of war for our minds. We're pulling on one side, telling ourselves that we are smart, bright” (Cited in Howard, 2003, p.10).

Another student, Ahmad, insists there are problems of discrimination and favouritism in some classes which leaves some students struggling to join in class discussions and learning. He alluded to the manner in which the Black children are not prompted or pushed to the correct answer but are rather dismissed at first trial while their Asian counterparts are encouraged to think differently “out of the box” and sometimes in so doing the students arrive at the answer. There is no time

given to them to try figuring the problem/question out differently. The teacher is patient with Black children as he is with Asian children (Howard, 2003, p.9). This brings to the fore the problems of exclusion as some learners can be excluded from learning by teachers' methodology willy-nilly which entrenches the discourse around the call for more input from stakeholders in order to enhance experiences for learners in high schools.

The context under which teaching and learning happens affects outcome, method and school experience. Experience, according to Dewey, does not go on simply inside a person but rather influences the formation of attitudes, desires and purpose. This presupposes that every genuine experience has an active side which changes to some degree the objective conditions under which experiences operated (Kolb, 1984). So, learners' experiences at each particular time have an effect, not just on their decisions, but also on their preparedness to make their life dreams come true.

Education is eclectic and has never been static, and as such, needs individuals who are flexible enough to move in tandem with the time, and the consequent evolution; education cannot be an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiques and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorise and repeat. This is one of the major malaises with education which Freire (1974) refers to as "the banking concept of education."

"This is a method in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing and storing the deposits. They do, it is true, have the opportunity to become collectors or cataloguers of the things they store. But in the last analysis, it is men themselves who are filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge

in this (at best) misguided system. For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, men cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and reinvention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry men pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (p.58).

This scenario creates a teacher narrator who leads the students to memorize mechanically the narrated content. Worse yet, it turns them into “containers,” into “receptacles” to be “filled” by the teacher. The more completely he fills the receptacles, the better a teacher he is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are. Which means the malleability of students determines their ability content wise, and the teacher’s ability as well. This system, Freire suggests, stifles creativity and confidence (Freire, 1974).

### **2.3.3 Motivation to Become Teachers**

Sinclair (2008) identified ten motivations for becoming a teacher that appeared to be common across studies, genders and even settings. These motivations included: (1) a desire to work with students; (2) a desire to make a difference; (3) teaching as a “calling”; (4) a love of teaching or a particular subject matter; (5) the influence of significant others; (6) the nature of the work; (7) the perceived benefits of being a teacher; (8) a desire for a career change; (9) the perceived ease of entry into the teaching profession; and (10) the social status that accompanies teaching. The result of this survey suggested that pre-service teachers were motivated to enter the teaching profession by both internal (i.e. desire to work with children, intellectual stimulation, desire to make a difference, to be a leader, and personal and professional development) and external (i.e. desire for a career change, job conditions, nature of teaching work, life-fit, and influenced by significant others) motivations (Sinclair, 2008). Other research suggests that

“variations in motivations to teach may exist between different groups of teacher aspirants” (Sinclair et al., 2006, p.1137). Research also suggests that although motivations to teach are likely to change over time “particularly in response to ‘real-life’ teaching experiences” (Sinclair et al., 2006, p.1135), much less is known about how or when entry motivations change (Sinclair et al., 2006) other research delved into the area of gender and gender disparity among those who choose the teaching profession. One research contends that more females than males are attracted to teaching as a profession (Ozturk, 2012). This may not be unrelated to the fact that women as mothers have a closer relationship to their children than males and as such would be keener to work in an environment populated by young people or children.

There is also the issue of attrition or people who are leaving the profession. It is possible that the dissonance between what beginner teachers expect the teaching profession to be and the subsequent reality is the underlying root of attrition. Beginner teachers may choose to leave the profession because their “motivations may be insufficient to sustain their involvement in teacher education or practice” following the “reality check” of real teaching experience (Sinclair et al., 2006, p.1134). This sudden movement or resignation of teachers creates an unnecessary change on the learning and school experience of learners as they may have to get new educators or be without one, as Bloch (2013) pointed out that experienced qualified teachers are either poached from poorer public schools by richer private schools or leave the profession for greener pastures to the detriment of their learners. Reasons for this movement would be a topic for further investigation.

Further research has found that some people may take up a career in the teaching profession for the sake of achieving a degree, as Ejie (2005) observes in a research in Nigeria that a significant percentage of students were simply using teacher’s college as a way into a university degree programme and from there

move on to their preferred career path. Jarvis and Woodrow (2005) agree with this position. In their research it was found that a small minority in the PGCE programme did not intend to teach while the same was found in Australia where students entered teaching to keep their options open (William & Forgasz, 2009). For this group, teaching becomes a ladder to climb to their destined academic desire and not a profession. This goes to show that there are different motivations to the choice of teaching as a profession and sometimes these motivations disappear leading to intended or unintended change of career choice. Kolb (1984) is of the opinion that the work of an educator is not just a job, but multi-faceted, as an educator is not only there to implant new ideas but also to dispose of or modify old ones.

It is obvious that learners' experiences cannot be divorced from their teachers. The thought and actions of teachers help in creating a school and classroom experience on which this research is based (Pajaras, 1992). The lack of acknowledgement and appropriation of universal best practices of instructions in the classroom have made it imperative that students have different experiences as teachers and are not as receptive to change as one would expect (Clarke, 1995).

For Clarke (2003, p. 3), "pedagogy which includes the way in which teachers think and act differ across work culture and classroom", making it possible for variation in experiences. Clarke (1995) identifies several variations between methodology and practice of teachers located in different parts of the world. These variations include, among others, the goals that teachers have for learning, approach towards the curriculum, textbooks and manner of inculcating knowledge and interacting with students. Teachers' professional practice is not so much acquired or informed by pre-service training but also by their lived and life-long experience in a specific community, culture and classroom (Clarke, 2003). These experiences are used then in the construction of classroom thinking and action.

There is a belief that experience is the best teacher and the best teachers are those who have been there and have myriads of experiences to tap from (Yildirim, 2004), but this assertion doesn't in any way relegate the importance of professional qualification.

“The studies suggest that in addition to a variety of factors related to the economic, political and demographic context that fuel this difference, teacher thinking and action, whether tacit or explicit, is founded and constructed by the culture that surrounds teachings” (Clarke, 2003, p.3).

This entails that, in addition to their professional knowledge usually acquired during pre-service training, teachers use their lived and life-long experience in a specific community and culture to construct their thinking and actions in the classroom. The models they imbibe were developed not only in professional training but also through being a child, student and parent in a particular culture (Clarke, 2003). The work of teaching is further increased by the fact that learning as a continuous process grounded in experience has educational implications; it implies that all learning is relearning. Everyone enters every learning situation with more or less articulate ideas about the topic at hand (Kolb, 1984). In essence teachers play an invaluable role in creating classroom and school experiences that learners are forced to imbibe willy-nilly, not only are teachers major contributors, learners themselves, their peers and the social context all contribute in creating the classroom and school experience which is at the heart of my research.

### **2.3.4 Effect of High School Experiences on Further Training and Schooling Choices**

High school impacts on further training in many ways (Pantages & Creedon, 1975). Research has found that Americans with low socio-economic status are less likely to complete high school, enrol in college and obtain a post-secondary credential than their middle or higher socio-economic status peers (U.S. Department of Education, 2003), which presupposes that context affects output; in this case, learners' participation and retention in the tertiary institution. To keep learners at university then and to improve their experiences, efforts must be made to start early to educate and inform them.

While there are various issues that militate against a student's success, participation and retention in the university, social stratification is important. Boudon (1974) and Breen and Goldthorpe (1997) distinguished between "primary" and "secondary" social stratification and its effects. According to him while the "primary effects" deal with cultural inequalities that determine the academic abilities of students; "secondary effects" are concerned with the different costs and benefits that are associated with different educational decisions for students from different social background (Sullivan, Parsons, Wiggins, Heath & Green, 2014).

Boudon (1974) further notes that, "The lower the social status, the poorer the cultural background—hence the lower the school achievement ..." (p. 29). The effects of stratification are felt more by students at the lower echelon than those higher up, as Boudon (1974) elaborates:

"The primary effects of stratification are seen as being reflected in students' ability and are therefore seen as a "given" or constraint, whereas the secondary effects reflect choices made by students and their families. This is problematic, because measured "ability" varies over time, and is

itself affected by the actions and investments of the child and family in the child's education" (Sullivan et al. 2014, p. 34).

Learners from a poor background both socially and economically find it more difficult to progress not just in high school but in tertiary studies. This is because very little is invested in them (Pantages & Creedon, 1975; Abott, Chapman & Wyld, 1992). The writers cited believe that students with poor study habits are more likely to withdraw from university or to have academic adjustment problems in the transition from high school to university. A learner's poor study habits can only be symptomatic of a bigger malaise which often comes from having a poor experience of high school which is often a result of circumstances advertently or inadvertently foisted on them.

As far back as 1975, Bruner (1975) noted that: "Children of the poor...are plainly not getting as much from their schooling as their middle-class age mates" (p.43). This also affects them in their tertiary studies. He buttresses his position by stating that the low attainment of poor children is a consequence of not just discrimination but deep cultural habits and traditions of upbringing. This he surmised in three key areas, which are (1) lower level of language; (2) lower level of executive function; and (3) lower aspirations. In as much as there are genuine disadvantages to a learner's academic progress, Bruner (1974) singles out lack of vocabulary as "central to academic attainment". He believes children from a poor background go into primary education "with their hands tied behind their backs" because of their poor vocabulary skills. While Bruner's views emanate from research from over four decades ago, it is interesting to consider the application today. In this regard, Sylva et al. (2014) believe differences in "academic enrichment" activities, low qualification of parents and less access to these enrichment experiences, especially outside the home, can create a very varied high school experience. Evans (2004), too, concluded that learners from a disadvantaged



background need to be more resilient, due to the overwhelming circumstances around them. It thus becomes imperative that my study explores my participants' high school experiences by understanding how the contexts from which they come shaped their experiences.

Cameron (2006) goes further to lay the responsibility of developing, influencing and shaping young peoples' sense of belonging, well-being and success at the feet of teachers and peers. This he says is achieved through a relationship founded in trust and love. Language plays an important part in the process of achieving or fostering this relationship, as language is vital in human interaction, separating us from animals (Seligmann, 2012). The choice of a language of teaching and learning is interwoven into the issues of politics, power, economy and sets of social tenets a country wants to drive or pursue. Be that as it may, it becomes imperative to study how students experience schooling and where language comes into this body of experience (Seligmann, 2012). To look at what experiences learners had in high school, how these experiences affected their further academic pursuits and their choices to become teachers of language is what my research aims to achieve.

### **2.3.5 Conclusion**

There have been several efforts to remedy a declining educational system and to consolidate the gains made in the South African educational context in which my research is situated. Improving what teachers do in their classrooms is the key to improved learning experiences. Learners have had school experiences bedevilled by poor management, dilapidated infrastructure and poor quality of teachers and teaching, while others have gone through totally different experiences. The situation appears to be worse in under-resourced, disadvantaged schools which are often poorly run and are commonly located in rural areas.

As Taylor (2008) notes:

“The first problem with the majority of South African schools is that they exhibit a culture which tolerates a very loosely bounded timetable: teachers and learners come and go as they please and teaching happens desultorily. Children in these schools are socialised into giving little value to efficient work habits, and to having very low expectations of their own intellectual development” (p.21).

Finally, Spaul (2015) sums up the situation when he says:

“The rich get education and with it access to universities and well-paying jobs while the poor get schooling and with it menial jobs, intermittent work or long term unemployment. Even some from poor non-fee paying schools who make it to university struggle to make it through to graduation as their experiences affect their ability to meaningfully access education” (Sunday Times, Nov 8, 2015, p.7).

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The aim of this research is to understand how student teachers of English at university experienced learning English in the South African high school English classroom and if this experience affected their learning of English and their choice to be teachers. The previous chapter dealt with a review of related literature which set the tone for a discussion of the methodology that informed the study.

#### **3.2. Research Paradigm**

For this study, my paradigm was interpretive, which aims to understand the subjective world of human experience. There are many “realities”, locally and specifically constructed and knowledge is created through consensus (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). Bertram and Christiansen go further to contend that people behave and respond in more complex ways than plants or chemicals. The way in which a person responds in a given situation depends largely on their past experiences and circumstances (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). It is recognised that results are not “out there” waiting to be found or discovered by the researcher, but they are created through interpretation of data (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) which then presupposes that a desire to understand the meaning that drives this human behaviour is apt.

The central endeavour of this research was to understand the subjective world of human experience (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). To retain the integrity of the phenomena being investigated, efforts are made to get inside the person and to understand from within. The imposition of external forms and structure is resisted, since this reflects the viewpoint of the observer as opposed to that of the

actor directly involved (Ibid, 2011). "Interpretation aims to make sense of the object of study by iterating between understanding of the object as a whole and understanding of its parts" (Darke, Shanks & Broadbent, 1998, p.13).

A case study in this case aims to understand the high school experiences of student teachers especially as it involved the English language classroom. It is understood that experiences vary as the experience of one person cannot be determinant or reflective of that of others even when they are contemporaries within the same school and environment. The decision of the students to become teachers would also have been instigated by different reasons which are as subjective as they are arbitrary. It is pertinent to understand as well that whatever effects these high school/classroom experiences might have had or are still having on the current experience of these student teachers currently will vary from one student teacher to another, hence this research.

### **3.3. Research Design**

The design adopted for this study was a case study design. I made use of case study as my aim was to understand the high school experiences of my participants, in this case third year English language student teachers in a higher institution of learning. "Case study provides rich insights into particular situations, events, organisation, classroom or even persons" (Rule & John, 2011, p.1). The "case" is the unit of analysis and the research question must relate to this unit of analysis (Rule & John, 2014, p.19). My "case" is the high school experiences of student teachers in an education institution of higher learning. "Case study research is an appropriate research strategy where a contemporary phenomenon is to be studied in its natural context" (Yin, as cited in Darke, Shanks & Broadbent, 1998, p.7), and the focus is on understanding the dynamics present in single settings. A case study might generate insightful evidence that could be used to make an argument (Rule & John, 2011). Case study therefore is used to refer to the process of

conducting an investigation which entails a study of the case and what is being studied and the product or conclusion that such investigation comes out with (Rule & John, 2011).

Meriam (as cited in Rule & John, 2011) sees case study as unit, process and product while Bogden and Biklen (as cited in Rule & John, 2011) provide helpful classification of case study into historical, organisational, observational, life history and community case studies. It can further be divided into broader enclaves such as ethnography, evaluative, educational and action research (Stenhouse, as cited in Rule & John, 2011). Darke, Shanks and Broadbent (1998) believe that in areas where the experiences of individuals and the contexts of actions are critical, a case study should be used. It provides fertile ground for rich data and appropriate results. My research used an educational case study as it is aimed at understanding students' experiences and the reasons and circumstances surrounding such experience.

The role of a researcher in case study is to describe, understand and interpret the case (Rule & John, 2001, p.11). Further to that would be to find out, "what it is like" to be in that particular situation. That is why they are descriptive in nature, and they can be used to generate claims that might lead to further investigation/verification (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). My aim was to "capture the reality of the participants' lived experiences of and thoughts about a particular situation" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, as cited in Bertram & Christiansen, 2014, p.14). Such lived experiences are factored into their present realities and experiences to find if there is a correlation (*Ibid*).

