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Reflections on first year teaching by second year novice teachers

By

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(221117201)

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Curriculum Studies, in the School of Education,

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Supervisor: Prof Nyna Amin

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List of Acronyms

B.Ed.	-	Bachelor of Education
CAPS	-	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
CEMIS	-	Centralised Education Management Information System
COVID-19	-	Coronavirus Disease 2019
DBE	-	Department of Basic Education
DHET	-	Department of Higher Education and Training
DoE	-	Department of Education
ECD	-	Early Childhood Development
FET	-	Further Education and Training
ISP	-	Individual Support Plan
ISPFTEd	-	Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development
NDP	-	National Development Plan
PGCE	-	Post Graduate Certificate in Education
PL	-	Performance Level
SACE	-	South African Council for Educators
SGB	-	School Governing Body
UNESCO	-	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USA	-	United States of America

ABSTRACT

The transition from novice to experienced teacher presents many challenges, notably during the induction phase, which significantly influences a teacher's career trajectory. This study explores the experiences of second-year novice teachers, focusing on their reflections on their first year of teaching. Novice teachers often face a stark reality shock as the classroom environment often differs from their expectations, with large class sizes, diverse student needs, and varying levels of resources across different school environments.

A qualitative research design, rooted in the interpretive paradigm, was employed, using semi-structured interviews and a single focus group discussion. Seven second-year teachers, who graduated from a private educational institution, participated in the study. The research aimed to identify the range of experiences, both positive and negative, that these novice teachers encountered, including the challenges they faced, the coping strategies they employed, and the support system that fostered their professional development.

Key findings revealed a significant reality shock experienced by novice teachers due to the disparity between theoretical training and the practical demands of the classroom. Effective mentorship and professional development programs were identified as vital support systems that enhance novice teachers' confidence and teaching efficacy. Moreover, the study revealed a plethora of positive experiences, such as supportive relationships and collaborative environments, which served as indispensable sources of emotional and professional support. Participants reported that mentorship and professional learning communities were invaluable in improving their classroom management skills and overall teaching competency.

The implications of this research highlight the imperative need for effective support structures such as mentorship programs and professional learning communities to help novice teachers navigate the complexities of their early teaching years. Additionally, the findings stress the significance of improving training programs to better prepare novice teachers for the realities of the classroom. These recommendations are intended to promote teacher retention and optimise educational outcomes in South Africa.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The progression from novice to experienced teacher involves many challenges and opportunities for learning. This phase, commonly referred to as induction, significantly influences a teacher's career path. Understanding these experiences is essential for enhancing teacher retention and improving educational outcomes. Research studies since at least 1984, and likely earlier, have documented that novice teachers struggle with a phenomenon known as reality shock; the stark contrast between their expectations and the realities of classroom teaching (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Veenman, 1984). Undoubtedly, South African early career teachers face similar challenges.

The South African education system has undergone extensive reforms aimed at improving its quality and addressing historical disparities (Department of Higher Education and Training of South Africa (DHET), 2011b). Despite these efforts, novice teachers often encounter additional challenges related to socioeconomic factors, limited resources, and diverse student needs (Spaull, 2022). These challenges are particularly pronounced in under-resourced schools, where novice teachers frequently face complex educational environments. The teaching and learning process can be significantly hindered by large class sizes, inadequate teaching materials, and insufficient infrastructure.

To address the extensive challenges encountered by novice teachers, essential support systems such as mentoring programmes and professional development initiatives play a crucial role in guiding them through the initial years of their teaching careers (Hudson, 2012). Effective support can alleviate the impact of reality shock and improve retention rates (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). In this study, I explore the experiences of novice teachers in their second year of teaching, as they reflect on their first-year experiences.

1.2 Background to the Study

In South Africa, becoming a teacher entails a comprehensive educational pathway. This typically involves completing a four-year Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degree. Alternatively, individuals can pursue a three or four-year bachelor's degree followed by a Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) to qualify. South Africa also offers teacher education programmes in various specialisations, including Early Childhood Development (ECD),

Foundation Phase, Intermediate Phase, Senior Phase, and Further Education and Training (FET) Phase, which cater to diverse educational needs and levels.

The curriculum for teacher education incorporates theoretical and practical components. However, the practical teaching experience, known as teaching practice, varies significantly between institutions. Typically, student teachers spend approximately six weeks per year in schools, which limits their hands-on experience. During this period, student teachers are expected to conduct a specific number of lessons. However, their exposure to the full scope of a teacher's responsibilities is often inadequate. This limited exposure leaves students unprepared for the significant demands of a full-time teaching role, which encompasses not only managing a full day of teaching but also handling extensive administrative duties.

The practical teaching component can vary significantly between public and private tertiary institutions. While private institutions may offer student teachers slightly more extensive opportunities for teaching practice, the overall duration remains limited. This disparity leads to varying levels of readiness among novice teachers in South Africa.

The objective of this investigation is not to conduct a comparative analysis between private and public tertiary education institutions. Instead, it focuses on examining the experiences of newly qualified educators as they transition from theoretical knowledge to practical application. Consequently, the study does not explore the quintile system, which categorises schools according to socio-economic criteria. Rather, the research emphasises the analysis of participants' reflections on their inaugural year of teaching, aiming to gain insights into their professional development and the challenges they encountered during this period.

All participants in this study obtained their B.Ed. degrees from a private educational institution. Upon entering the teaching profession, novice teachers confront the challenge of adjusting to a demanding teaching workload, which can be overwhelming given their limited practical experience. Additionally, in South Africa, teachers may not always be assigned subjects or teaching phases (grades) they specialised in during their training. This misalignment between their training and actual teaching roles forms part of the professional realities explored in this research.