### **3.4. Research Approach**

This research used a qualitative research approach. According to Creswell (2008), the intention of a qualitative approach is not on generalizing to the entire population, but to develop an in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon. This is why purpose and intent are paramount to this study. This research aimed to provide an in-depth, intricate and detailed understanding of meanings, actions, non-observable as well as observable phenomena, attitudes, intentions and behaviours of student teachers in their high schools especially as it involved the English language classroom (Gonzales as cited in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). It involves verbal inputs and description of scenarios and can only be captured best in qualitative research. Barbour (2007, p.12) argues that qualitative research:

“Seeks to unpack how people construct the world around them, what they are doing or what is happening to them in terms that are meaningful and offer rich insight.”

My research therefore aimed to understand the experiences of the South African high school English classroom of third year student teachers of English.

### **3.5. Sampling**

This study used purposive sampling which is the selection of a group of people, events, and behaviours to include in a study, or other elements that are representative of the population being studied in order to derive conclusions about the entire population from a limited number of observations (Christiansen & Bertram, 2014; Segen, 2011). For Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2006), purposive sampling serves the aim of providing the researcher with those people who are likely to possess the necessary information for the study. Creswell (2008) calls it a deliberate selection of individuals and sites with the purpose of learning

and understanding the central phenomenon existing/happening within them. The criterion for this choice is around how “information rich” the participants are with regards to the research (Patton, as cited in Creswell, 2008).

“As the word ‘purposive’ indicates, this sampling type is chosen for a particular purpose” (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014, p.61). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p.156) aver that “purposive sampling is undertaken to achieve representativeness, to enable comparisons to be made, to focus on specific, unique issues or cases; to generate theory through accumulation of data from different sources.” Purposive sampling is used to access knowledgeable people who have in-depth knowledge of a particular scenario or have professional knowledge or access to power, expertise or experience (Ball, as cited in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). That said, it becomes expedient that I employ it as a sampling method because it captures firmly the scenario and circumstances I want to research.

I chose student teachers from the School of Education specifically because they have had experiences of the South African high school English classrooms. My participants finished high school between 2000 and 2012. I believe they are in a position where they can look back and critique the type of schooling they had. I have used students from two racial groups as they are the predominant groups in the School of Education where the research is taking place. My participants were drawn from students who attended rural and urban schools that are resourced and under-resourced. The reason for this choice is that data generated can be generalizable to other schools as these settings are definitive of most schools in South Africa.

I worked with fifteen students comprising four (4) males and eleven (11) females. Among these were two Indian students and thirteen Black students representing

the racial demographic make-up of the class. I recruited four (4) participants from rural schools and four (4) participants from urban schools and seven (7) from township schools. I also recruited students who went to resourced and under-resourced schools. For the purpose of this research, under-resourced schools will refer to all schools lacking equipment or resources (personnel and infrastructure) that are utilised as aids in achieving outcomes or end results (Nyuswa, 2003) while resourced schools are those schools, mostly private and former model C schools, which boast quality infrastructure (libraries, laboratories) both in personnel and teaching aids/equipment to assist in achieving outcomes.

I chose to use this group as they captured the class demography and provided valuable information about the South African high school English classroom. As third year students majoring in English my participants were in a privileged position to critically evaluate the entire high school structure in general and the language classroom practices they witnessed in particular. My participants were given questionnaires that asked for all the necessary information about their race, gender and educational background and it was through this I was able to identify those who best fit within my criteria. I also gave them consent letters informing them about scope/purpose of the study and about their right to participate or withdraw from the study; that participation was voluntary and anyone was free to withdraw at any moment. It was after this that I recruited my participants. The demography of my participants is captured in the following table:



Table 3:1

Participant	Race	Sex	School (Description)
Marissa	Indian	Female	Urban (Former model C) Resourced
Aphiwe	African	Female	Township/Resourced
Lerato	African	Female	Township/under Resourced
Nikita	African	Female	Urban/Resourced
Nonkululeko	African	Female	Urban/Resourced
Zama	African	Female	Rural/Under resourced
Ayanda	African	Female	Rural/Under Resourced
Ntokozo	African	Female	Township/Under resourced
Mthokozisi	African	Male	Rural/Under Resourced
Nompilo	African	Female	Rural/Under Resourced
Simphiwe	African	Female	Township/Under resourced
Enhle	African	Female	Township/ Under resourced
Kevin	Indian	Male	Township/Under resourced
Ntobeko	African	Male	Urban (Former model C)Resourced
Smilo	African	Male	Township/Resourced

### 3.6. Data Collection Strategies

To collect data needed to answer the research questions set for the study, I used semi-structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and written narrative accounts.

### **3.6.1. Questionnaire**

‘A questionnaire is a list of questions which respondents answer and can contain open-ended or closed-ended questions’ (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014, p.72). I used a semi-structured questionnaire (appendix 5). This is because a semi-structured questionnaire consists of closed-ended and open-ended questions. A closed-ended question is a question format that limits respondents with a list of answer choices from which they must choose to answer, while open-ended questions give respondents enough room and freedom to be detailed in their answer based on articulation of questions given to them. Open-ended questions are structured in such a way that respondents may respond to them the way they like. They are not given specific categories or other answers to choose from (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014).

I chose this data collection method as, according to Oppenheim (as cited in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011), closed-ended questions are very useful in that they prescribe a range of responses from which participants can make choices. This is in contrast to open-ended questions which are used ‘if the answers are unknown and exploratory’ (Bailey, as cited in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 382), or if there are very many possible answers and it gives participants options to add remarks, qualification and explanation (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). The fusion of these two methods should provide rich data.

### **3.6.2. Interview**

I used a semi-structured interview (appendix 6) to answer my research questions. In a semi-structured interview, the researcher asks a question and gets his/her answers from the response or behaviour of the participants (Creswell, 2008). Further to that, ‘an interview is a conversation between the researcher and the respondent’ (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014, p. 80) and unlike other forms of

conversations this form is structured and focused and the researcher has designed particular questions with the respondents in mind (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014).

This was appropriate for my study as an interview is important when exploring or describing peoples' perceptions and understanding that might be unique to them, and it allows the researcher to ask probing questions and seek clarity especially when seeking to understand a participant's point of view (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). I chose a semi-structured interview as 'it does not follow a system of predetermined questions; the interviewer is free to develop each situation in whatever way he wants' (Rao, 2005, p. 101). Rao believes this system helps a researcher to penetrate deep into the problem thereby understanding the attitudes and behaviour of people who are involved in the circumstances/context being researched (Rao, 2005). It will also help with both uniformity and depth. By this I mean it will be helpful that participants are asked the same questions while the fact that it is semi-structured gives them an added space to go further than what is asked and by so doing add depth and clarity to questions asked. Each of the participants has had different experiences and different approaches to the narration of those experiences; a semi-structured interview method gives them that liberty. The interview was audio recorded.

### **3.6.3. Written Narrative Accounts**

According to Cresswell (2008), written narrative accounts are valuable sources of information in qualitative research. It can consist of, among other things, diaries, personal notes/documents, letters or jottings belonging to participants extracted in trust to be used in a research. I asked participants to provide me with narrative accounts (see attached appendix 7) of their experiences of their high school English classrooms. I used these accounts as rich sources of information in participants' own words. It is important to note that memories fade and narratives may be useful in corroborating information from the questionnaire and interview,

and may provide additional information not covered using the other two data collection methods.

### **3.7. Data Analysis**

‘Analysis means a close or systematic study or the separation of a whole into its parts, for the purpose of study’ (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014, p. 115). Miles and Huberman (1984) argue that data collection and data analysis should overlap to allow for flexibility in data collection procedures and so that the researcher remains open to new ideas or patterns which may emerge. Miles and Huberman (as cited in Bertram & Christiansen, 2014, p. 116) define data analysis as ‘consisting of three flows of activity: data reduction, data conclusion drawing and verification’. They explain that data reduction focuses on selecting and focusing, display deals with organisation and compressing and conclusion drawing is aimed at finalization. My findings were disseminated to my participants when the data analysis was completed to enable participants to provide further input and verification as it was important that I had honestly articulated their stories meaningfully the way they wanted them portrayed.

I developed individual textural and structural descriptions; composite textural and composite structural descriptions and a synthesis of textural and structural meanings and essences of the experience. From this then, textures and structures are weaved into the phenomenon thereby creating meaning and essences (Moustakas, 1994).

In data analysis in a phenomenological research Moustakas (1994, p.4-5) argues that:

“Organisation and analysis of data begin with regarding every statement relevant to the topic as having equal value. The meaning units are listed and clustered into common themes. These are used to develop a textural description of the experience.”

According to Wertz, Charmaz, McMullen, Josselson, Anderson and McSpadden (2011), ‘Phenomenology involves describing the essence, the phenomena by what they call “eidetic analysis” which involves conceptualising what is invariant through all imaginable examples of phenomenon’. Eidetic analysis according to phenomenologists provides knowledge that religiously synchronises with lived experience. Qualitative analysis rooted in phenomenology also uses reflection which focuses on lived experiences in order to focus on their processes. This process, according to Wertz et al. (2011) is called “noeses” the ‘how’ of the experience and “noemata” which is meaning and what is experienced.

The value of the findings in the end depends on their ability to help others gain insight into what has been lived unreflectively as captured succinctly by Spiegelberg (1983, p.694): “The main function of phenomenological description is to serve as a reliable guide to the listener’s own actual or potential experience of the phenomena.” This methodology in essence requires ‘living’ the question through a process of returning to the question or the thing itself which is in contraposition to simply stating the question as is the case in other research methods.

I read through the data to get a feel of what was being said “underlying concepts and the occurrence of these concepts” (Wilson, 2002) then identified key themes and issues in text. Depending on occurrence, these points were aggregated and

organised using mind maps and notes and the resulting list was used as a set of points that interrogated the texts (Lester, 1999).

I arranged findings according to themes and topics and drew out key issues being discussed by participants. The aim here was to be faithful to the participants, and to be aware of biases being brought to the discussion due to the circumstances inherent within. It is to be noted that some types of study benefit from vignettes of individual cases or participants, provided this does not compromise confidentiality (Lester, 1999), and I chose to use such vignettes in reporting my findings.

### **3.8. Credibility, Trustworthiness and Rigour**

#### **3.8.1. Credibility**

According to Beck (as cited by Chiovitti & Piran, 2002, p.4), credibility is a term that relates to “How vivid and faithful the description of the phenomenon is...when informants, and also readers who have had the human experience...recognize the researcher’s described experiences as their own.” Credibility refers to the question of whether the document is free from error or distortion (Gilbert, 2008). Thus, in buttressing this point he further states that distortion may occur when there is a time lapse between the time the event(s) took place and the time the story is told or written down (Gilbert, 2008). He is of the view that this time lapse might create doubt in the minds of readers as to the authenticity of the information. That is why it is important to bring in different measures such as member checking and triangulation to make sure this gap, if it is there, is closed up and more credibility given to the research.

Due to the time lapse between when the events took place and when the students are being asked about it, there might be apparent confusion of events. There is

also the possibility that learners might forget. These were the reasons I chose three different data collection methods. That will make it possible to close up any apparent gaps in the volume and quality of data I generate.

In addition, the three data collection methods were used at different points in time. Student teachers who participated in this research were given questionnaires to take home to fill in, after which they submitted at different points in time. After that they came in individually for the interview sessions which took place in an office appropriate for such. The participants were again given the topic for the written narrative account which they took home and submitted at completion. There was a gap of more than a week between each data collection method and another. This was to make sure the participants' state or current circumstance does not impinge on the quality of data collected. The spacing was therefore to make sure the chances of the data being affected negatively by a participants' present situation is reduced.

In order to address credibility, Hammersley (cited in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011) concedes that the amount of evidence required is important, so the greater the claim, the more convincing the evidence has to be for that claim. Lincoln and Guba (cited in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011) suggest that credibility can be addressed through triangulation and member checking. I used triangulation, which according to Creswell and Miller (2000) is used to increase credibility and check dependability by sourcing information from different sources to form themes for the study. This is the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p.195). Triangulation may take several forms, but commonly refers to the employment of multiple data sources and data collection methods to achieve credibility or validity (Long & Johnson, 2000). It is important to note that as much as triangulation may illuminate different perspectives on the problem it does not provide any test of

validity, but helps in closing room for doubts on both the findings and/or methodology (Long & Johnson, 2000).

I employed, “member checking” (Creswell, 2012), to further ensure credibility of the research. This was done by taking the interview transcripts and narrative back to the participants to crosscheck and confirm their accuracy. Further to this, Carlson (2010) affirms that in member checking, interview transcripts and particles from the narratives/stories they narrated during interview sessions and in writing are taken back to them to check their veracity/accuracy. In this process participants are given the chance to elaborate or clarify aspects of the data in order to ensure that their views and experiences were captured accurately.

This explains why I used more than two data collection methods as it helped to exhaust aspects not covered by other data collection methods used. I also kept a personal journal where I wrote issues that emanated from my interview, questionnaire and narrative account for which I needed more time with my participants. These were recurrent issues raised by most participants that were laden with rich information important to my study. Issues also involved areas or questions where most participants were unable to give expected answers which warranted my highlighting those areas for further attention. I let participants guide the inquiry process using participants’ actual words in the theory and articulating my own personal views and insights through use of proper literature and my personal journal (Chiovitti & Piran, 2002).

### **3.8.2. Trustworthiness**

Guba and Lincoln (as cited in Long & Johnson, 2000, p.5) recommend prolonged engagement in order to build trust and overcome the difficulties presented by perverse constructions and misinformation on the part of respondents. My aim was to create trust between me and the participants and among participants



through honesty to research processes and expectations, thorough explanation of my expectations of them and making sure their contributions were originally represented in my work during and after my research. Another important way of increasing trustworthiness was the use of “thick description”, which refers to the depth that the researcher needs to report (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). By using a thick description the researcher provides enough detail so that the reader can judge whether the findings can be transferred to another context (Scott, as cited in Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). This is why I have included narrative accounts as a data collection method as it added to the information at my disposal especially information not captured by either questionnaires or interviews.

### **3.8.3. Rigour**

In this study, data was collated via written narratives, interviews and questionnaires. The reporting of case study research can be a daunting task: the rigour of the process used to arrive at the results and the validity of the findings and the conclusions reached need to be accurately established, hence my intention of using goodness and triangulation (discussed earlier). ‘Goodness’ is demonstrated through explicit data collection mechanisms, accurate representation of voice, professionalism and clear meaning making/interpretation (Arminio & Hultgren, as cited in Tobin & Begley, 2003). Arminio and Hultgren warned that goodness as used in qualitative research is not linear but dynamic and interactive and must be approached as such. Slevin and Sines (cited in Tobin & Begley, 2003) identify use of rigorous methods of assessing truth and consistency as a means of ensuring that findings represent real life experiences. My work then was to help my participants to remember their experiences and how connected they are to their current university experiences. It also aimed to find out if these experiences were factors in their choice to be educators.

### **3.9. Ethical Issues**

My gate keeper permission was obtained from the Registrar of the university and from the Dean and Head of School where the research was conducted (appendix 1 & 2). Similarly, consent letters (appendix 3) were issued to all participants recruited, requesting their permission to take part in the study. Participants taking part in the study reserved the right to withdraw as and when they wished to. They were also guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity. Research-related documents were treated in the strictest of confidence. All data will be stored in my supervisor's office in a locked cupboard for five years, as required by the university. Thereafter, all data will be destroyed, print data by shredding and tapes by incineration.

### **3.10. Methodological Problems/Limitations**

In the case of my research, it was important I got hold of participants who offered to find time from their very busy schedules and participate in my research. Lester (1999, p.3-4) notes that: "It can be difficult to gain access to participants for more than a single session of an hour or less, particularly if they are not strongly engaged with the topic of the study." My data collection happened at the same time that my participants were actively involved in their studies and getting to each one of them was not easy. As a result of this, I endeavoured to meet them at a time convenient for each of them.

It is possible that the information I got from my participants was not as rich as I expected due to their inability to remember their experiences or circumstances as vividly as possible. As a result of this, I informed them ahead of time so that they were ready for the interview and I gave them prompters in the form of key points and themes to guide them in remembering the information. I also gave them the questionnaire and left them enough time to assimilate the contents so as to respond

accordingly. It was challenging to get my participants to remember accurately their high school experiences especially those related to my study.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1. Introduction

Having dealt with methodology, it is appropriate to look at the data collected and analyse it by answering and discussing the three critical questions at the base of this research. The findings discussed in this chapter will include the personal data of the participants and the findings from interviews, narrative accounts and questionnaires.

#### 4.2. Setting and Personal Data of Participants

According to the participants in this study it was found that all the schools in the rural areas and townships were under-resourced while all the schools located in the urban areas were well resourced. Three participants in my study went to schools that had resources which were not put to profitable use. There were laboratories and libraries under lock and key not put to use for fear of learners vandalising them or damaging equipment or infrastructure.

English was predominantly used in all the urban schools and IsiZulu or Sesotho were used mainly in the rural and township schools depending on location and the language group that dominated that location. According to the participants, English was the official language of teaching and learning in all the schools except in four of the under-resourced schools located in the rural and township areas where the local language was used in teaching and learning even though English was used sporadically. Participants indicated that teachers in all but one of the four schools located in the urban setting were proficient in English while teachers were proficient in English in four and not proficient in English in five of the township and rural schools which the participants attended. Teachers in all the

three rural schools were not proficient in English, in the opinion of the participants.

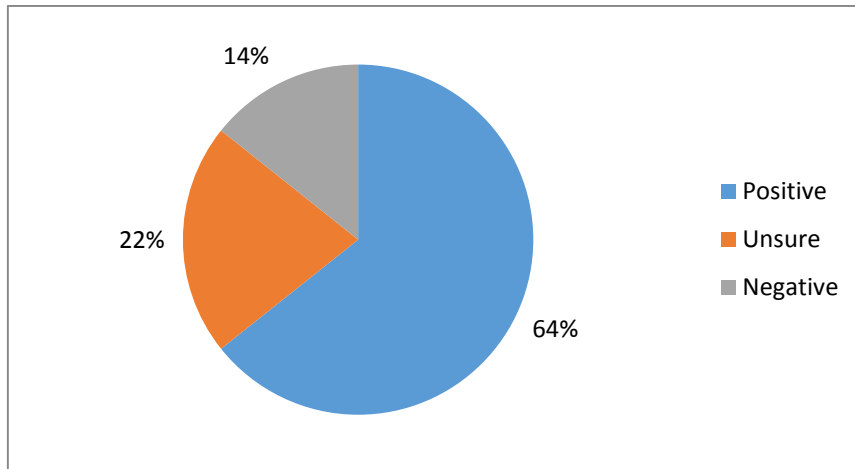
From the above answers it appears that most urban schools enjoy better facilities, quality teachers and teaching and a more conducive environment for teaching and learning compared to in the rural areas and townships. It is also clear that learners in urban areas have better educational experiences than those in rural areas based on this lopsidedness in context and content.

In data collected using interviews, questionnaires and narrative accounts among fifteen third year students majoring in English Education at a university in South Africa, it was found that their high school experiences of learning English were different even where they were contemporaries and attended school within the same setting and proximity.

#### **4.3. Experiences that Student-Teachers of English have about Learning English in South African High School English Classrooms**

Out of the nine participants who were interviewed, five spoke about contexts while four spoke about experience. Each hinted at the issue that was of most influence to them while at high school. In their questionnaires, participants were asked for three words that might be used to describe their high school experiences of learning English, and below is a graph of the responses from 15 participants who returned their questionnaires. For the sake of protecting their identities and keeping them anonymous, pseudonyms are used.

**Figure 1: Graph of Participants' Responses to High School Experiences of Learning English**



Positive words provided included descriptions such as worthwhile, informative, exciting, eye-opening, enlightening, fun, mind-blowing, interesting, constructive, life changing, enjoyable, educating, pleasant and adventurous. Unsure are the blank responses where participants did not respond. Negative words provided included descriptions such as stressful, challenging, and difficult, average, bad, mediocre and bitter.

From the graph above, one may notice a marked difference in the answers given by participants in their experiences and views of their high school experiences of learning English. Even when these participants attended schools in close proximity and around the same timeframe there were still differences in their experiences which goes to show that experience is exclusive to individuals involved in the situation and not group or context dependent. Experience is multi-faceted as what one student sees as a positive experience might not be seen the same way by another student.

### 4.3.1. Context Vs. Experience

Ten students in my study came from backgrounds or communities characterised by under-development and unemployment. This affected their schooling as they had difficult experiences of high school. These findings are from interviews with four of the students from rural and township contexts. Lerato believes her peculiar context and situation was demotivating and made it difficult for them to believe in themselves. In her words:

*“Unfortunately my teachers were not that good in English, they didn’t have that passion for teaching English. They didn’t even show to us that they loved it. They just taught it and in some sections they didn’t teach, for example in language paper one there are some sections that are challenging so those sections they didn’t really teach them so that you can understand. They focused on those that were easier, like literature paper 2. They probably understood those ones and focused on those ones.”*

But there is a marked difference between a teacher being ambivalent to his/her professional duty and doing more than he/she is supposed to do. For example, some teachers go out of their way to do learners’ work for them and by so doing kill their creativity and independence. This is captured by Aphiwe who notes:

*“I think my high school experience of English was bad. Mainly because our teacher had to teach English in a class where we were mixed race. So what they would normally do based on their assumptions that black learners find it difficult to read and speak English they would take it upon themselves to actually do things for us. For instance, if we were going to start a novel, the teachers would make sure that they give us the notes and give us the study guide and basically what we would be tested on, so you basically shift the whole focal point of really learning and engaging with the novel to knowing what you are going to be assessed on. It is completely assessment driven.”*

Many circumstances may explain why teachers in particular contexts like Aphiwe’s find it difficult to trust learners enough to leave them on their own and only facilitate. Possible reasons could be the fear the learners may not know what to do in such circumstances whether it be, academic or social or it could be as Aphiwe pointed out, due to the issue of assessment. It is an open secret that most schools are rated based on assessment-based results. So schools do all within their power to produce good results irrespective of what modality is followed to achieve

that. In extreme cases learners are spoon-fed making it difficult for them to be independent and self-reliant (Nieto, 2000).

High school experiences may be challenging mostly because of the lack of resources, quality of teachers and teaching and the lack of proper use and teaching of the English language which is the language of teaching and learning. Many Black students view English, at best, as a tool (De Kadt et al., 2003) which affects how they receive it and use it in a classroom context. Individual teachers are able to help learners in this regard, like Ntokozo, who opines:

*“My love for English in the latter stage helped me to cope because the teachers who taught the lessons were excellent and caring.”*

It goes to show that excellent and caring teachers go a long way in fostering positive learning experience among learners. Teachers who have good content knowledge, who are passionate, and cascade teaching in a loving, caring and democratic way do impact positively on the study life and experience of learners within contexts such as this. The struggle learners undergo in high school is not just that of lack of teacher content knowledge and pedagogy but also of infrastructure, resources and relationships. Some schools are better off than others even when located in the same context because the factors that improve a school are multi-faceted. The context of Zama’s school buttresses this point:

*“There were not enough classes or desks in my school, so some learners had to sit on the floor. We did struggle a lot due to the marked shift between primary and high school and their peculiar context. The relationship between teachers and students lacked depth. Teacher absenteeism was also a problem because there were no substitute teachers (free periods). Teachers did not have enough time for the students which made it difficult for them to ask for clarity on anything that they might be confused with during or after class. Changes started in Grade 10 where majority of teachers were committed and teachers were more helpful to students which was supported by Saturday classes.”*

My participants have spoken of the tendency schools have to be assessment-driven due to the pressure from the department and parents for them to perform, and what other way can this “performance” be measured if not through the



barometer of examination marks, percentages and averages. This puts pressure on students, as their teachers incessantly demand that they improve.

Even though this demand is not unreasonable on its own, the manner in which it is made sometimes can be as frustrating as it can be harmful. This desire to improve school ratings through external results makes some schools focus energy and resources on the FET (Further Education and Training) classes which start from Grades 10 to 12. However, by so doing, they abandon the GET (General Education and Training) classes starting from Grades 7 to 9. This they do by way of increased contact time, extramural classes, and morning, afternoon and weekend classes. Learners also get individual help and counselling on study skills, completion and submission of tasks and provision of resources and enabling environment for academic engagement.

This is seldom the case in the lower GET phase. It must be highlighted here that most South African high schools start from Grade 8. This could make students in circumstances such as mentioned above reduce their work rate in the GET phase. The FET appears to be the schools' priority and could affect factors including budgeting and student intake. Some students are unable to pass to another grade because they are held back (Chisholm, 2004), a situation popularly referred to as "gate keeping," where schools are stricter in their summative and formative reporting in the FET which entails retaining more students than those allowed to progress to the next grade. Classes get smaller in most schools in the FET phase probably due to "gate keeping" or the fact that a school's management's desire to improve the school's rating through assessment and the result thereof makes it imperative that class size must be reduced and teaching quality improved to achieve maximum results. Most of these schools keep their best teachers at the FET phase to be able to achieve quality results, particularly in the final matriculation examinations.

Contexts as captured in the responses given by my participants when interviewed can go a long way in demoralising a learner and making self-belief rather difficult. Teachers can create interest in education for learners and can also obfuscate their path to knowledge which may cause many a student to derail and lose focus. Sometimes teachers are also constrained by school context, and the unpredictable chaos that can break out in class is most times rarely envisaged. This same unpredictability can be situated outside of the classroom between learners and their peers and has the propensity to affect their academic life negatively (Bloch, 2009).

High school was considered interesting to six of my participants and was not for the remaining nine; many variables contribute to this. These include the location, proximity to individual students' homes, management style and teaching methodology/pedagogy. Other factors included whether it is a single sex school or co-educational and whether students are boarding within the school premises or whether they come from home. No issue around schooling and high school in particular can be isolated as being incapable of affecting how a young person assesses his/her general high school life.

It was found that some students moved from one area to another with their parents due to the lure of economic opportunities which necessitated a change of schools. With these changes come new experiences which can be as convoluted as schooling itself. This is captured in no better ways than by Enhle:

*“We moved from one location to another and in moving left a very good primary school to a high school that was inferior in quality and content; moving also meant I left friends behind. Moving from a black school to an English medium township school felt like a positive upward movement until I realised the former school was better run and more disciplined as compared to the new school. I also realised my primary school was of a higher level and quality than my high school. This is because I did not learn more than I did not know already and to fight the boredom I had to work hard not to let the level drop.”*

From the foregoing, it seems that improved contexts do not necessarily mean better education as many factors contribute to better education or a positive high school experience. These factors include the family, the individual student, school management methodology and specific classroom contexts. The sum total of these factors and how positively or negatively they impact on an individual contribute to a very large extent to the type of experience one has in high school.

Another person who had the same experience as Enhle was Nikita, who also moved schools but unlike Enhle, she did enjoy her new school as it offered her what her previous school did not. In her words:

*“My first high school was not exciting as I loathed the idea of studying there but at the second one I enjoyed it and wanted to be there. The teachers and the environment were warm and welcoming; teachers went the extra mile for their learners, thereby making it easy and pleasant to be in school. I learnt more about life from high school than I am learning now in university.”*

Teachers here went beyond the call of duty to impact on their learners' knowledge. But, Nikita had to move schools to have an encounter that was not only favourable but also positive to her future and dreams. A student such as Nikita was fortunate enough to be placed in an alternative school setting that motivated her and improved her school experiences. It is unfortunate that her university experience is not as useful as her high school experience. This can be due to many factors which include the closeness of home to high school and the fact that the high school setting is so different from university. The population of staff and students in a high school are smaller compared to the university and there might be a relationship of trust borne out of learners and teachers coming from the same race, tribe, community, or religion, among others. This is as opposed to the university setting which is multi-racial and multi-lingual. Sometimes university is the first contact learners such as these make with people of other races, cultures and languages.

The ability to succeed in high school can be daunting and demands much hard work, as corroborated by Mthokozisi, who believes his maturity and organisation helped him in high school to succeed. In his words: *“I was bold and purpose driven and these traits helped me a lot in high school.”* Students need to be bold, confident and purposeful to be successful in high school, as mentioned by Mthokozisi. When students are lacking drive and purpose there is the tendency to get disillusioned by the expectations of the moment. This may lead to boredom and a loss of confidence which affects students negatively. They might then lose focus, fail their tasks and examinations, and ultimately drop out or become unsuccessful in their final examination. It is the role of the school to keep students on track and on task so as not to lose sight of their target. The school (high school and university) could be a platform where students are taught not just for academic purposes but about life in general. Success is not only measured by a student’s academic achievements but also by his/her ability to handle pressure, integrate with others, innovate and build character to become not just a moral person but one who has been holistically educated to co-habit peacefully with others and contribute meaningfully to the environment and society at large. Teaching, then, means providing those around you with a continuous example of leadership, social adroitness and moral fortitude. This is reinforced by Gordon (1998) who presupposes that the absence of these core tenets can negatively affect learner experience.

Additionally, high school is also about acquiring values, skills, relationships, friendships, sports and socialisation, which Kevin contends made his time in high school worthwhile. He adds:

*“My experience was enjoyable; at times it got stressful because of high academic goals not being met. The relationship between teachers and learners was almost non-existent outside the classroom. Taking part in sports created enduring memories as was socialisation with my peers. These made high school interesting.”*

His experience was not so different from Simphiwe, who came from a different context, which was rural. His experience was exemplified by love, togetherness and belief.

*“My high school experience was good. I reckon that in the township not everybody went to school to learn, other learners were just going there because their parents are forcing them to. The school found a way to accommodate people like that. I enjoyed high school because it was not only based on academics or content but also allowed for the acquisition of skills, values and beliefs for the future. No cultures were discriminated against. All cultures were accommodated and they had time for us to engage in extra activities.”*

For Simphiwe, his school represented growth and raising of leaders, ideals and ideas that will foster the goals and dreams of some of the students. However, while some students did not want to go to school, some students, like Simphiwe, had positive experiences. This is in line with Bloch’s (2003) view that education is key to growing the skills that are needed in changing our world. He notes that education is about the aspirations and opportunities that young people have and which should be enhanced. Schools may also become the centres for the fostering of unity among diverse cultures, language, ethnicity and creed. Education and learning could bring harmony and unity among diverse people and by so doing close possible divisions that exist among people.

#### **4.3.2. Discipline**

Discipline is at the core of classroom management as it enhances classroom practice in a way that positively impacts teaching and learning. For effective teaching and learning to take place, there needs to be a level of order that will drive it. Many schools and teachers battle with ill-discipline among learners, as is evident in Lerato’s excerpt:

*“In our school, there was no discipline. We did work - those that wanted to do it. In Grades 11 and 12, it was less chaotic. But when the teacher asks particular learners to go out and they go out because they actually wanted to go out anyway.”*

As pointed out earlier, so many schools pay special attention to the FET phase to the detriment of the GET. It is possible that the fewer the number of students per class, the less the chance of ill-discipline and chaos. Lerato highlighted another malaise in her school which is learners absconding from classes either by not being present at all in school or being present but not attending classes. The more learners are away from the classroom, the more they increase their chances of failure and possible repetition of class, as not being in class means they would possibly have no idea what was taught in class. This shows a possible link between class absenteeism and school failure.

Enhle spoke of a proactive discipline method through her teacher's teaching method.