In the South African context, novice teachers encounter distinct challenges amplified by socioeconomic disparities, inadequate resources, and diverse student needs. Socioeconomic disparities refer to significant differences in income and living conditions among the population, directly influencing the quality of education students receive. Schools in affluent

areas often benefit from better facilities and more resources, while those in economically disadvantaged communities typically contend with inadequate infrastructure and limited financial resources.

This disparity often presents in class sizes which can pose a significant challenge. In under-resourced areas, classes often exceed 40 to 50 students, whereas private schools typically maintain smaller classes with fewer than 24 students. As a result, teachers in public schools face challenges in providing personalised attention and support, and classroom management becomes more difficult and complex. A lack of teaching resources, including textbooks, technology and classroom supplies, further hinders the ability of teachers to deliver effective lessons.

In any South African classroom, teachers face a spectrum of student needs, including diverse learning abilities, language barriers, and socioeconomic challenges, which are more pronounced in under-resourced schools and exacerbated by large class sizes. Educators must be prepared to meet the needs of students from diverse backgrounds, including those requiring special education services or additional support due to their socioeconomic circumstances.

Novice teachers enter the teaching profession with high expectations, only to confront the harsh reality of under-resourced schools, large class sizes, and inadequate teaching materials. This disconnection can lead to feelings of inadequacy, stress, and burnout.

The experiences of novice teachers in the Umlazi and Pinetown districts of KwaZulu-Natal highlight the challenges faced in diverse urban settings. The varying socioeconomic conditions in these areas create a range of school environments that significantly impact novice teachers. They must navigate large class sizes, address a wide array of student requirements, handle behavioural issues, and engage students who may lack motivation. These complex classroom environments require strong management skills and the ability to create a supportive and structured learning environment. Balancing the development of these skills with the demands of delivering quality education can be particularly overwhelming for novice teachers (Morrow, 2015).

This study aims to explore the reflections of second-year novice teachers on their first year of teaching. It focuses on the challenges they faced, the coping strategies they employed, the support they received, and the triumphs they experienced. It examines both the positive and negative aspects of their experiences to provide a comprehensive understanding of their initial teaching journey.

1.3 Purpose, Focus and Rationale of the Study

The study's primary focus is to explore second-year teachers' reflections on their first-year experiences and, through analysis, aims to uncover the challenges, coping mechanisms, and support systems that facilitated their professional growth.

This study comprises multiple aspects. It aims to identify the primary challenges encountered by novice teachers in their first year of teaching, with regard to classroom management, student behaviour, and curriculum implementation. Additionally, it seeks to highlight the successes and positive experiences that contribute to their professional growth and resilience. The research also explores the coping strategies employed by novice teachers to navigate these challenges and build resilience. Understanding these strategies is crucial for developing interventions that can better support novice teachers during the early stages of their careers (Veenman, 1984). The study explores the roles of formal and informal support systems in assisting novice teachers, including mentorship programmes, professional development opportunities, and peer collaborations. Effective support systems have been shown to reduce stress and improve retention among new educators (Darling-Hammond, 2012; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

The rationale for this study is rooted in a critical need to address the high levels of stress and burnout of novice teachers in South Africa, which leads to substantial attrition rates within the profession.

The early years of teaching are crucial for shaping a teacher's career trajectory, yet many novice teachers find themselves unprepared for the realities of the classroom. The phenomenon known as reality shock, characterised by the stark contrast between the expectations formed during teacher training and the actual demands of classroom teaching, profoundly affects their confidence and effectiveness (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Veenman, 1984).

Socioeconomic disparities, limited resources, and diverse student needs pose significant challenges for South African novice teachers. Schools often contend with inadequate infrastructure, insufficient teaching resources and large class sizes which exacerbates the difficulties novice teachers face in translating theory into practice (Spaull, 2022). These conditions highlight the urgent need for robust support systems to help novice teachers navigate the challenges they face early in their careers.

Support systems, including mentoring programmes and professional development initiatives, are critical in helping teachers cope with their new roles. Effective support can mitigate reality

shock, improve teaching practices, and enhance teacher retention (Hudson, 2012; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Unfortunately, the availability and effectiveness of these support systems vary greatly across schools and districts, resulting in a lack of essential resources and mentorship.

This study aims to provide recommendations for practical support structures for novice teachers in South Africa, with a particular focus on the challenges they encounter. By identifying best practices and strategies applicable to educational institutions and policymakers, the study seeks to improve professional development and retention, thus improving the quality of education in the country. The study will examine the unique difficulties South African novice teachers face, such as large class sizes, diverse student needs and limited resources, to propose effective support systems. Additionally, the findings may offer valuable insight for global teacher education and support programmes, benefiting not only South Africa but also informing international best practices. This study aims to make a significant contribution to the broader discussion on teacher education and professional development, by offering evidence-based recommendations for policymakers, educational leaders and teacher educators. The study's fundamental goal is to guide the creation and implementation of effective support systems that improve teacher retention and educational outcomes globally.

1.4 Problem Statement

Novice teachers in South Africa face numerous challenges transitioning from theory to practice in classrooms. The reality shock from this transition significantly affects their confidence and teaching proficiency (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Veenman, 1984).

Inadequate support systems exacerbate these challenges, contributing to stress, burnout, and high attrition rates. Despite efforts by the Department of Basic Education to implement support and professional development programmes, many novice teachers still report insufficient support in their first year (Hudson, 2012; Spaul, 2022).

This study addresses the issue of inadequate support for novice teachers in the Umlazi and Pinetown districts of KwaZulu-Natal. It explores second-year teachers' reflections on their first year of teaching, aiming to identify specific challenges faced, coping strategies employed, and the most effective support systems for promoting their professional growth and retention.

1.5 Key Research Question

The primary objective of this study is to gain insight into the reflections of second-year novice teachers on their first year of teaching. To achieve this, the study is guided by the following research question:

What are second-year novice teachers' reflections on their first year of teaching?

This research question aims to explore the experiences, challenges, coping strategies, and support systems that second-year novice teachers encountered during their first year in the classroom. Gaining insight into their reflections will provide valuable insights into the factors that influence their professional development and retention, which can inform the design and implementation of more effective support structures for novice teachers in South Africa.

1.6 Objectives of the Study

To achieve the aim of understanding the reflections of second-year novice teachers, the study focused on the following objectives:

1. To identify positive experiences and successes encountered by novice teachers during their first year of teaching.
2. To examine the negative experiences and challenges that novice teachers face, including those related to classroom management, student behaviour, and curriculum implementation, will be examined.
3. To analyse coping strategies employed by novice teachers to overcome the challenges that they face during their first year of teaching.
4. To evaluate the effectiveness of formal and informal support systems, such as mentorship programmes, professional development opportunities, and peer collaboration, in helping novice teachers.
5. To provide actionable recommendations for improving support structures for novice teachers.

By achieving these objectives, this study aims to inform the design and implementation of more effective support structures for novice teachers in South Africa.

1.7 Preliminary Literature Review

This section briefly outlines the key elements and findings of the extensive literature review presented in Chapter 2. The literature review explores the challenges encountered by novice

teachers, the significance of support systems, and establishes a theoretical framework for this study.

1.7.1 Reality Shock and Challenges for Novice Teachers

The existing body of literature on novice teachers highlights the intricate difficulties and challenges they face during their initial years of teaching. A critical issue is the occurrence of reality shock, where the expectations set during teacher training conflict with the actual demands within the classroom. This phenomenon often leads to feelings of inadequacy, stress, and burnout (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Veenman, 1984).

The challenges faced by novice teachers in South Africa are exacerbated by socioeconomic disparities, limited resources, and diverse student needs. In under-resourced areas, such as some schools in the Umlazi and Pinetown districts of KwaZulu-Natal, where the participants taught in their first year, the struggle with inadequate infrastructure and large class sizes further complicates the transition of novice teachers from theory to practice (Spaull, 2022).

1.7.2 Positive Experiences and Coping Strategies

Despite the challenges novice teachers face, they also report positive experiences that contribute to their professional growth. For example, incorporating technology into the classroom has been identified as a positive aspect because it allows teachers to be creative and innovative in their lesson planning and delivery (Doran, 2020). During the COVID-19 pandemic, novice teachers' familiarity with digital tools positioned them as valuable assets in schools, enabling effective integration of technology into their teaching practices (Dvir & Schatz-Oppenheimer, 2020; Mecham, Newell, Reina, & Stewart, 2021).

Inevitably, novice teachers face numerous challenges that necessitate the adoption of effective coping strategies. These strategies include seeking advice from peers, engaging in continuous professional development, and reflecting on their teaching practices to enhance their skills and resilience (Bertram, 2023; Whitcomb, Borko & Liston 2008). The importance of support systems such as mentoring, and communities of practice cannot be underestimated. These networks provide novice teachers with the necessary guidance and resources to navigate their early years in the profession, ensuring their success (Arends & Phurutse, 2009; Hudson, 2012).

1.7.3 Theoretical Framework: Driscoll's Reflective Cycle

The theoretical framework of this study encompasses Driscoll's Reflective Cycle, which highlights the importance of reflection in professional development (Driscoll, 1996). This framework entails continuous learning through reflective practice, where experiences are critically examined to gain insights and subsequently applied to enhance future practices. Reflection helps novice teachers critically evaluate their teaching methods, classroom management strategies, and overall professional development, leading to more effective teaching and increased resilience. Driscoll's framework has gained widespread recognition for its versatility in diverse educational and professional contexts, providing a systematic approach for continuous improvement (Rolfe, 2002).

1.8 Research Design and Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the reflections of second-year novice teachers on their first year of teaching. Qualitative research is well suited for capturing the complexity and depth of personal experiences and offers rich, detailed insights into the phenomena being studied (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018).

This research is grounded in the interpretive paradigm that seeks to understand the subjective world of human experience. This paradigm focuses on understanding emotions, perceptions, and interpretations of the world through the eyes of individuals (Cohen *et al.*, 2018). It is particularly suitable for this study because it allows for an in-depth exploration of the nuanced experiences of novice teachers. This aligns with the belief that reality is socially constructed and understood through human interactions, as expressed by Bertram and Christiansen (2014).

The research instruments used in this study were semi-structured interviews and focus-group discussions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all participants, allowing for flexibility in exploring their experiences while ensuring that key focus areas were addressed. Each interview lasted 60 to 90 minutes and was conducted via Zoom due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021. Interviews were scheduled during the weekends or after working hours. This timing and format facilitated a comprehensive understanding of each participant's experience and perspective (DiCicco, Sabella, Jordan, Boney & Jones, 2014; Nieuwenhuis, 2019). Following the interviews, focus group discussions were conducted to explore the key themes and issues identified during the individual interviews. The focus group setting promoted interaction among participants, leading to a deeper and richer understanding of their experiences and shared challenges (Morgan, 2014). This session was scheduled over a weekend at a venue that was convenient for all the participants.

The participants were requested via WhatsApp, Facebook, and email. Invitations were sent to graduates who completed their B. Ed degrees in 2019 and 2020 as not all graduates commenced teaching immediately after qualifying. From the initial cohort of 20 graduates, seven participants who met the inclusion criteria were selected. The criteria were that they had to have graduated from a private institution, be second-year teachers, and be volunteer participants.

To safeguard the data, all digital research information was password-protected. Audio recordings will be deleted from storage after five years to protect the confidentiality of the participants. Participants were given pseudonyms to maintain their anonymity, and these pseudonyms will be used in this thesis and related work.