*"My teacher didn't need to say much. Rather, her teaching made us stay and listen and be disciplined, and learning happened."*

The above is evidence that a teacher's professionalism, content knowledge and pedagogy may be all he/she needs to keep the class in check and on task. Sometimes students want to repay a teacher's commitment and output by behaving appropriately in class and following the teacher's instruction. These are the type of teachers learners do not want to disappoint, as keeping them happy is tantamount to a better classroom experience for students. A teacher's classroom practice can furthermore be the example and motivation some students need to aspire to become teachers themselves, as has been captured by Nikita, who contends:

*"It was more my English teacher that had an influence in me choosing teaching. My English classroom did play a role in my choosing English as a major also. My English teacher is still my mentor today. She encouraged me to be an English teacher today for some reason, and she was always encouraging. I actually wanted to be a lawyer and she said to me, you are not a good liar, so don't think of that."*

Similarly, Marissa did not have problems with discipline in her class due to the fact her teacher had a reputation for being strict and committed unlike the younger teachers.

*“My Grade 11 and matric teacher, she is very strict, she has been there for a long time, so when you stay that long in a school and being old, you have a reputation; nobody dare mess with her.”*

In Marissa’s school the teacher had a reputation for being strict which preceded her and made it possible for her students to be self-disciplined and focused in school. She adds:

*“But when there was no discipline, the teacher would ask you to go in front of the class, to detention or you do your work during the break time.”*

Some teachers are innovative in handling ill-discipline in classes while others are not. This is the difference between a class where teaching and learning are effective and where they are not. Ntokozo observes that:

*“When a student is doing something wrong the teacher would pull a joke on you and you will be embarrassed and never to do it again. My other teacher in Grade 8 would usually smack you hard. There was a time when she and a girl fought. The girl actually slapped her back, but that was resolved when the girl apologised to the teacher.”*

As mentioned by Ntokozo, they were embarrassed by their teacher when they did something wrong. Embarrassing learners to stop them misbehaving could be very harmful to the psychological and emotional well-being of a child and may be counter-productive as can be seen from the above quote. The school should build and not destroy young minds. Schools are also meant to encourage creativity and be a hub for innovation and not where learners are afraid to make mistakes and face embarrassing consequences. Schools should have a constructive disciplinary approach that aims to be more corrective than punitive as that is the only way of raising confident individuals worthy of standing on their own in the world. The issue of ill-discipline and how to curb it remains a problem for many teachers, and many teachers resort to corporal punishment, even though it is illegal (Msani, 2007). Ntokozo spoke, without apparent concern, of a Grade 8 learner who slapped a teacher. While this action could possibly be a reprisal for a punishment,

censure, or other action by a teacher, it might not be. More alarmingly, is the fact that the teacher and the learner fought with each other, pointing to an apparent lack of discipline in the classroom.

Ayanda agrees that corporal punishment was used in her class but identified one of her teachers who was a tough no-nonsense teacher, saying: *“Whenever he came to the classroom, we all went silent.”* This again may prove not to be the best teaching or discipline method as it is difficult to learn in an environment where fear is a dominant trait. Similarly, this was the case for Smilo where the teacher would twist their ears severely. For Simphiwe kneeling down in front of the class constituted punishment or learners wrote an impromptu test after disruptive learners had been chased out of class. Smilo said:

*“Like if we had a test for next week, it is brought forward and if you are outside you are not going to write.”*

This goes to show how teachers are grappling with the issue of discipline in the classroom and how it negatively affects classroom output.

Teacher absenteeism also contributes to negative classroom experiences which spill over to the general school context. Nompilo describes her classroom/school experience of discipline:

*“Discipline was maintained especially as the teacher didn’t come to the class often. When she did come, we behaved because we didn’t want to upset or anger her. We thought making her angry would make her come every day, which we didn’t want. So, when she came it was pure discipline. We followed everything that she said.”*

Absurd as this may sound, it captures the lived experience of schooling as Nompilo observed it. The classroom should be the centre of teaching and learning and not a place where learners prefer to be free rather than busy learning. There are possible reasons that would make learners choose having free time over learning. Reasons could include a lack of professionalism, lack of subject content



knowledge, incompetence on the part of the teacher, and/or lack of interest on the part of the learners. But, it is disturbing that a whole class of learners would not be interested in learning when it was time for a particular subject. The fact this happened only during the English period goes to show there was possibly a problem with the teacher's pedagogy and/or English classroom methodology. Ideally, a teacher engages with educational philosophy with the students in the classroom. That the teacher was unable to detect this anomaly and work towards addressing it makes it even more worrisome. This is corroborated further by Nompilo who stated:

*"I had the not so determined educator so I would only study when I had to, like when there was a test and we knew she would give us the questions that were already there inside our novels or short stories. So we didn't even finish the book, we were just reading the questions, looking for the answers so that we can write the test and that was it."*

The findings make it evident that many policymakers in education, teachers included, have reduced the currency of educational success to one main measure - test scores. This is detrimental to the overall school experience of learners and has succeeded in reducing schooling to a means of economic competitiveness, both personal and national. This puts unnecessary pressure on students to work to pass rather than to learn (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). For many possible reasons, including laziness and lack of passion, some teachers find it difficult finishing their set work and, to close up the gap, they focus on assessment rather than making sure the curriculum requirements are met. The tendency for some teachers to regurgitate questions already in learners' texts or reproduce questions from previous question papers does more to harm learners than improve them. It does not help foster creativity and ingenuity, attributes that schools should foster and entrench.

From the above quote, it is obvious that Nompilo and her class, due to their teacher's disposition, did not put in much effort because they were schooled to

imbibe the notion of ‘the end justifying the means’ and by so doing missed out on life lessons which school should have encouraged. When teachers place emphasis on marks and not on learning, it may often result in learners running with the system and working to pass, rather than learning, where the “greatest reward” should be.

The issue of language can also be an inhibiting factor that works to the benefit of teachers battling with ill-discipline. In the words of Aphiwe:

*“Discipline was maintained in our classroom because many of the students feared communicating in English, so in our English class, learners would be very quiet. However being very quiet is detrimental to learning... speaking English and in another class they would be very outspoken.”*

It was like a situationally enforced kind of discipline, but it seemed to serve the purpose intended, and some teachers would take it as the end justifying the means.

Sometimes the context may help prevent indiscipline and violent tendencies in schools. From the responses of students from rural schools, students in the rural areas tend to be more responsible and respectful in behaviour and manners. All the students in my study from rural schools did not have issues with discipline. The school disciplinary structure took care of that; there were disruptive learners but their ability to disrupt teaching and learning or the internal workings of the rural schools were significantly minimal. Zama illustrates that further:

*“The students were very respectful and that might have something to do with their social background (deep rural area) where elders are to be respected and there was no violence.”*

### 4.3.3. Context and Schooling

For Lerato, context made it difficult for them to learn: “*We had only chalk board as a resource.....we shared books....and had no library nor laboratory*”, a situation Mthokozisi concurs with:

*“One of the bad experiences during my Grades 8 and 9 was that we did not have any textbooks which affected the pace at which we learnt, say English. I did not remember any teacher using any visual aid resources such as charts, pictures, posters nor power point presentation.”*

Scientists and psychologists (Fleming, 1995) have developed a number of different models to understand the different ways that people learn best. In the case of Mthokozisi, he would have done better had the teacher used different teaching approaches as learners are supposed to be exposed to as many learning and teaching methods as possible so as to help those who do not learn better in the commonly used teacher-centred approach. One popular theory, the VARK model, identifies four primary types of learners: visual, auditory, reading/writing, and kinesthetic. Each learning type responds best to a different method of teaching. Auditory learners will remember information best after reciting it back to the presenter, while kinesthetic learners will jump at the chance to participate in a hands-on activity (Fleming, 1995).

To create a classroom where content knowledge is entrenched and character is built, infrastructure and resources play key roles. Classrooms lacking in books cannot be ideal for learning and education. Lack of resources like books and set texts slow down the pace of classroom methodology and pedagogy; it also diminishes the possibility of achieving assessment requirement as learners take turns to share scarce resources. This was the situation Mthokozisi faced in this class, and the lack of teaching aids meant the classroom was not as learner friendly as expected; it should be a place where learners’ creativity is enhanced, not impeded.

The lack of text books in particular may create disruption within classes as students who are not on task might get restless and become chaotic in class which might attract punishment as a consequence. This was in contrast to Marissa who went to a resourced urban former model C school and who believes her school context helped her grow academically and otherwise, as according to her:

*“Books were lent to us by the school but we had to return them after we were done using them and worksheets were also made by teachers ....to aid learning.”*

Many resourced urban schools do not have issues such as those previously articulated by Lerato and Mthokozisi. They boast state-of-the-art facilities and competent, well qualified educators and management. Contexts such as this, like in the case of Marissa who went to a highly resourced school that had competent teaching staff and management, also played a vital role and helped her in closing the academic gaps she had: *“We had text books, science lab, library, computers...set books. I had a good teacher....she played a huge part in my academic development.... where I am today.”* This goes to show that experiences and contexts have a lot to do with what type of experience a learner has in high school. The situation was worse for Zama as her teacher was always absent and ready replacements were not available:

*“He used to be absent..... Teachers were not enough...therefore we were robbed of what rightfully belonged to us.”*

The sense of entitlement is not lost to the student but context can make it difficult to make demands even when one knows what his or her rights are. It was even worse for Zama who reminisces about her high school days:

*“Our school was very under-resourced, lacking text books; as a result teachers were the only people with books. The school also lacked photocopying machines and projectors which led to students copying notes from the chalkboard whenever necessary. There were no libraries or laboratories, there wasn't enough desks (priority was given to Grades 10-12). The school lacked sufficient classrooms and desks. We had to sit on bricks...”*

Libraries should be a prerequisite if a school wants to train not just students who are equipped but life-long learners who are ready to excel in life. However, some

schools have libraries which are lacking in books, librarians and reading desks and chairs. Simphiwe understands the need for a library and highlights how unhelpful their library was in their high school. *“There was a library but it was full of outdated textbooks and there was not enough books to use, so it was no longer useful to do work at that time.”* Kevin’s school had no library and functional laboratory but only blackboards and textbooks which did not go round. Smilo’s high school fared better as it had computers, a chalk board, sufficient desks, two libraries and a laboratory.

The ability of a school to implement the use of English as a language of teaching and learning despite the difficulty inherent in that remains part of the basic issues affecting learner performance. This might account for why children do not speak the English language accurately or are not able to use it convincingly in reading and writing tasks and situations. Orland (2001) believes the physical condition of the work place, teachers’ lack of motivation, the tradition of the workplace and the dynamics among teachers play a role in this, and Kamwangamalu (2003) brings in the language dynamics and role that the English language plays as a language of power in these situations. Mqgwashu (1999) and Balfour (2000) have shown that the teaching and learning of English in Black schools in South Africa still, and for some time, will remain a formidable challenge for the present and future governments. This is a situation not lost on a child schooling in a rural or township context, as Nompilo pointed out:

*“There was a time we said let us speak English from the moment we enter the school gate so that we would be better at it, so they were like..... ‘no, why do you want to make yourself look like you are better than others’..... That is the same language that our papers are going to be written in.”*

This points to the fact that the use of English remains an obstacle to effective education in different school contexts while the absence of it can be detrimental

in the scaffolding and cascading of learning in and out of class. The use of English in high schools appears to pose a challenge, as highlighted by Lerato: *"teachers did not even encourage us to love and practice speaking English,"* a case corroborated by Mthokozisi, who believes: *"reading was not encouraged hence our apathy for reading,"* and Nompilo adds: *"our teachers were not proficient."* Mthokozisi believes the culture of reading was lost on most Black people as they never valued it and it affected him adversely. Reading and the ability to read helps students not just in their study of English but other subjects as well as it improves understanding and learners' ability to participate in class.

#### **4.3.4. Schooling and Family Impact**

The experiences and influences of high school students originate both in families and through schooling. Families play a positive role in the academic life of a student (Chen, Kyle & McIntyre, 2008). Sometimes unfortunately they can be toxic in their effect on the life of a learner knowingly or unknowingly. Situations such as child-headed homes and homes where children are in charge of their upkeep or have parents who do not play any significant role in their lives have the propensity to affect a learners' classroom output in particular and school life in general. Enhle had a family that was involved, as she posited:

*"When I first got to high school my marks were really bad for English, then I started reading books. My sister forced me to get a library card and I started reading and that was when I started really enjoying English. I enjoyed the classes because the teachers made me read because I would say I was a good reader."*

This runs contrary to the experience of Nompilo who says:

*"Our school was in the township and not everybody went to school to learn, other people were just going there because their parents were forcing them to while other parents weren't interested or were absent or living in the city."*

However, Zama painted a very balanced perspective that saw hope in an otherwise bleak circumstance:

*“The school was located in a deep rural area. The students were very respectful (as they were educated by traditional Zulu parents) and that might have something to do with their social background (deep rural area) where elders are to be respected.”*

So in as much as there are contexts that are very predictable, it does not take away the fact that students can get positive experiences in a rural context or vice versa, as experiences are as personal as they are exclusive and cannot always be predicated upon context.

#### **4.4. The Role Played by Student Teachers’ Experiences of the High School English Classroom in their Decisions to Become Teachers of English**

##### **4.4.1. The Decisions of Student Teachers of English to Become Teachers of English**

It is believed that early personal histories in education are strong influences in the thinking and practices of student teachers (Knowles & Holt-Reynolds, 1991). The fact that English is the language of teaching and learning and a subject that is compulsory in many South African schools puts English teachers in a privileged position of influence in the life of their students. This influence can be positive or negative but nevertheless capable of influencing students to make teaching their career choice (Galton et al., 2009). Nompilo believes agriculture and not English helped her make the decision to become an educator but knowing English and participating actively helped her understand the other subjects, hence her choice to take English as her major. She notes:

*“This made it easy for me to relate to other subjects and help the others, when we understand we would then say the word in Sesotho so that everyone else could understand and then you would hear them exclaim in amazement.”*

Nompilo believes their lack of English vocabulary made it difficult to learn English as their inability to understand a particular word in a sentence in some cases obfuscated the entire meaning the sentence is meant to communicate. In her words:

*“The problem was the word which made it difficult to understand the entire paragraph. I helped the other students understand these words as I was better in the knowledge of English vocabulary. Doing this made me comfortable and increased my desire to do and teach English.”*

This is in contrast to Lerato whose choice was borne out of a sheer desire to change the experience she had. According to her:

*“There was nothing to love about English as it was a language we never used so it was left to the teachers to make it lovable, which they failed to do....I didn’t love it due to the way it was taught. My desire to change this made me choose to be an English teacher.”*

This is the same with Ayanda who opines that her English classroom did not impact positively on her decision to become a teacher (they were not the most positive) but her choice to study English was influenced by her negative English language experience in high school. Having teachers who were not effective in delivering English lessons led to her wanting to teach English and to improve the quality of material delivered as well as the methods used to teach. Kevin also experienced a boring English class and vowed to change that:

*“I believe English can be interesting as a subject and can be taught in an innovative way to change the erroneous belief that English is a boring subject. I feel that I can make that emphasis in my own teaching methods. And by so doing make students aware that there are careers which can be pursued after studying English which are not limited to teaching; careers like writers, authors and poets.”*

This goes to show that the desire to become English teachers is borne out of variety of reasons which may be as personal as they are professional and also as positive as they could be negative. The reasons are multi-faceted which goes to show that within each experience in high school is a seed capable of germinating and in the process producing myriads of outcomes that may impact individuals involved in the experience in a variety of ways. This divergence in reason for choosing teaching is captured by Enhle who believes her English teacher was the motivating factor for her.