1.9 Overview of the Chapters

This paper is structured into five chapters, each focusing on different aspects of the research topic. The following provides a synopsis of the structure and content of each chapter:

Chapter 1 introduces the study, outlining the research topic, background, purpose, focus, problem statement, rationale, key research question, aims and objectives, preliminary literature review, research design, methodology, and an overview of the chapters. This chapter establishes the foundational framework for the study, exploring essential elements that shape the research.

Chapter 2 presents a comprehensive review of the existing literature on the experiences, challenges, and support systems of novice teachers. Central themes include the transition from student to teacher, the concept of reality shock, and the significance of mentoring and support systems in the early years of teaching. The chapter also discusses the theoretical framework underpinning the study, namely Driscoll's Reflective Cycle.

Chapter 3 focuses on the research methodology and outlines the research design in detail. It discusses the interpretive paradigm, qualitative research approach and the specific methods used for data collection. These methods consisted of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The chapter also addresses the selection of participants, sampling procedures, data management, and ethical considerations.

Chapter 4 presents and analyses the data collected through semi-structured interviews and the focus group discussion. It identifies key themes and patterns that emerge from participants' reflections on their first year of teaching. This section provides a detailed description of the challenges novice teachers face, their coping strategies, and the effectiveness of various support

systems. The discussion integrates the findings with the existing literature and explores the implications for novice teachers and education in general.

Chapter 5 offers a summary of the conclusions and recommendations for improving support structures for novice teachers, and addresses policymakers, educational leaders, and teacher educators. In addition, this chapter acknowledges the constraints of the study and proposes potential directions for future research.

1.10 Conclusion

This introductory chapter provides a detailed background to the study, articulates the problem statement, purpose, and focus of the study, and clarifies the main research question and objectives. A preliminary literature review is also included, along with an overview of the research design and methodology. The following chapter presents a comprehensive analytical literature review.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided an overview of the study. This chapter presents a review of the relevant literature and the theoretical framework that informs it.

The literature review is divided into four sections. The first section focuses on the experiences of novice teachers, including their expectations and encounters with reality shock. The second section examines the specific types of knowledge novice teachers acquire and apply, such as pedagogical knowledge and classroom management skills. The third section explores the various challenges novice teachers face, including classroom management, workload, and emotional and psychological pressure. The final section highlights the role of mentorship, professional development programmes, and collegial relationships in promoting resilience and efficacy.

This study aims to provide comprehensive insights into the diverse experiences of novice teachers by critically assessing the existing literature. It seeks to identify research gaps and suggest potential areas for further investigation, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding and more effective support for novice teachers in their initial years of teaching.

2.2 Defining Novice Teachers

The characterisation of novice teachers, often referred to as beginning or beginner teachers, varies across different countries. In the United States of America (USA), the term ‘beginning teacher’ is commonly employed and typically denotes teachers in their first year (Strong, 2009). Veenman (1984), from the Netherlands, extends this classification to teachers within their initial three years of teaching, a definition that finds support in the works of Barrett, Jones, Mooney, Thornton, Cady, Guinee, and Olson (2002).

From a South African perspective, Arends and Phurutse (2009) define beginner teachers as “newly qualified teachers who have recently entered the profession and possess less than four years of teaching experience” (p. 11). Esau and Maarman (2021) use the terms ‘novice teacher’ and ‘beginner teacher’ interchangeably, stating, “Novice teachers, also known as neophytes and pre-service teachers, are often the subjects of studies focusing on educators facing challenges in their professional roles” (p. 1).

In this particular study, the emphasis is on novice teachers in their second year of teaching. Davis, Petish, and Smithey (2006) propose that novice teachers be viewed as individuals “who, by definition, are in the early stages of their journey towards expertise” (p. 608). Therefore, novice teachers are recent graduates at the outset of their teaching careers.

The path to becoming an experienced or a ‘seasoned’ teacher (Lomi & Mbato, 2020) inevitably elicits both positive and negative emotions in novice teachers regarding their perceptions of experienced educators. These emotions can significantly influence the development of their own professional identities (Dvir & Schatz-Oppenheimer, 2020).

The journey to becoming a ‘real’ teacher is characterised by a blend of excitement, anticipation, and anxiety as novice teachers embark on their roles with varying levels of preparedness and confidence. Recognition and acceptance from peers, administrators, and students are essential for novice teachers, as they provide confirmation of their competence and capability (Esau & Maarman, 2021). This acknowledgement strengthens their professional identity, making them feel more confident and respected. During the initial years, filled with challenges such as classroom management and balancing work with personal life, novice teachers must develop effective coping strategies (Arends & Phurutse, 2009). Additionally, positive mentorship and reflective practices support growth, reinforcing novice teachers’ sense of belonging and professional identity (Davis *et al.*, 2006). Understanding these factors enables the creation of more effective support systems to facilitate the professional growth and identity formation of novice teachers.

The experiences of novice teachers can differ significantly based on context, such as private compared to public schools or well-resourced in contrast to under-resourced schools. For instance, novice teachers in well-resourced schools may have access to better teaching materials and support, while those in under-resourced schools might struggle with insufficient resources and larger class sizes. Studies conducted by Botha and Rens (2018) in South Africa, Shulman and Shulman (2004) in the USA, and Khalid and Husnin (2019) in Malaysia reveal these differences. Additionally, Ünver (2014) specifically examines the distinct challenges that novice teachers encounter within diverse educational systems across countries. Analysing these contextual differences, this review offers a more refined understanding of the experiences of novice teachers.