*“I have said this is the subject I am going to teach and I will go and do teaching and I want to be just like Miss Moodley. If not for my English classroom I wouldn’t have taken teaching as a discipline.”*

Her view is corroborated by Marissa, who notes:

*“I saw my teacher’s passion and I really looked up to her as a teacher and want to be like her in making a difference.”*

This shows the influence teachers wield in the life and career of their students which is in line with Valenzuela (1999), who argues that it is important to examine how students are schooled, rather than focusing only on how they learn, because the organisation of schooling can be just as consequential to their academic progress as pedagogy. More than half of the respondents in this research chose to be teachers due to the positive impact their teachers had on them in high school. Others, like Nikita who wanted to do law but was dissuaded by her teacher and was told in no uncertain terms by her English teacher that she would be a good teacher of English and that was why she chose to become a teacher. This is in line with what Herman (1996) calls “studentising” which is a process of socialisation into rules, routines and subordination in school, which enhances inclusion as a student in the school world as a preparation for the world of work.

#### **4.4.2 Teachers and the Practice of Teaching**

Teaching is both a profession and a calling. The work of a teacher in today’s classroom is multi-faceted. My respondents outlined the type of teachers they would love to be when they finally qualified. All the participants in this study outlined innovative teaching methodologies and pedagogy in line with modern practice which was in contrast to what these participants had experienced. Some participants elected to model their classroom practice against the one they experienced. Ten of my participants chose to model their classroom teaching in opposition to the models they experienced themselves. It is evident from the numbers in this research that most students’ sojourn into the field of teaching

emanated from a desire borne out of some possible bad school experience. For Lerato motivation is key to learners' need for change in their life and circumstances. To achieve this, she says:

*“I would love to be a teacher that will change the learners' life for good, teach them beyond passing exams but things that will help them in their future as individuals. I want to be a teacher that is motivated because when you are motivated your learners become motivated.”*

Similarly Enhle was emphatic on the type of teacher she wants to be:

*“I want to teach in a Black school (under-resourced or rural). I want to be that teacher that when a child from Kwa Nyuswa or any of the rural areas comes to university they do not feel threatened academically but is confident enough to learn and prove themselves. I don't want them to be defined by their background or context but by the content of their output. I do not want the gaps that exist between them and learners from White schools (former model C schools) I want to liberate these learners. I want to empower them to not look at their background and confidently, proficiently learn English like it is supposed to. I would encourage lots of oral, writing and listening and I will encourage them to read a lot so as to help them get that needed proficiency in English.”*

Ntokozo believes instilling the culture of independence, creativity and democracy is the best way to teach:

*“I will be a creative teacher who uses new methods and strategies in teaching and learning such as games during lessons. A teacher who takes different views from learners and allows them to share their views and take over class discussions. I believe it is also good to create professional but friendly relationships with students, especially those who seem challenged. Also, I would like to be a teacher who does intensive research on classroom learning and teaching.”*

Nompilo sees content as the most vital aspect of a teacher's work:

*“I want to be an English teacher who knows her content. I want learners to explore learning in any way possible. I want them to know that as Africans speaking English it does not degrade our language. I want them to know that it is merely a medium of instruction. You can't change that it is a language of power and economy. I want them to know that this stigma we have with the language must just stop. I want them to know that knowing English well will translate to academic progress. And the fact that we get people who get 100 percent in mathematics and then get 40 percent in all other subjects simply because they require one thing which is English is deplorable. A good English teacher will*

*definitely help learners not only in English but in all other subjects taught in English.”*

For Ayanda, boredom has made it difficult for learners to enjoy school, a lot become frustrated and drop out of the system, so she advocates a methodology that makes learning fun:

*“I will make my class exciting and interesting. I already started it during my teaching practice. I will encourage group works and a conversational classroom where confidence is enhanced through constant English communication. I want to be a model as well for good communicative skills. They will know what I expect through how I use it myself through speaking and reading. I will try enriching myself in content knowledge no matter how long it takes me to achieve that. That’s the type of teacher I want to be.”*

Similarly Mthokozisi notes:

*“I want to be the type of teacher who believes that each and every learner has the potential to become somebody through education and that they know every aspect of English because English affects the way we relate to individual subjects as every subject is taught in English. I want to be a type of teacher that employs constructivism as an element of ensuring that a learner-centred approach is used effectively, inviting the social part of the knowledge of learners and the cognitive part of the learners’ knowledge. I will help create a conducive atmosphere where teaching and learning happen.”*

Aphiwe wants to be a teacher that helps build independent students:

*“I will be a good language teacher, I will be encouraging. I will get my learners to engage appropriately without depending on me. I will get them to engage in whatever activity that is given rather than them believing I will be there to bail them out. I will try to make them believe in themselves.”*

Nikita was more focused on relationships:

*“I will be the professional teacher that is approachable, accessible, learners know that they can ask questions, talk to me about anything. Be accessible, be that teacher who is always patient and goes the extra mile for the learners, because I think that’s very important. The moment you show them that you have time for them and you care enough to help them pass is when you can get the most result from them.”*

Kevin was intent on creating a democratic culture:

*“I would like to be an innovative teacher who facilitates the learning process instead of controlling it; (can get learners out of the class and teach English there) allow the students to enjoy the process instead of forcing them into things.”*

And his stand is corroborated by Smilo, who opines:

*“I would like to be the kind of teacher that my learners can relate to and also can talk to outside the class. I want to be that kind of teacher that can find a balance between my formal work (which is me teaching) and my secondary work (which is being able to make them feel comfortable around me) being a mentor to them.”*

Simphiwe focuses on scaffolding and methodology:

*“Scaffolding students is a better teaching methodology than transmitting knowledge as it helps to facilitating and understanding learners because that is how it makes it easy for you to work with your learners. When you understand them, their background; you must know their background knowledge before you teach them in class. Because as I went for my teaching practice, I could see that for some learners you are going to teach them discipline before you teach them the content. And it is unfortunate that in the curriculum there is no time set aside for you to teach discipline. I don’t want to be a teacher who goes to class knowing everything, and making everyone listen to what I have to give.”*

Zama believes teachers should instill courage, ambition to succeed in life and an open mind to the process of learning with all its challenges, and importantly for her learners to manage their time. Accordingly teachers should also be easily approachable.

In her words:

*“I want to be a teacher who instills courage, ambition to succeed in life and an open mind to the process of learning with all its challenges and importantly for learners to manage their time accordingly (keeping a diary with time frames for each planned activity for the day). I believe I will be an easily approachable teacher and that will be facilitated by my humble personality.”*

These go to show the type of teachers and kind of school and classroom they want to foster. It is easy then for the students, having spent most part of their tertiary years being introduced to diverse teaching methods, to juxtapose their current experiences with their high school. The marriage of the two will predicate an outcome close to what policy dictates both in the schools of education and with the Department of Education.

Kevin believes innovation helps in facilitating a learning process that puts learners first, and Ayanda is of the view that making learning fun will be the way to go, bringing passion and creativity into teaching. Further to that, teachers are supposed to be role models to the learners they teach thereby making it easy for learning to happen where what happens in class and what the teacher says are in consonance. Knowledge of content is the way to go for Nompilo, as teachers who know their content impact learners positively in class. English, she believes, as does Enhle, is at the heart of every good thing that can be done for a learner in class. Their knowledge of English, they believe, has the ability to not only spur learners to great academic heights but also improve their opportunities in life.

Ntokozo contends the tenets and values of democracy and creative ingenuity in cascading classroom content should be at the heart of classroom practice. She believes teaching the way learners learn rather than how they should be taught should be the way to go in the classroom. This will be enhanced using methods and strategies that speak to learners' needs and contextual realities. This, she believes, should be done in an environment that is convenient and accommodating and with professionalism and candour. Lerato sees a change in the life of the learners as the best outcome of a learner-centred technique that is not aimed at fulfilling assessment requirements but at teaching the whole person. This will engender a motivated classroom where learners are self-taught and objectively instructed. Enhle hopes to work at closing the gap between impoverished rural schools and privately funded urban schools that tend to threaten the future of young children. This is in line with the position of Rivkin, Hanushek and Kain (2005) that a poor child who has a high quality teacher for five consecutive years would have large enough learning gains to close the achievement gap with high income students. She believes young learners from rural handicapped backgrounds cannot be empowered except if it is started in the classroom. What other way to achieve this than to create a platform for excellence for these learners

using the English classroom. For Enhle, learners who are grounded in the use and understanding of English can go so far in their life and academics. Nikita maintains being approachable and accessible will make it easy for teachers to recreate a sense of positivity within their classroom practice. All these opinions go to show the outlook of student teachers and the kind of school and classroom they want to foster.

#### **4.5. The Role of Student Teachers' Experiences of their High School Classrooms on their Current Experiences of Studying English**

##### **4.5.1. Student Teachers' High School English Experience vis-a-vis Current Experience of Studying English**

At the heart of learners' high school experience are the issues of teacher content knowledge and school management which continue to undermine academic progress of learners especially in high school (Statistics South Africa, 2006; Bloch, 2009).

The situation enunciated above has affected six of the students in this research negatively. For Mthokozisi, his English was at a very poor level at university and he feels his past experience is to blame:

*“The way we grapple to make sense of some engagement in English makes me think high school is to blame because when I came to varsity I could not read and make an informed judgement of most English texts given to me.”*

Poor levels of English skills create a substantial barrier to education and also limit employment options (Jupp & York, 1995). A lack of English language and literacy skills, and especially a lack of experience with academic English, is one of the major issues facing students from English second language backgrounds.

Students have been found to compare themselves with their English-speaking peers and opting out from interactions or even class participation due to their limited interpersonal communication skills. Their language barrier, therefore, became an obstacle to learning and social engagement, as students sacrificed their learning opportunities in order to avoid being seen as people with low levels of competence (Carrasquillo et al., 2004; Anderson, 2004, cited in Brown et al., 2006; Mgqwashu, 2007).

Lerato believes that the lack of opportunity to practise English in the classroom meant that she felt “scared” when she had to use the language outside the classroom:

*“I struggle a lot to read and write, because at school we were not really taught the importance of reading and writing especially in the English language. For example in school I did not do novels in literature, in the university I have to read a thick book and memorize all the events and characters. I am slow in reading because I was not exposed to it in my high school so it becomes difficult for me.”*

Clarke (2003) reveals several ills within the education system that impact negatively on learners and schooling. Top on these lists were lack of infrastructure, incompetence, lack of content knowledge and lack of professionalism on the part of teachers. These issues impact negatively on the lives and study of learners in high school.

Not all the student teachers in my study were impacted negatively. For students like Nikita and Marissa, their high school English classroom had a positive impact on them thereby preparing them well for the English they now learn. This is not the case with Lerato who did not have a great experience of English, especially regarding literature. It is possible teachers do not take the trouble to expose students to the amount of work expected of them either due to a teacher not being proficient in that area or fearing the amount of work that they have to contend with as some classes are large and too much for one teacher to handle. Experiences

such as this can also motivate learners to become teachers or discourage them as well as affect their university experience negatively as they find out they have not been well groomed or prepared for the study they now undertake. The amount of work might become cumbersome and the methods or approach foreign if learners have not been prepared in high school. Enthusiasm, focus and hard work have been entrenched in the study life of Marissa and Nikita as the best way to learn the language, which is completely in contrast to Aphiwe who hates reading till today because she was never really encouraged to do so and still has difficulty with some words when it comes to articulation:

*“If I was equipped with the right skills from high school I will basically be sailing away in university. Our English teachers instead of them getting us engaged with the novels would rather give us notes and basically summarise the novels. Now in university I find that I have to read by myself, summarise things by myself and make notes by myself. Before now everything was done for me. Sometimes throughout the reading I find myself dozing off, if I started earlier I could have been trained, I could have been skilled. When I pick up a book I should know what I am supposed to do with it to get the needed understanding without someone holding my hands.”*

This clearly highlights how schooling if not appropriately scaffolded can impact negatively on the future and career of students involved. High school is not meant to equip learners only in the areas of academics but in building self-confidence and teaching them studying techniques. Some teachers’ lack of trust in their ability and their learners make them want to spoon-feed their learners to the detriment of their individual ability and growth. When learners get to university they are forced to work alone and it becomes difficult as they have become used to being helped in tasks. The issue of assessment also plays a role here as teachers, especially in examination classes, do not want to submit results where their learners have failed.

For Zama, the fact that poetry was badly taught affected her negatively:

*“...I still find myself struggling with poetry in my English modules. I had never developed a love for it due to the effect of my high school education on poetry.”*



Her position is supported by Ayanda who notes:

*“I have been struggling with English since I came to the University because I learnt English in a teacher-centred manner and couldn’t engage with content critically. I also had a problem with grammar and the teacher was not able to identify the problem and try solve it and help us. I used to look at those people who matriculated in Grade 12 earlier on like during the apartheid era and you find out that some of them are more competent than I am. And I ask myself why ...so high school affects the way I do English now. I am not trying to compare or class schools here but in classrooms you will find out that whenever a lecturer asks a question, learners normally from the former model C schools are brave enough to express themselves and you will see elements of being critical whereas we from public schools are shy, we are scared that maybe when we are trying to put a sentence together in English, we will employ some isiZulu and things like that.”*

Students struggle if they have not been grounded in some areas which are vital to their success and further growth academically. Some teachers have the tendency to skip some parts of English language education they are either not conversant with or have not had enough grounding in. Ayanda made mention of her experience with people who went to school during the apartheid era seeming to be better in their use of language than them. This could be as result of the system and method that was employed during those times which are not used presently or it could be an issue of administration.

Learners benefit when they are taught by a teacher of high quality who has appropriate subject content knowledge (Rivkin et al., 2005). As with Zama, it is likely her English teachers did not appropriately teach poetry and that may have put the learner at a disadvantage going into university. One module at university focuses on poetry alone and for a learner whose contact with poetry or the teaching thereof was minimal, it becomes a daunting task to navigate through these modules. The appreciation and understanding of aspects of language or particular genre do not happen abruptly but happen over a period at which time a learner understands the dynamics and complexities that add to the knowledge worthy of

building up a learner. This is in line with Cameron's (2006) belief that teachers have a huge role to play in the development, influencing and shaping of young people's lives. This role is not only academic but a holistic development that helps them when they transit to university. But again this speaks to the issues of proficiency and pedagogy. From this response one can see a learner who is unfazed by the experiences of her high school; who has made the effort to personally work hard at closing the gap that exists in her academic life especially in English in order to have a better and fruitful experience of university. It is highly practicable from the foregoing to change one's experiences from a very negative one to a positive one or also from a positive to a negative. Changing one's experience is helped to a great extent by context and a learner's will and resilience to succeed. Some students are able to change their experience of being taught English in an under-resourced school by switching to a well-resourced school. However, one can only imagine how challenging it can be for a person who has been in this kind of a school from the reception grade referred to as Grade R and who might be unable to change the circumstances under which he/she is taught. It is very difficult and these students are the ones that are not so comfortable in engaging in class discussions and are easily overwhelmed at university. Aphiwe believes strongly that English is poorly taught in Black schools:

*"I hated the idea of how Black students are perceived when it comes to teaching them the language. The idea of breaking up words or else using simple terms just so that they are able to understand placed them at a disadvantage because they then lose interest in learning knowing that things are done for them."*

This actually made her choose teaching to correct the impression that Black learners need extra help to understand and engage in and with English. Teachers are an essential resource that contributes to a nation's economy, given that they are expected to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge and skills for progression into higher education or the world of work. There is the tendency to have different

classroom methods by teachers who might be products of the country's chequered apartheid history that enforced segregated education and gave teachers different teacher training (Welch 2002). The passion of some learners to change this trend has led them into choosing to be teachers as already highlighted in my study.

For Mthokozisi the method was faulty:

*“The English classroom I experienced was teacher-centred because he will normally come to class and from his exercise book ...will write an activity on passive voice and active voice. Even in literature there was no time whereby learners were asked the theme of the short story or any form of probing question. What the teacher does is come to class (he used what we call ...the banking content by Paulo Freire)... tell us the thing we are about to learn and then he will tell us the three short stories you have done this term, two of them are going to appear in the exam. When he was telling us those things there was no joy or excitement around the subject whenever he came to teach us because of the manner in which he taught. I expected more but given the fact that I understood what was happening I think I told my mum I needed a study guide and then did some extra/personal reading on the side to have a chance of passing.”*

The methods teachers employ in class go a long way in determining the performance of learners in that classroom. The teacher in Mthokozisi's class used a teacher-centred approach that did not resonate much with learners and as such was unable to impact his learners positively in the class. The teaching was geared towards assessment as learners were mechanically prepared to write and pass examinations thereby making assessment an end instead of a means. The lack of ingenuity and creativity in the classroom removes excitement from the classroom making it difficult for learners to invent and create but rather to reproduce expected answers and regurgitate outcomes. When classroom expectations are not met the learner is left to fill the gap mostly by extra-curricular activities that might improve the lacuna that has thus been created. In some cases the family can step in while at other times the school brings in some extra help for learners who are in situations like this. Mthokozisi was fortunate he had a family that was able to help him, sometimes other students do not have such privileges.

He went on to point out how difficult it was writing an essay because they were not taught how to write one but were rather expected to write it whenever they were asked. In his words:

*“Though I was expected to know how to write an essay, there was never a time we were told ‘if you want to write an essay this is how you do it.’ But essay writing comes out in both formative and summative assessment that we undertake in school.”*

This issue as raised by Mthokozisi highlights the apparent difficulty learners face when they move from high school to university or from one grade to another. In some circumstances they are expected to have reached a certain milestone in their study life. In doing this students might be overlooked and punished later for their inability to comprehend what is being taught whereas it is possible that it is the teachers’ inability to meet learners at their level and walk them to where they are supposed to be that is making it difficult for them to be at their best.

Nompilo agrees:

*“Time was not given for rebuilding on the foundations because we are learners, and have the tendency to forget, we weren’t given feedback whether we understood something or not, she just assumes you are in this grade so basically should have the concept for this; so then, she starts up from here rather than starting up from where you will understand.”*

Teaching learners using their context can go a long way in making it easier for them to understand and apply rather than using a context that is unfamiliar to them. From the above it is obvious the manner in which English was taught was abstract making it difficult for learners to relate and attempt questions posed to them.

The issue of competence is again highlighted as students in my study lacked faith in the competence, qualification and proficiency of their teacher to teach English. Even though role play and debate were brilliant teaching strategies, Lerato viewed them negatively probably due to how they were implemented in class. When these

strategies are appropriately used in class it has the ability to bring learners into a more familiar content knowledge and move them from being adherents to participants in their own teaching and learning. Questioning and rote teaching are teaching strategies that can also be used to bring about learning, and just like I earlier pointed out, the methodology a teacher employs while using them is where learners can have problems. These might be part of the misgivings possibly informing Lerato's position.

For Lerato:

*"The strategies they used was to select students to role play particular characters especially in drama, and that was how we mostly did it. There was no group work, there was debate. She was using questioning and just taught (rote teaching)."*

Nompilo concurs:

*"We read for ourselves most of the times. She would allow us to read because we were better readers than her. She would just be in the class making comments where necessary. I cannot say she used other strategies, we felt we had nice accents, most of the time when she would read we would laugh. We wanted to make it fun, because the other learners had fun made for them. We would play a game and she would buy sweets. If you ask a question and no one is able to get it you will get your sweet. The teacher knew the short stories (maybe because she had been doing it for a very long time, it seems she knew it off by heart)."*

The teacher in Nompilo's class allowed them to read by themselves which was a good strategy as this dictated the manner and method of their own education. The manner in which she gave learners freedom in the class was encouraging even though Nompilo seems to look at it as a negative teaching strategy. But methods such as this are capable of bringing the best out of learners. The best way to harness learners' potential is to allow them space within the classroom to become partners in their own education rather than spectators.

The issue of lack of competency and professionalism, as highlighted by Bloch (2009), continues to plague the system. The teacher in this context either due to lack of competency or professionalism is said to not be a good reader and also did the short story she is familiar with which makes it difficult for learners to improve if their teacher is lacking in confidence or competence, or both. Teachers should not just be pace setters but trail blazers who are able to guide learners on the road to success and a future capable of preparing and keeping them in their chosen career.

Nompilo blames her high school for her poor start to her academic life at university.

*“I had a lot of gaps between my high school English and learning at university. I had no idea what an academic essay was and as a result I struggled a lot especially in Academic Literacy (ALE). My first year was very bad to the point I was regretting that I chose English in the first place, I should have taken another module. It affected me a lot, I cannot tell you how I passed ALE but I just knew I couldn’t fail. Failing was not an option. I think with English Communication in the second semester things started becoming better. But my first and second year were the toughest. It is only now that I am beginning to find myself, and realised I was missing out in some things. I think it is also evident in my result, it was roughly 55, 56 and then 65, 68 and later 70, 80. There were differences from how we were taught English in high school and how it is taught here in university.”*

The way English was taught in high school lacked depth and did not allow learners space to be productive and creative. It is evident that methodology and content cannot be the same in high school and university. The learner was self-motivated and able to help herself through hard work to bridge the obvious gap that existed due to her high school shortcomings. Every learner is able to help himself or herself despite the circumstances or contexts they find themselves in. It all boils down to commitment and hard work. Having said that, some students from my study happen to have been prepared better for life at university than others. This preparation, besides the confidence it gave to the students, also gave them an edge over others. So many students have a difficult classroom experience which affects them going forward. Students like Ntokozo whose classroom experience jeopardised her faith in her ability, said her experience was traumatic:

*“It got to a point where we didn’t understand what was happening in class. We had no relationship. She will just come in class sometimes with her articles about something. Usually she will bring a motivational booklet and she will read it until the class ends and then leave and we would have learnt nothing. I think maybe she was trying to motivate us. She was really.... I rather not think about her because she never prepared me for what I am witnessing today.”*

Currently according to Ntokozo, *“I will say it’s difficult for me to participate in class because I am usually not sure about my language, my grammar, and my dictions.”* She finds it difficult to speak and rather prefers to write something down than speaking because writing helps her to erase and make corrections. She goes on to opine that, *“Usually in English class I will just listen and not participate. When a lecturer asks a question, I need to think about it before I answer. And so it’s quite difficult.”* This goes to show what Ntokozo as an individual does to try and make sense of daily classroom routine interactions, discussions and teaching. It is possible that a learner’s understanding of a language or lack thereof can permanently hamper or boost a learner’s progress.

Nompilo argues that the fact everything was predictable made it easy for them and it took away the desire and passion expected:

*“Everything was so predictable, we knew that she was going to take the paper from the past year, so we would go to the library and Google them ourselves. We knew it was going to be one of the past four papers.”*

It is possible that some teachers do not bother putting much effort into the setting of exam questions and would rather recycle them to make it easy for them to mark and probably easier for the learners as well. But this eventually catches up with students when methodology and pedagogy changes at university. This unpredictability that characteristics their life at university has the capability of derailing their progress and their future as well.

"The university has assisted the students by creating a platform that caters for various academic needs of the students. Teaching method was flexible and

dynamic and able to allow for creativity, flexible and a dynamic approach that made it possible for all to be involved. This is succinctly captured by Smilo who argues:

*“It is opposed to a method mostly used in the high school; where a teacher believes this is right, this is the only right answer. At university they allow you to explore other avenues as far as you can support your answer. I think if that was used a person will be able to critically discuss. But now I think if that was used it would have been of help to us. In high school I was only looking for what the teacher wanted, I wasn’t looking to learn. But here I am looking to learn and sometimes I am even looking to challenge the teacher. If that was used it would have benefitted me.”*

Three participants in my study raised the issue of code switching which occurs when a speaker alternates between two or more languages, or language varieties, in the context of a single conversation. Some teachers code switch in order to create understanding. Cummins (2000) agrees this can enhance the learning of the target language. But there exists a thin line between code switching and teaching a language using another language, as can be seen in six (6) of the schools in this research. In these schools, teachers taught English using IsiZulu. Simphiwe believes this makes it difficult for students to adapt to using English in everyday interaction either in or outside the classroom as learners have become used to being taught concepts in their mother language.

This is captured by Simphiwe:

*“The code switching was like 50/50 in the lower grades but in Grade 12, the code switching was like 95/5. So it was more English than isiZulu so some other students were struggling because they were not used to it. It should have been 100 percent English from the start so we get used to it and how to use it as well.”*

Simphiwe believes the teaching method as captured here still affects her current experience of studying English at university. Although she was taught differently and in different contexts, she doesn’t find any correlation between methods used in high schools and university:



*“At university we get deeper with the poem, novels and short stories which never happened in high school. We only did one novel and maybe like five poems in high school whereas here, every semester, you are doing poems, some semesters you are doing three novels ....”*

And it was far worse for Zanele: *“In Grade 10 we had one debate, Grade 11 one oral and Grade 12, nothing. English was sometimes taught in isiZulu.”*

There may be many reasons why teachers of English would teach English in another language, one of which will be proficiency. Some teachers might not be proficient in the target language or possibly believe that is the best way to teach their students who may be struggling with the language. Teachers felt it was necessary to explain English lessons in isiZulu probably to ensure that everyone understood what was being communicated. Maybe they were not as proficient as they were supposed to be or they were trying to help them understand content in IsiZulu but in the process making it difficult for them to use English and also difficult for their proficiency in English to be evaluated. It also hinders the improvement of students' knowledge or ability to master the language fully because of the lack of practice. Simphiwe insists: *“They were not proficient; isiZulu dominated throughout our academic and social life, every conversation in school was done in IsiZulu.”* This further exacerbates the dire situation the learners faced as the school was located in a deep rural area so isiZulu dominated and the environment which was mono-lingual contributed to their lack of proficiency. This affected Simphiwe and many other students. Ayanda spent her last years of high school in an African school which led to her being comfortable with expressing herself in IsiZulu; that had negative consequences when she went to university because she had to adjust to just using English as a medium of communication in class.

*“It is not easy to express yourself in English when you did not get the practice in high school; this made us not to use English in high school and currently being unwilling to answer in a lecture here in the university even if we know the answer ...”*

Enhle contends that her high school and university are not far apart experience-wise. She had a good experience of high school and that experience spilled over to university. She is one of a very few who falls under that category. But she also does not completely believe the schools are to blame for their academic success or otherwise. She believes students have the capacity to help themselves and the gap between students from poor schools and the very affluent schools has more to do with infrastructure and teacher quality rather than motivation. Many students from poor rural schools are highly motivated and have the ability to challenge and compete with the best students in the country. To achieve this the teaching method has to be re-evaluated. It is evident then that English teaching uses a multi-faceted technique that is all encompassing. Some learners who are good in writing may not have been as good in their oral or listening skills. The aim of an English classroom though is to create an enabling environment that helps learners in their reading, writing and speaking skills. Some schools focus on one aspect of language teaching more than another thereby creating a loophole capable of derailing a learner's academic future. She contends that her context did not affect her academic life as she has been able to rise above all the challenges posed by her high school experience. In her words:

*“I have issues in language I need to work on personally not because of the school I went to, though I went to a Coloured school and before that I had gone to a Black school, so with learners that had attended White schools, what I notice is different between us is the accent. I speak English with a Coloured accent, while with these other learners they speak English like White people. What I have noticed with the assignments or the works I have to submit is that most of the time we get the same marks, so I don't think they were in any way more privileged than me. I think we are just the same the only difference is in speaking English correctly. They are more fluent when they are speaking but on paper they are either on par with me or I am a level above them. I wouldn't say I was under-privileged with the school I went to, I think they are more confident when they speak, it is just that with us when you want to speak you try to make sure that it sounds 'English' enough. We are the same there is no difference between us.”*

Zanele's high school experience was difficult. It was teacher-centered and learners had no voice: *"The teacher would just come and preach to the class; there was no student engagement the entire time."* Zanele and her classmates lacked the platform to practice the language, to make mistakes and possibly learn to properly use and understand the language better.

The history of apartheid and its relationship with English language also came into focus and Nompilo contends some teachers do not like English because of the past and do not teach them as they are supposed to, due to their aversion for the English language. She posits:

*"I think when it comes to English and in most rural schools especially because it is dominated by people of colour, I think it is important that teachers realise that when they don't teach us in English because they have grudges about whatever happened in the past, it affects us. They know it affects us because most of the teachers take their children to private schools, so they know their children are not affected. And we are the ones who are affected."*

Students always juxtaposed the teaching they had and the practice they are having. It is the way that they formulate methodologies, pedagogy and style. Smilo wanted to explore other ways in which English can be taught:

*"My teachers showed me a particular way in which English can be taught, I wanted to see if it is the right way, this will also help the student discover which method is most effective."*

The variety of teaching methods at the university had a positive impact on the student's academic life and progress as his marks have improved.

*"In university there are no wrong or right answers so that makes it easy to contribute as well as look at a certain topic through different perspectives. Teachers in high school believe a strict teacher-centred way is the right approach of getting the best result but I've found out it is not so."*

Ten (10) of the participants did not completely paint a gloomy picture of their high school experiences, there were places where they admit progress was made and their experiences were pleasant and appropriate teaching methods were used by their teachers. Aphiwe said: *"There were group works, testing and oral*

*presentations, there was no debates but there were language tests, prepared and unprepared speeches.”*

Enhle’s situation was far better than Zanele’s: *“We did a lot of reading and writing (you will be given topics to write on and present) and orals. I think that was where my writing skills developed.”* Teachers are able to develop learners through the method they apply in their classroom. These methods have long lasting effects on a learner’s progress.

It was equally the same experience for Marissa:

*“Our class was interactive, we did group work (little groups to discuss our story), questioning, recapping our prior knowledge, things that we know, and testing that; we were given a different story and role play as a form of assessment and were meant to pick a scene and play it out. We did posters like a story board. We had to understand..... We did a whole lot of speeches. How to do prepared and unprepared speeches.”*

Group work can be problematic if not properly facilitated (Davies, 2009). Ayanda contends that most times when group work was used it was mostly not effective due to group dynamics. Some learners dominated the group process which led to the rest of the students feeling too intimidated to even contribute. Writing was left to the dominant members and that had negative consequences for those who did not contribute. Group work was not that effective in this regard which means a teacher’s use of any method will always boil down to what is important to learners, and how this is cascaded is dependent of context, demographics and the teacher’s understanding of these.