It is essential to investigate the strategies employed by novice teachers to navigate their challenges effectively. Engaging in practices like seeking guidance from mentors, reflecting

on their experiences, and participating in professional development can significantly influence their professional growth and enhance overall job satisfaction. Studies by Feiman-Nemser (2012) and Saidin, Shafii and Veloo, 2020 emphasise the importance of these strategies, broadening the scope and practical relevance of this review. Novice teachers frequently encounter challenges such as classroom management and achieving work-life balance, necessitating the development of effective coping mechanisms (Arends & Phurutse, 2009). Positive mentorship and reflective practices provide further support for their development, reinforcing a sense of belonging and professional identity (Davis *et al.*, 2006).

2.2.1 Understanding the Knowledge of Novice Teachers

The knowledge of novice teachers is a multi-faceted aspect of their professional development. This section looks at the different dimensions of their knowledge and how it develops during the transition from student to teacher.

2.2.2 The Transition from Teachers-To-Be to Teachers

Shulman (1986) explores the fundamental questions of what teachers know and when they acquire it. He examines the sources of teacher knowledge and the process of integrating new and existing information to create a new knowledge base. This transition from novice to expert teacher is a crucial moment (Myers, Lambert, & Howard, 2022). It marks the shift from theoretical learning acquired during studies to its practical application in the classroom.

2.2.2 Types of knowledge

2.2.2.1 Content Knowledge (recognition of the subject matter)

Content knowledge, as described by Shulman (1986), involves a deep understanding of the central concepts of the subject. Teachers depend on this understanding to integrate various elements of the subject into their teaching practices (Bertram, 2011). Interestingly, novice teachers often feel confident that they have mastered the content (Akcan, Kirkgoez, & Ersanli, 2023).

2.2.2.2 Pedagogical Knowledge (teaching methods)

Shulman (1986) distinguishes pedagogical knowledge as the dimension that goes beyond subject knowledge and includes knowledge specifically tailored to teaching. Novice teachers often express a sense of mastery in this area because they believe they understand their role in the classroom (Akcan *et al.*, 2023).

2.2.2.3 *Pedagogical Content Knowledge (translating content into lessons)*

The concept of pedagogical content knowledge is the subject of debate (Bertram, 2011). According to Shulman (2000), it involves the ability to transform content knowledge into comprehensible instruction. To achieve this, teachers must have a solid pedagogical knowledge of their subject and be aware of factors that contribute to the ease or difficulty of learning specific topics (Shulman, 1986). This kind of knowledge, often referred to as 'conceptual knowledge in practice', is supported by Rusznyak (2010).

2.2.2.4 *Regional Variations*

In an American study by Shulman and Shulman (2009), participants generally believed they had mastered academic and pedagogical content. However, in contrast, South African trainee teachers report significant challenges in these areas, particularly with translating theoretical knowledge into practical classroom strategies (Botha & Rens, 2018). This difference highlights the contextual factors influencing teacher preparation in different regions.

In South Africa, trainee educators frequently encounter significant obstacles in developing their pedagogical content knowledge, primarily due to constrained access to resources and limited exposure to diverse teaching contexts. This observation is substantiated by Bertram's (2023) research, which highlights the unique challenges faced by novice teachers in rural and peri-urban educational settings. These challenges encompass oversized classrooms, a dearth of instructional materials, and scarce mentorship opportunities. Consequently, these factors serve to widen the divide between theoretical instruction and practical implementation in the field of education.

Participants in this study provided anecdotal evidence aligning with these findings. One participant shared that “teaching in a rural area felt like a different world compared to the urban settings we were trained in, where resources and support systems were readily available.” Another participant expressed frustration at having to teach subjects they were not formally trained in, a challenge more common in under-resourced regions. These experiences underline the influence of regional disparities on novice teachers’ professional readiness.

Existing research indicates that contextual elements, such as the location of schools and socio-economic circumstances, play a crucial role in determining how effectively newly trained teachers can implement their education. According to Gravett (2012), novice educators in rural settings encounter more significant hurdles due to their isolation and limited access to

professional development. Botha and Rens (2018) further note that these teachers often operate in environments where insufficient infrastructure and oversized classes hinder the practical application of their theoretical knowledge. Bertram (2023) adds that the discrepancy between training settings and the actual conditions in under-resourced schools exacerbates these challenges. Conversely, urban educational institutions typically provide more comprehensive induction programmes and better access to experienced mentors, enabling new teachers to transition more smoothly into their professional roles.

2.2.2.5 *Contextual Knowledge (understanding diversity in the classroom)*

Shulman (1986) emphasises that effective teaching goes beyond content knowledge; teachers must also understand the diversity in their classrooms. Arends and Phurutse (2009) argue that higher education institutions often focus on theoretical content rather than the practical realities teachers face. Novice teachers need to acquire practical skills through trial and error, emphasising the importance of extended practical teaching experiences (Arends & Phurutse, 2009). In South African schools dealing with socioeconomic challenges like poverty, unemployment, violence, and security concerns (Morrow, 2015), novice teachers in resource-poor settings require additional coping skills gained through experience.

2.2.3.6 *Continuous Learning*

Saidin *et al.* (2020) conducted a study in Malaysia and emphasised that it takes years of experience to become a competent teacher. These authors argue that though not every teacher achieves expert status in their field, novice teachers should strive to improve their knowledge and skills.

In summary, novice teachers' knowledge encompasses several dimensions, including content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge and contextual knowledge. The transition from student to trainee teacher involves not only the acquisition of knowledge but also its application in different teaching situations. How novice teachers assess their knowledge and how much confidence they have plays a crucial role in how they cope with the challenges of teaching (Qadhi *et al.*, 2020; Khalid & Husnin, 2019). Veenman (1984) emphasises the importance of learning by doing and highlights the value of practical experiences in acquiring knowledge and skills.