For Smilo, storytelling or class discussion should be used more often rather than the mostly teacher-centred approach where the teacher is the only one conveying information. There should also have been field trips to watch plays as well as lessons outside the classroom. Improvisations in whatever form help to create a classroom experience that is not just interesting but also less boring. A

monotonous approach to the teaching of language will make it difficult for learners to establish the rapport needed for effective learning and experience to happen. Besides issues of strategy and method, Smilo believes organisation helped him and he remembers his high school teacher:

*“I think it was very organised in the way she conducted her class. From the moment you walked into her class, you knew you had to sit down and if that day you are doing grammar you knew that Monday was grammar, vocabulary, language, literature, or poetry.....”*

It goes to show that organisation plays a critical role in learners’ understanding and helps in creating an experience that is not only positive but capable of preparing learners for the world of work and/or tertiary studies. For Ntokozo, the strategy that was used the most was reading, and then using the strategy of questioning was used alongside the reading strategy. There was group work but the strategies were mostly the simple ones. Further to that Ntokozo continues:

*“There was group work, questioning and storytelling. Storytelling was the most interesting one. They would tell us stories. Yes, I think those were the three most used, I never had a debate in my English class. The only time I had a debate, it was in social sciences and it was in Grade 8.”*

Ntokozo may not have had the best classroom experience of English but she understands that method more than everything and teacher proficiency is vital to a warm classroom experience where learners achieve optimum results and succeed in what is expected of them. As mentioned earlier, students’ experiences have never been the same even when learners’ schools are in close proximity and have similarity of context. As with Marissa, who did have an impressive classroom experience predicated upon pedagogies and methodologies that still help her in her current English experience:

*“We built on what we were taught in high school. We were already introduced to literature and teaching in the classroom but I knew what I was going to expect, my knowledge really improved looking at how dynamic English teaching could be. University life is different from high school though not completely, being introduced to academic writing, referencing was new and collaborative, learner-centred teaching was mainly used here through group work tutorials.”*

Zanele could not identify any effective teacher who taught English. For Kevin there must be a change in methodology, as he asserts:

*“English teachers should be more innovative in their teaching methods but mine were not. English was only associated with a certain voice of that teacher. We could be taken out of the class, taken to the theatre to watch a set play or novel, a teacher might not even talk and English will be taught.”*

Students' proficiency in the language improved but only five conceded to participating appropriately in reading and writing in class. They contend that most of the times they did write or read for assessment purposes and they were not prepared enough for what they were assessed on or what was expected of them.

Smilo underscores the importance of reading:

*“There needs to be an emphasis placed on reading, spelling and grammar. Actually reading, reading, more reading and more reading. Reading improves vocabulary. What I have also come to realise when I am here is that learners lack vocabulary, they lack grammar. They say the same thing twice or thrice trying in the same paragraph to put it in a different way, they can't express themselves. That is what I found difficult.”*

From the foregoing it is evident that most teachers from the study use a teacher-centred rote teaching method. There are a lot of probable reasons why teachers would use this method. Owing to the poor infrastructure and large classes in most cases, it is easier to manage learners and also it is less tasking. Role plays and debates were frowned upon as the teachers perceived them as capable of causing chaos in class. This may be due to class size and other demographics; it is within the teacher's discretion then to use a method that works for his/her learners and by so doing achieve optimum output. To bridge the gap then between high school and university it becomes imperative that there must be a whole school approach in place to create better experiences that are capable of positively impacting on students without diminishing their self-confidence and ability.

One of the most difficult situations that most English second language students are faced with is succinctly captured by Ntokozo:

*“In English lessons it is where I am most comfortable, I can participate in lectures as it has taught me the importance of letting your voice be heard. Though at times, I struggle to participate because of not being able to perfectly put words in speech. I prefer writing to speaking. I also prefer learning in small groups such as tutorials than in lectures.”*

The issue of competence, teaching methodology and proficiency have been some of the issues learners have raised as having impacted on their academic future. It is possible the manner in which learners have been taught and educated may not have sufficiently prepared them for life at university. I can conclude then that learners that had had positive high school experiences find it easier to fit into university than those who have not. However, in several instances from my study learners who have had very negative high school experiences have gone on to enjoy their academic life at university without being disadvantaged so much by their high school academic background. The teaching of English involves writing, speaking, listening and viewing and there is a high possibility that a teacher is not able to comfortably highlight all four aspects of language. It is possible Ntokozo has been impacted positively by written English more than by spoken English probably due to how it was cascaded in class or the methodology or approach the English teachers that taught him used. There are students whose strengths are in spoken rather than in written English. This may not have been due to how they were taught but how students received the teaching given to them.

This was the case with Mthokozisi who admits:

*“The use of IsiZulu to break down jaw-breakers (the difficult terms) has affected me because when I came here to the university it was hard to express myself without using one or two words of IsiZulu. In high school I was doing English as a first additional language, whereas here at the university I am forced to consider it as a first language. My past experience of my English classroom did not teach me to write essays on short stories or poems (for paper two we responded to short questions), so I had a tough time to adapt into critically analysing a literary text.”*

From the above text, it is clear that students like Mthokozisi have not had a constructive high school English language classroom experience which makes it difficult for them to function in a more complex study environment like

university. It is possible that some students did not make it to university because of the manner of education they received and some who made it may continue experiencing some lacuna that makes it difficult to measure up to the standard expected and to the standard of their peers as well.

From the above it becomes clear that teaching methodology and pedagogy go a long way in preparing students for the world of work and tertiary study. So many students will have a positive tertiary experience while some others might not be able to navigate university due to their high school experiences. This pre-supposes that high school experience and university cannot be divorced as they affect each other positively or negatively. Having said that, one wonders how a teacher can help second language speakers get a complete hold of the language without a systematic well-structured approach in writing, speaking, listening and viewing. It is obvious some teachers are not doing this, and as such make it rather difficult for students to have worthwhile experiences in language acquisition that will help students in their study life going forward.

Nompilo gave a scathing diagnosis of her high school education:

*“My high school learning was a waste. I would like to believe that the most beneficial English that’s working for me is that which I have learnt from the higher institution of learning. Learning how to structure and write an essay. Learning what a sentence is comprised of. All these basic things of language I have learnt here even though it has been a constant struggle that’s improving every day.”*

The position of Nompilo around issues of quality and management is also echoed by Henning and Gravett (2012) who question the professional qualification of some teachers at the start of their teaching career. They believe not all teachers have the experience and qualification to teach when they start teaching. Some get the experience and qualification along the way while others get the experience and not the qualification. This presupposes that so many students get disillusioned by schooling. Their fate will be decided by what happens going forward which is



where the university comes in to help bridge the gap within the academic divide. Learners like Nompilo would have to take recourse in the ability of their tertiary studies to help them learn what they either have not learnt in high school or learnt wrongly in high school. Ayanda's confidence was not helped by the context in which she attended high school.

Simphiwe believes their teachers taught them what they wanted to teach and felt comfortable teaching not necessarily what the curriculum required. This emphasises teachers' professionalism (or lack thereof) when they choose what to teach rather than teach what is prescribed. Enhle has benefitted from high school English just like Simphiwe, who believes high school has made university life easier:

*“To this day I still enjoy English. I always compare my lecturers to my high school teacher, and luckily I have never experienced lazy English lecturers, some are reminders of her, while others are just an extension to her wisdom and her ‘walking dictionary ways’ (I called her a walking dictionary). I would say her approach to teaching English has made it easy for me to adapt in university, I do not regard myself as someone that has fully acquired proficiency in the language, however I am coping very well and it is because of the skills I learnt in high school and learning today in English classrooms.”*

Some learners had a positive high school experience making their life in the university less strenuous. A positive high school experience makes university a continuum of unbroken education in pedagogy, methodology and content. Kevin believes university has changed his perspective and given him a different dimension from which to see things:

*“It has made me more open to the fact that English can be fun. I wanted to change my opinion on the subject. From studying it at university I would be able to look at the subject from a teacher's perspective and therefore be able to use an alternative approach to teaching it.”*

From the above it is inexplicably obvious that university has been helpful in changing the experience which Kevin had in high school. The university needs to understand the diversity of its students and try through the use of a variety of

methodologies and pertinent pedagogies to help students who are struggling to get the help they need.

#### **4.6. Conclusion**

From this chapter it is evident that experience is both an internal and external process and is not something that happens to a group but to individuals. Even when a group has a common experience the depth to which it is experienced is different from one member of the group to another. The environment or context plays a great role in every experience but is not the only factor. There are factors that are both seen and unseen, known and unknown, which have the ability to impact on not just the experience but the type of experience one gets.

From the analysis one can find that the students in this study had both great enduring experiences and very negative destructive experiences. It is evident also that family and home environment, as far removed as it is from the context under research, can also impact on a student's high school experience.

The importance of teachers, the relationship they have with learners and the methodology and pedagogy that they apply to their work in and out of class cannot be over-emphasised. Many students in my study highlighted the issue of teacher-centred rote teaching as detrimental to their academic success. Such methodology is characterised by an instructor (teacher) and learner type of arrangement; learners spoke when spoken to, making it difficult for learners to relate. This creates apprehension where learners are unable to ask questions or make contributions in class. Teachers should have cordial relationships with their students as that gives students the freedom to be themselves in class and make valuable contributions to classroom discourse. The absence of cordiality makes it difficult for students to ask questions or make meaningful contributions in class. The classroom context should also make it easy for learners to have different

opinions from their teachers. A healthy classroom setting must encourage divergent views as that is the foundation of creativity and independence which is at the base of academic growth and success.

It has been established that the experiences of student teachers of English has informed not just their decision to become teachers but also teachers of English. This goes to show that no experience can be overlooked as it is capable of either fostering or derailing the dream and future of a future teacher. At the heart of the learners' choice to be teachers is a desire to play a role in the future of young people. But reasons for becoming a teacher are far deeper than that; while they are personal, they are almost all united by the desire to impact people's lives. In as much as many stakeholders are involved in creating a worthwhile and fruitful learning experience for learners, it is teachers who have a direct effect on students in the classroom, because that is, after all, where learning takes place.

## **CHAPTER 5:**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **5.1. Introduction**

My research was centred on the experiences of the South African English classroom with the focus on the high school experiences of student teachers of English at a university in KwaZulu-Natal.

This study was considered imperative due to the upsurge in the number of students registering to be teachers and the existing gap in knowledge among these students that has seen some excel while others struggle. That prompted a critical look into their past high school experiences. This study set out to determine if current study can be affected or enhanced by past experiences which has necessitated a study that speaks to those realities.

It is pertinent to further note that all the schools in this research located in the rural areas and townships were considered by the participants to be under-resourced and all the schools in the urban areas were considered to be well resourced. This goes to show the apparent disparity in development among urban, township and rural settings in South Africa and the asymmetrical impact it has on schools and schooling consequently. This study suggests that in general, schools in urban areas boast the best resources and more qualified teachers than their counterparts in township and rural areas and this fact has consistently shaped the outcomes emanating from schools located in these contexts. There are findings that point to the fact that most poorly managed schools are also located in the townships and rural areas which could explain why many learners in these areas have poorer experiences of high school than their counterparts in the urban areas.

Some schools have resources which are not put to profitable use, for fear of learners vandalizing them or damaging equipment or infrastructure supposedly bought or constructed for their use. The fact that most of these schools do not pay

fees probably made it expedient on some principals to prioritize the safety of school infrastructure, study apparatus/equipment and information and information communication technology (ICT) over students' use or interest.

Taken altogether, these results suggest that English was predominantly used in all the urban schools and IsiZulu and Sesotho used mainly in the rural and township schools depending on location and the language group that dominated that location. The implication of this is the possibility that learners' inability to understand or use English was their greatest undoing as it affected not just their academic life but also their confidence and general interest in education. This is happening against the backdrop of English being the language of teaching and learning in most South African schools. My research also highlighted many schools where teaching and learning were prioritised and where learners were helped not only academically but also to be motivated and dream bigger. My research threw up a very convoluted classroom and school experience that also led to a variety of reasons why the student teachers in my research chose to be teachers. The relevance of classroom methodology to this study is clearly supported by the current findings. These experiences were found to have informed the current experiences my participants are having in their study of English.

## **5.2. Main Findings**

This study has shown that student teachers of English in a university in Kwazulu-Natal have had experiences that influenced or impinged on their choice of teaching as a career. These experiences still have an effect on their current experiences today, both negative and positive. These experiences were subjective as it was determined by each individual's unique circumstance and context. Each context is as unique to the individual as it is his/her experience. One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study is that student teachers' experiences of urban schools were more positive as they enjoyed better facilities, quality teachers and teaching and a more conducive environment for teaching and

learning compared to schools in the rural areas and townships. While it was seen that some student teachers recognised that their circumstances made it difficult for them to study and have a positive school and classroom experience they worked hard with what they had to improve their situation while those in the urban areas had a context that made it easier for them to achieve their desired objectives.

Although the current study is based on a small sample of participants, the findings suggest that families play important roles in the academic lives of their children in contrast to learners whose fate and school life are left completely in the hands of the teachers and school. Students who reported that parental influences had an impact on their education made better choices and helped create a positive environment necessary for their growth.

The most obvious finding to emerge from this study is that many student teachers experienced classrooms where teachers were mostly preoccupied with directing and morally and socially rearing the pupils rather than creating pedagogical conditions that promote pupils' critical and reflective thinking. There have become many issues that make learning difficult, issues like lack of parental involvement, large classrooms and lack of discipline. Situations as these cannot be blamed completely on teachers as the situation in some schools made it failure an inevitable outcome. The evidence from this study suggests that learners are not getting enough help to close up existing gaps in their academic and mental growth. Learners should be guided to play a role in their own academic life as the intended outcomes for schooling is among other things to create a critical and independent learner capable of contributing to the boosting of the country's workforce and able to also stand on their own. Student teachers are trained to become teachers who are able to create and improvise, by so doing contributing towards fostering environments conducive for learning; this should also support communication that involves learners' own perspectives and interests.

This study also finds that the type of experiences learners underwent in high school were not only necessitated by teachers' content knowledge, methodology and pedagogy but also as a result of context, infrastructure, resources and relationships. Infrastructure such as a library, laboratory, computer centre and sports facilities can create a rather positive high school image for a learner even when classroom circumstances are debilitating. For some it was difficult and quite challenging while for others it was interesting and encouraging. Sometimes these experiences are not just about contexts but about the individual learner as some learners were seen to have different experiences in schools located in the same context. It was established that the individual student's response and interpretation of events and incidents were as personal as they were different with another even under the same milieu. The role teachers and school management play in dictating the type of experience a learner can have cannot be overemphasised. They are the live wire and creators of content and atmosphere and as such play a huge role in dictating how their students experience their schooling. Issues of class size, discipline and scaffolding of content also have direct implication on how learners experience their high school career.

The enhancement of positive student learner experience through recruitment and keeping of professionally qualified educators with skills, values, attitudes and competences to engage in day-to-day running of schools and classrooms is the intention of the Department of Education. Then there is the issue of dysfunctional schools which was a recurrent feature in my research. In as much as most 'dysfunctional' schools are found in rural and township schools populated by Black people, race and colour did not necessarily play a role completely in the situation under review. One of my participants believes her primary school experience in a purely Black school was better than when she went to a multi-racial former model C school. This could be as result of the type of management that runs the school or the teaching staff or both. However, I found out it was not

a straightforward race-related division. Some schools that were ‘dysfunctional’ were multi-racial. However, it does not take away the fact that Black children suffer the most in high school and are the most possible to miss out of tertiary studies or drop out of tertiary education as well. This may be as a result of the fact that they are the largest in number among the confederating racial groups or because of the history of apartheid replete with issues of discrimination and lopsided development both in infrastructure and manpower. It is possible that no other sector feels this imbalance as strongly as the educational system where young people study in decrepit situations and poorly run schools lacking in qualified personnel.

Some research found that urban students are self-motivated which was contrary to my findings. In my findings, some students from deplorable school conditions in the rural and township areas were self-motivated despite their contextual circumstances, the same way some urban students are. Experts believe early personal histories in education are strong influences in the thinking and practices of student teachers, and teachers in carrying out their daily duties influence their learners. These influences can be positive or negative but are nevertheless capable of influencing students to make a career of teaching.

Some learners chose to become English teachers because of the impact the teaching of English had on them in high school while others chose to become English teachers due to other reasons which were as personal as they are contextual. Some learners’ choice of becoming teachers were influenced by their negative English language experience and sheer love for English rather than the classroom context. It is not surprising then that ten of my participants chose to model their classroom teaching in opposition to the models they experienced themselves. This confirms then that one’s desire to pursue a career in English language teaching can be borne out of a variety of reasons which may be personal and professional as well as positive or negative. Each person’s drive is exclusive



to a very multi-faceted myriad of circumstances and experiences whether they be personal or contextual. Low proficiency in English does not only have negative consequences academically; it impacts on students' broader socialization and social life.