2.3 Experiences of Novice Teachers

To gain a thorough understanding of the complexities within the teaching profession, it is crucial to examine the experiences of novice teachers who are at the outset of their careers. These individuals, who have just completed their training, often face a stark contrast between the theoretical knowledge they have acquired and the practical reality of the classroom. This section of the literature review explores the multifaceted experiences of beginning teachers, highlighting the challenges they face, the strategies they employ to overcome these obstacles, and the positive aspects they experience on their first professional journey. I start by exploring the psychological and practical challenges that these educators face during their pivotal first year of teaching. Subsequently, I examine how novice teachers navigate the shift from theoretical learning to practical application, dealing with the reality of their new responsibilities and their impact on students.

As with any other profession, a novice feels apprehensive and unsure of themselves when starting in their chosen field. For the novice teacher, who is adapting from being a student teacher to being a qualified teacher, there is added responsibility as their coping strategies directly affect the learners within the class (Souza, Backes, Medina Moya & Lazzari, 2021). The first year can often be more pragmatic than reflective, due to the limited pedagogical knowledge that the novice teacher possesses, which limits the integration of theory and practice. Khalid and Husnin (2019) refer to this initial stage of a novice teacher's career as the "critical stage in which novice teachers will face numerous conflicts, responsibilities and tasks" (p. 195).

Whitcomb *et al.* (2008) explain that novice teachers must develop pedagogical skills, grasp content knowledge, assimilate into workplace culture, and take responsibility for their students. Consequently, novice teachers often find themselves overwhelmed by non-teaching duties as they adjust to the fundamental aspects of their teaching role.

According to Botha and Rens (2018), the schools where novice teachers enter the workforce expect that the newly qualified teachers will effectively evolve from "a theory-orientated pre-service teacher to a well-rounded practice-based teacher" (p. 1). Unfortunately, this transition often proves less seamless than anticipated, with novice teachers quickly discovering the disparity between the theoretical ideals of teaching and the practical realities of the profession (Feiman-Nemser, 2012; Ünver, 2014).

In terms of novice teachers' experiences, Khalid and Husnin (2019) employed a mixed-method approach in their study with 120 novice teachers in urban Malaysian schools, providing

comprehensive insights into their experiences. However, the applicability of their findings to rural or less diverse contexts may overlook unique challenges faced by teachers in those environments. In contrast, Whitcomb *et al.* (2008) conducted a study with 30 novice teachers in rural American schools, offering detailed, long-term insights into challenges such as isolation and resource constraints specific to rural teaching. While their longitudinal study deepened understanding over time, its scope was limited to rural settings.

To address the limitations of these studies, the present research aims to interview novice teachers from both urban and rural settings in the Umlazi and Pinetown districts. It also aims to consider the dynamics of private, public, well-resourced, and under-resourced schools to provide a more comprehensive understanding of novice teachers' experiences across diverse educational contexts.

The experiences of novice teachers significantly impact their professional development and job satisfaction. Positive experiences, such as effective classroom management and supportive mentorship, enhance their sense of efficacy and commitment to the profession. Conversely, negative experiences can contribute to burnout and attrition. Research by Arends and Phurutse (2009) and Dvir and Schatz-Oppenheim (2020) provides comprehensive insights into these impacts.

2.3.1 Expectations vs Reality

According to Botha and Rens (2018), as a newly qualified teacher enters the teaching profession, they need to evolve from being a theoretically focused student teacher to “a well-rounded practice-based teacher within the first few years of employment” (p. 1).

This is, unfortunately, the moment that they discover a gap between the theories they covered in their degrees and the practice of being teachers (Ünver, 2014). Their expectations of what the teaching profession will be like, and the experiences they have once they are in the classroom, are often a reality shock. Senom, Zakaria and Shah (2013) support the findings of Botha and Rens (2018) by stating that the transition from student teacher to classroom teacher can be seen as “a type of reality shock in which beginning teachers realize that the ideals they formed while training may not be appropriate for the realism they are faced with during their first year of teaching” (p. 119).

Nearly forty years ago, Veenman (1984) also referred to this reality shock, where novice teachers needed to assimilate to the realities of teaching daily. A participant in Botha and Rens'

(2018) study, noted that teaching had not been as she had expected. Bertram's (2023) study also addresses reality shock and clarifies that within the South African context, this shock is amplified by the "bifurcated schooling system that has unequally resourced schools, and poor learner achievement" (p. 11).

Botha and Rens (2018) and Bertram (2011) offer significant insights into the gap between novice teachers' expectations and their realities. Botha and Rens (2018) discovered that novice teachers working in resource-constrained South African schools face significant challenges, such as insufficient teaching materials and tools and larger class sizes, which sharply contrast with their initial expectations. In well-resourced schools, while expectations and realities are more aligned, challenges like adjusting to the school culture persist. Bertram (2011) highlights a similar gap, stressing that theoretical knowledge from training often falls short in preparing teachers for practical classroom demands, especially in diverse and resource-limited settings. This study builds on these findings by examining a wide range of school environments.

Gravett (2012) uses the imagery of theory and practice being on opposite sides of a great divide, a chasm, which can be viewed as nearly impossible to cross. She supports this argument by stating that the way we view and provide teacher education, along with the methods of applying the taught theory, creates a binary. The way we lecture student teachers on the theories they need to apply in the classroom and the practical application of these theories seldom align.

Many novice teachers are overwhelmingly disillusioned when they realise that their chosen career is not what they had hoped it would be. This often contributes to the sense of being unable to manage the multitude of responsibilities that teachers constantly face (Ali, 2013). When novice teachers struggle with the realities of the classroom, they feel professionally inadequate which often leads them to reshape their professional ideals to match the reality of the situation (Zhukova, 2018), or they question their career choices and ability to learn (Botha & Rens, 2018).

Most novice teachers state that the dramatic shift from training to classroom teaching is traumatic (Senom, *et al.*, 2013). Pyhältö, Pietarinen and Salmela-Aro (2011) identify substantial workload, adverse interactions with fellow teachers, inadequate salaries, demanding parents, poor leadership, and challenging learner behaviour as some of the practical challenges. These aspects of teaching often contrast with a novice teacher's expectations.