Against this backdrop then, the claim that teachers do not forget how much influence they wield in the life and career of their students cannot be interpreted as being sacrosanct as students in circumstances as these sometimes use it to their advantage by helping themselves get out of the situation they find themselves in. Teachers are supposed to help students in dire school circumstances to build an organised and focused study approach that would have a positive impact on their future. Whatever a teacher does in the classroom affects a learner one way or the other. It is important to know that knowledge is vital and it rejuvenates the humanity and passion in them for their chosen career and calling. This will help marry pedagogy and organisation into important focal points in the teaching and learning process. This is because more than half of the respondents in this research chose to be teachers due to the positive impacts their teachers had on them in high schools rather than the negative.

The work of a teacher in today's classroom is multi-faceted due to the fact that the work of a teacher goes beyond the teaching profession to something personal and life changing. This made my participants align their intended teaching methodologies and pedagogy with modern practice which was in contrast to what they mostly experienced in their classroom.

It is pertinent to note that most of my participants when asked about their school experiences remembered teachers and not methods and techniques; this goes to show that the teacher is at the heart of the educational systems. However, issues of incompetence in basic language knowledge and a general language barrier made it difficult for students to become integrated easily into the academic life of South Africa's universities.

The Department of Education profiles schools according to whether they are functional or dysfunctional. It is believed in some quarters that roughly 75% of pupils in South Africa attend dysfunctional schools. This was corroborated by my study to a great extent by Minister of Education, Angie Motshega's parliamentary media briefing in which she argued that the diagnostic test of the NDP said 80% of the schools were dysfunctional bears testimony to this. Functionality here is measured by attendance of teachers and learners and Annual National Assessment for the foundation, intermediate and senior phase learners and matric for the FET phase. It is established that most of the former Model C schools and private schools are beyond the reach of the poor academically, geographically and financially.

It has been found that learners carry their experiences with them as they move up in life and in their academic pursuit. Where this experience is negative it makes it difficult for learners that had had this experience to progress academically. Many learners found it difficult to move from one phase to another or one grade to another due to a chequered school history and experience. It was also highlighted from the study that lack of experience with academic English is one of the major issues facing students from English second language backgrounds. Students who had a poor English language experience ended up struggling or being strangulated in their tertiary studies as their foundation in English creates a gap between where they should be and where they are. When students are faced with such barriers, their classroom participation and engagement in and out of class is stifled. This leads to drop out of learners and inability of others to even access tertiary studies. My study finds that many learners did not practice English enough in their high school to prepare them for further education and study where they are expected to meet and navigate their academic lives seamlessly together with students from more privileged urban and private schools using the English language. The tone that teachers and school management set in schools especially in the use and study

of English is highly instrumental to how far learners can go towards achieving their dreams, and in the case of my study, what roles these school experiences play in their current English experience.

### **5.3 Significance of Study**

This study contributes to existing studies around student teachers' experiences of the English classroom. Despite its exploratory nature, this study offers some insight into how learners are schooled and how their schooling affects their choices in life. Learners' futures and careers are impacted by a positive high school experience as it creates a favourable climate that supports growth and development irrespective of personal circumstances.

Appropriately schooled student teachers take with them the gains of high school to their tertiary study and as such will make better teachers. My study recognised that there is a relationship between high school experiences and further education especially as it affects student teachers. The study also understood the impact of high school experiences on the desire of learners to become teachers and also on their current experience of learning English at university.

### **5.4 Limitations of the Current Study**

The participants were not observed during the time of the experiences they enumerated in their responses. There are possibilities that some of the facts I got from the participants are either not completely accurate, which was why I used several data collection methods to help to overcome that. The study was undertaken in the middle of normal academic activities, which was sometimes difficult for students and, at times, affected their ability to concentrate on my questions. However, I needed patience to enable the process to unfold.

## **5.5 Areas for Future Research**

This research has thrown up many questions in need of further investigation.

5.5.1. Further work needs to be done to establish whether student teachers who had positive experiences do better when compared to student teachers who had negative experiences.

5.5.2. There needs to be more research into the effects of high school practices and experiences on students' academic futures, not just for future teachers but also for students pursuing other careers.

5.5.3. Considerably more work needs to be done to determine to what extent current students' experiences are, in fact, as a result of their high school experiences.

## **5.6 Implications for Teaching and Teachers**

These findings suggest several courses of action for professional practice and teaching of students in institutions of learning. Students' high school experiences are to a great extent affected by the amount of investment in infrastructure and resources, both human and capital, as they compromise a learner's engagement with the wider target language community in general, and second language classrooms in particular.

The role of management is an important factor capable of derailing a school's progress and with it, learners' experiences. While the government has built schools and classrooms, and has improved the resources in the poorest and most disadvantaged schools, some schools have not been able to manage the resources provided by government due to factors ranging from not having capable hands to manage them, to locking them up to avoid vandalism and inappropriate use.

The findings in this study show that school management in most cases failed to administer the school as expected and by so doing allowed for the breakdown of

the culture of teaching and learning. This is as opposed to schools which Christie and Potterton (1997) refer to as “resilient schools”, which functioned where others failed. They were remarkable as they did not fail due to lack of funds, infrastructure or resources. All of them managed to survive, if not thrive, in contexts where neighbouring schools showed the symptoms of crisis and what has come to be termed “the breakdown of the culture of teaching and learning”. This goes to show that for a school to thrive it is not just about resources, about quality teachers or about a competent management team but about a systematic fusion of all these weaved together to create a successful school, worthy of positively affecting the lives of learners.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

My study is intended to highlight experiences of the South African high school system especially as it involves the teaching and learning of English. Being the language of learning and teaching (LoLT), it is imperative that students are well instructed in the use and understanding of English as that helps in creating a conducive classroom, conducive to accommodating and inspiring learners. Being well-versed in the use and appreciation of the English language helps in raising students' readiness and ability to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. To achieve this, teachers, especially teachers of language, must be capable, well equipped and conversant with the demands, and how to apply their knowledge using the resources available to them in bringing about effective change in their respective classrooms. Teaching must be a process of guiding and facilitating, in which children are encouraged to think and understand for themselves, and to discover how to learn.

The task of initial teacher education is to prepare students to enter a profession which accepts individual and collective responsibility for improving the learning and participation of all children. Furthermore, there is no better place to prepare student teachers for the classroom than the universities designated for such

training. Thus, student teachers arrive with beliefs and images based on their experiences as learners. If a learner experiences the classroom as a safe, healthy, happy place with supportive resources and facilities for teaching for optimal learning, he/she tends to participate more than expected in the process of learning and this leads to the overall improvement of the school.

The ability of all the stakeholders in education to bring about conducive teaching and learning environments that will create more positive experiences will go a long way in helping to produce teachers of high quality and professionalism. This creates room for the development of a learning environment which allows for the space for interaction and for shared building of knowledge, operation and participation which is not hampered by class size, class composition, background, school climate, academic environment, discipline, and relationships with teachers.

Learners' high school experiences and student teachers' tertiary experiences cannot be divorced as the effect of the former impacts on the latter, hence this research. These experiences go a long way in determining how far learners who have had the experiences can go. Creating a platform that will start the discussion on how and why high schools should provide and foster positive school conditions for learners to not only thrive but build their future through hard work and appropriate support, is the intention of this study.

Further to this, my study suggests that the people in whom learners have the greatest investment and belief, may be the very people who are making it difficult for learners to have positive high school experiences. I therefore believe that it is imperative for teachers, learners, parents and researchers to understand how such investments support or obstruct learners' ability to succeed in tertiary institutions of learning, and then act on this understanding.

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Appendix 1.



School of Education, College of Humanities,  
University of KwaZulu-Natal,  
Edgewood Campus, Durban,  
South Africa  
13/08/2015

Dear Participant

### **INFORMED CONSENT LETTER**

My name is Munachiso Anyanwu. I am a Masters student studying at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood campus, South Africa.

My research seeks to understand the 'Experiences of the South African high School English classroom: A case study of high School experiences of student-teachers of English at a university in KwaZulu-Natal'. To get this information, I am interested in asking you some questions in the form of a questionnaire, interview and narrative account.

The objectives of this study are:

Objective 1: To understand how student-teachers of English at university experienced learning English in the South African high school English classroom

Objective 2: To ascertain the extent to which student-teachers of English at a university in South Africa believe that their experiences of their high school English classrooms played a role in their decisions to become teachers of English

Objective 3: To determine the extent to which student-teachers of English at a university in South Africa believe that their experiences of their high school English classrooms affect their current experiences of studying English.

Please note that:

- Your confidentiality is guaranteed as your inputs will not be attributed to you in person, but reported only as a population member opinion.
- The semi-structured interview may last about 30 minutes.
- Any information given by you cannot be used against you, and the collected data will be used for purposes of this research only.
- Data will be stored in secure storage and destroyed after 5 years.
- You have a choice to participate, not participate or stop participating in the research. You will not be penalized for taking such an action.
- Your involvement is purely for academic purposes only, and there are no financial benefits involved.

I can be contacted at:

Email: [munagod06@gmail.com](mailto:munagod06@gmail.com); Cell: 0783198426, 0742603231

My supervisor is Dr. Ansurie Pillay of the School of Education, Edgewood campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Contact details: email: [pillaya3@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:pillaya3@ukzn.ac.za); Phone number: 031-2603613

You may also contact the Research Office through: Ms. P. Ximba HSSREC Research Office,

Email: [Ximbap@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:Ximbap@ukzn.ac.za)

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

**You may keep this document**

**Appendix 2.**

**Informed Consent: Declaration**

I..... (Full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you willing to be interviewed using audio-recording equipment? Tick against the appropriate answer (x).

Willing:	Not Willing:
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### Appendix 3.

#### Semi-structured Questionnaire

Please fill in answers to the following questions:

1. Please provide me with demographic information:

1.1. Gender \_\_\_\_\_

1.2. Age \_\_\_\_\_

1.3. Race \_\_\_\_\_

2.1. Please identify the name of the high school you attended

\_\_\_\_\_

2.2. Duration of attendance – identify the years - From

\_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

2.3. Would you consider the school a resourced or under resourced school?

\_\_\_\_\_

2.3.1. Please give reasons for your answer in 2.3.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2.4. Is the school located in a rural or urban setting?

\_\_\_\_\_

a. What language was pre-dominantly used at your school?

\_\_\_\_\_

b. What was the official language of teaching and learning at the school  
(in what language were tests and exams written?)

\_\_\_\_\_

4. In your opinion, how proficient were your teachers in the language of teaching  
and learning?

\_\_\_\_\_

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5. Please provide 3 words that characterize your experiences of your high school.

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6. What experiences do you have about learning English at high school? This is an open question that aims to find out your personal experiences of learning English at high school. (Should you need more writing space, please use a sheet of paper)

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7. Do you think that your experiences of your high school English classroom played a role in your decision to be a teacher? Please explain your answer. (Should you need more writing space, please use a sheet of paper)

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8. Do you believe that your experiences of your high school English classroom has affected or shaped your current experiences of studying English at university? Please explain your answer. (Should you need more writing space, please use a sheet of paper)

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## **Appendix 4.**

### **Semi-structured Interview schedule**

1. During which years did you attend high school?
2. Was your school a well-resourced or under-resourced school? What resources did they have?
3. Is the school located in a rural or urban setting?
4. What language was pre-dominantly used at your school?
5. What was the official language of teaching and learning at the school? In what language were tests and exams written?
6. In your opinion, how proficient were your teachers in the language of teaching and learning?
7. Please tell me, in as much detail as possible, your experiences of your high school, in general.
8. What experiences do you have about learning English at high school? This is an open question that aims to find out your personal experiences of learning English at high school.
9. Did you have a cordial relationship with your English teachers?
10. Would you say that your expectations of an English classroom were met? Please explain your answer.
11. Was there an English teacher who was particularly effective and/ or ineffective and why do you say so?
12. Please describe some teaching strategies used by your English teachers and say whether you think they were effective.

13. What forms of assessment were used in the English classroom and were they effective?
14. How was discipline maintained in your English classroom and was it effective?
15. Do you think that your experiences of your high school English classroom played a role in your decision to be a teacher? This is an open question with no right or wrong answers.
16. Do you believe that your experiences of your high school English classroom has affected or shaped your current experiences of studying English at university? Please feel free to provide as much information as you wish.
17. What other experiences of yours related to the high school English classroom would you like to tell me about that has not been asked already?
18. What type of teacher would you be when you become a qualified teacher?

## **Appendix 5.**

### **Written Narrative Account**

Please write a narrative account of your experiences of the South African high school English classroom. In your account, you may consider:

- What experiences you have had learning English in a high school classroom
- To what extent you believe that your experiences of your high school English classroom played a role in your decision to become a teacher of English
- To what extent you believe that your experiences of your high school English classroom affected your current experiences of studying English

The points above merely serve as a guide. Please feel free to write on any other aspects of the topic. You may write your account in any form that you wish.

Appendix 6.



14 October 2015

Mr Munachiso Anyanwu 208520957  
School of Education  
Edgewood Campus

Dear Mr Anyanwu

Protocol reference number: HSS/1200/015M

Project title: Experiences of the South African High School classroom: A case study of High school English classroom experiences of student-teachers of English at a University in KwaZulu-Natal

**Full Approval – Expedited Application**

In response to your application received on 20 August 2015, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol have been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

.....  
Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)  
Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

/pm

cc Supervisor: Dr Ansurie Pillay  
cc. Academic Leader: Professor P Morojele  
cc. School Administrator: Ms T Khumalo

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Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

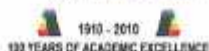
Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000

Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 3687/035014567 Facsimile: +27 (0) 31 260 4609 Email: [vinsoo@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:vinsoo@ukzn.ac.za) / [vinsharm@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:vinsharm@ukzn.ac.za) / [mshumo@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:mshumo@ukzn.ac.za)

Website: [www.ukzn.ac.za](http://www.ukzn.ac.za)



Funding Campus: ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville

Appendix 7.



Appendix 8.



21 July 2015

Mr Munachiso Anyanwu  
School of Education  
College of Humanities  
Edgewood Campus  
UKZN  
Email: [208520957@stu.ukzn.ac.za](mailto:208520957@stu.ukzn.ac.za)

Dear Mr Anyanwu

**RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH**

Gatekeeper's permission is hereby granted for you to conduct research at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), towards your postgraduate studies, provided Ethical clearance has been obtained. We note the title of your research project is:

*"Experiences of the South African High School English classroom: A case study of student teachers of English at a university in KwaZulu-Natal".*

It is noted that you will be constituting your sample by randomly handing out questionnaires, conducting interviews and the use of narrative accounts with third year English major students on the Edgewood Campus.

Please ensure that the following appears on your questionnaire/attached to your notice:

- Ethical clearance number;
- Research title and details of the research, the researcher and the supervisor;
- Consent form is attached to the notice/questionnaire and to be signed by use before he/she fills in questionnaire;
- gatekeepers approval by the Registrar.

You are not authorized to contact staff and students using 'Microsoft Outlook' address book.

Data collected must be treated with due confidentiality and anonymity.

Yours sincerely



**PROFESSOR D. JAGANYI**  
**REGISTRAR (ACTING)**

---

Office of the Registrar

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11 Mc Bean Road  
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**To whom it may concern**

This is to certify that I have read the dissertation by Munachiso Anyanwu entitled:  
“Experiences of the South African High School Classroom: A Case Study of High School  
English Classroom Experiences of Student Teachers of English at a University in KwaZulu-  
Natal.”

I have made any corrections to grammar, referencing and spelling which I felt necessary.  
Regards,

Lauren Walford  
084 240 9326  
laurenb@dbn.caxton.co.za