Botha and Rens (2018) postulate that little has been done to help student teachers avoid this reality shock. They pose the question of whether tertiary institutions need to "better prepare

students for the realities of teaching” (p. 1). This issue is not only relevant to South Africa but also internationally. Ünver (2014) found that most novice teachers struggle with classroom management and the discipline it requires. When teachers lack confidence in their capability to manage their classrooms it can be a key restriction of their capacity to be effective teachers (Esau & Maarman, 2021).

2.3.2 Challenges that Novice Teachers Experience

According to Veenman (1984), the challenges that novice teachers experience can be defined as the struggles they face when carrying out their daily tasks within the occupation. These challenges pertain to the way novice teachers try to attain specific goals. When resilience is applied (Dias-Lacy & Guirguis, 2017), with the assistance of reflection (Botha & Rens, 2018), novice teachers can develop coping mechanisms, but identifying the challenges remains the first step.

Various international studies (Çakmak, Gündüz & Emstad, 2019; Dvir & Schatz-Oppenheimer, 2020; Esau & Maarman, 2021; Khalid & Husnin, 2019; Lomi & Mbato, 2020; Qadhi, Hendawi, Ghazi, Ghazi, Al-Dosari & Du, 2020; Saidin *et al.*, 2020) indicate that novice teachers worldwide struggle with their first year of teaching. Studies such as those undertaken by Fantilli and McDougall (2009) emphasise the struggles faced when transitioning from a student teacher to a novice teacher. Chaaban and Du (2017) point out that the way novice teachers cope has significant ramifications for their level of job satisfaction. This is supported by an international study by Le Maistre and Paré (2010), who state that transitioning from student to novice teacher creates many challenges.

Bertram’s (2023) study with 30 novice teachers, conducted 18 months into their teaching careers, explored the complex systems influencing their teaching practices. The study revealed that novice teachers often feel overwhelmed by the volume of administrative tasks and extra-curricular demands, which consume a significant portion of their time. Many of the challenges faced by these teachers extend beyond the scope of their initial teacher education, stemming from broader systemic issues within the classroom and school environment. Implementing the teaching strategies, they learned during their training is often hindered by difficulties in classroom management (Bertram, 2023).

Although teachers have the freedom to choose their preferred approaches within their classrooms, Strom, Martin, and Villegas’s (2018) longitudinal study, which involved classroom observations and interviews with 50 novice teachers over their first two years,

revealed that these choices are influenced by the characteristics of their students. This study provides insights into how teaching strategies evolve over time and the factors that shape them, including student demographics and behaviour.

Bertram (2023) further explores the impact of the classroom environment, noting that external factors such as resources, learner-teacher ratio, and support from school administration significantly affect novice teachers' ability to implement their preferred teaching strategies.

These aspects divert teachers' focus from their instructional duties, creating a significant imbalance in their professional obligations. This comprehensive understanding of the teaching context highlights the necessity for targeted support systems that address both instructional and administrative challenges encountered by novice teachers.

2.3.2.1 *Socioeconomic Conditions*

Novice teachers in South Africa teach students from various socioeconomic backgrounds (Soudien & Baxen, 1997). Students might be from underprivileged homes, confronting issues such as lack of nutrition, poor living conditions, and restricted access to educational materials. In such situations, novice teachers must consider these challenges while designing and executing lesson plans.

Bertram (2023) explains that factors such as poorly resourced schools, lack of parental involvement, and malfunctioning school management have added to the complexity that teachers deal with in South Africa. High levels of poverty within the country add to poor academic performance within the education system (Allais, Cooper, & Shalem, 2019). Bertram (2023) explains that the “structural constraints of the education system and a grossly unequal society” (p. 12) make it difficult for teachers, even those with years of experience, to address and consider all these challenges when preparing lessons. It is therefore understandable that novice teachers will experience these socioeconomic challenges as disabling. No amount of theory can prepare the novice teacher for these challenges.

2.3.2.2 *Language of Learning and Teaching*

South Africa is a linguistically diverse country with twelve official languages. English is the dominant language in the education system; therefore, most public schools teach nearly all content subjects in English (Mkhasibe *et al.*, 2021). It is important to note that, as per the 2016 Census, less than 9% of South Africans speak English as their first language (Tsebe, 2021).

Therefore, the reality is that most learners do not have sound knowledge of the language in which they are receiving instruction.

This notion is supported by Bertram (2023) who indicates that 67% of the participants in her study struggled to teach their learners due to a lack of learner proficiency in the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT). The same percentage of participants also stated that learners struggled to express themselves verbally in English and did not always understand the LoLT.

The situation is often compounded by the fact that intermediate-phase novice teachers often feel uncertain about teaching learners to read, a task typically handled within the foundation phase (Bertram, 2023; Spaul, 2013). Additionally, the novice teachers in Bertram's (2023) study did not have the time or capacity to help learners read with comprehension if they were already in advanced grades. This lack of literacy skills in the LoLT adds to the reality shock experienced by these novice teachers.

Mkhasibe, Mncube and Ajani (2021) discuss the concept of code-switching, which experienced teachers use when facing the challenge of learners not understanding the LoLT. This enables them to use the learners' home language to explain difficult concepts. Novice teachers indicated that they were uncomfortable using this teaching strategy because it goes against the language policy of English as the LoLT (Mathole, 2016).

2.3.2.3 *Resource Disparities*

Many South African schools lack basic infrastructure, teaching materials, and technology. Allais *et al.* (2019) reason that severe poverty in South Africa augments learners' disproportionate achievements. Bertram (2023) iterates that in schools with resource disparities, there is not much that novice teachers can do to help their learners overcome the barriers they face within the classroom, the school, and the community as a whole.

In under-resourced schools, teachers rely solely on textbooks for lesson planning, which limits innovative practices within the classroom. In a study by Mkhasibe *et al.* (2021), the lack of adequate reading material in South African rural areas is repeatedly highlighted. This deficit in resources hinders novice teachers in their attempt to create 21st-century lessons for learners who need all the help that teachers can provide. Theoretical knowledge of how to improvise lessons cannot be put into practice if there is a lack of reading material (Ajani, 2019).

The scarcity of resources in South African rural schools significantly limits the options available to novice teachers as they participate in teaching and learning activities.

Consequently, improving the standard of education in these schools presents a considerable challenge (Bertram 2023; Mkhasibe *et al.* 2021).

2.3.2.4 *Preparing and Presenting Lessons*

Creating Lessons

Flores (2007) found that novice teachers are cognisant of the fact that teaching as a career is more challenging than they thought it would be when they were student teachers. Some feel that they lack the content knowledge they need to fulfil all the tasks and duties required of a teacher. Interestingly, Khalid and Husnin (2019) found that their novice teacher participants felt that they did not struggle with the subject material, it was the planning and creation of activities for teaching and learning that they struggled with.

Creating exciting lesson plans requires considerable time and energy (Zhukova, 2018). Most novice teachers spend the majority of their time at home working on creating lessons and activities for the next day. Since the 21st-century student teacher is taught to use learner-centred approaches which require scaffolding and differentiation, the struggle to produce stimulating, yet theoretically sound material can be difficult. A participant in Zhukova's (2018) study stated, "I spent whole nights looking for interesting lesson ideas and attention-grabbing activities that would suit each of my classes and even each student" (p. 105).

Once the 'perfectly planned' lesson is taught, novice teachers often discover that their carefully designed activity does not work. This can create problems with keeping the learners' attention, which may also lead to discipline issues (Zhukova, 2018). Understandably, such an experience can leave the novice teacher feeling disheartened, potentially dampening enthusiasm for future lessons. Dias-Lacy and Guirguis (2017) found in their study that novice teachers feel frustrated when creating new lesson plans, as this task consumes much of their time outside of work.

Teaching the lesson plan

Reflecting on the experiences of one hundred South African novice teachers, Botha and Rens (2018) established that the overwhelming number of tasks expected of novice teachers has led to the development of a low professional identity. This often leads to a shift from a learner-centred approach to a teacher-centred approach. As 21st-century teachers are predominantly encouraged to follow a learner-centred approach, this shift in teaching approach is in direct contrast to what novice teachers are taught during their professional qualification.

CAPS

A study in the Maldives (Ali, 2013) found that changes in the national curriculum can occur before they are covered within the teacher education syllabus. This highlights the need for teacher educators to remain informed about the latest curriculum developments to ensure that pre-service teachers are adequately prepared for current teaching requirements. Similarly, an American study, by Doran (2020), observed that understanding the curriculum does not necessarily mean that student teachers have the knowledge or skills to apply it in their classrooms. While CAPS provide a structured and standardised approach to curriculum delivery, it presents significant challenges for novice teachers. One of the key challenges lies in the pace and prescriptive nature of the CAPS curriculum, which requires teachers to adhere strictly to timelines and content progression (Bertram, 2023). Novice teachers often struggle to balance these requirements with their learners' needs, resulting in a tendency to prioritise curriculum coverage over deeper learner understanding.

The CAPS framework has come under scrutiny from Bertram (2023) for its focus on an archetypal "ideal learner" capable of effortlessly meeting curricular objectives. However, this approach overlooks the reality that numerous students face fundamental obstacles, particularly in reading comprehension. Howie *et al.* (2017) underscore the widespread literacy challenges among South African pupils, which create significant hurdles for novice educators attempting to balance the prescribed curricular pace with the diverse learning requirements of their students.

The discrepancy between the CAPS framework's prescriptions and the pragmatic challenges encountered by novice educators accentuates the necessity for a more adaptable and encompassing strategy in curriculum implementation. Addressing these disparities could enhance the educational system's capacity to facilitate both teachers and students in attaining substantive learning objectives.

Teaching out of Phase

In her 2023 study, Bertram (2023) pointed out that 20% of the participants were teaching outside the phase they had specialised in. According to a dissertation conducted in 2022, 30% of the participants were teaching outside of their subject specialisation (Ncayiyana, 2022). The Initial Teacher Education Research Project which surveyed over seven hundred novice teachers, found that 65% of intermediate-phase novice teachers were teaching out of phase (Deacon, 2015). This phenomenon has a direct impact on novice teachers' teaching

experiences. The confidence that student teachers develop regarding their competence within the classroom can be attributed to their familiarity with the specific educational phase they are studying to teach. However, when placed in a different phase, they often lack both the necessary content and pedagogical content knowledge (Akcan *et al.*, 2023; Shulman, 2000).

2.3.2.5 *Workload*

Pyhältö *et al.* (2011) identify substantial workload as a challenge for novice teachers. Esau and Maarman (2021), in their study, identify factors within South African public schools that increase teachers' workloads, namely overcrowded classrooms, inadequate support, and low teacher morale. In addition to these factors, teachers are also required to perform tasks that are not directly related to teaching, such as counselling students or caring for those who are ill. As discussed earlier, managing ill-disciplined classes creates significant stress for teachers. When combined with all the other factors identified in Esau and Maarman's (2021) study, novice teachers face challenges beyond their capabilities.

Romano and Gibson (2006) and Shoffner (2011) also highlight extracurricular activities, such as sports and clubs, as additional components of the novice teacher's workload. Moreover, the necessity of assuming disciplinary responsibilities related to students' dress codes, supervising breaks, and participating in various committees adds stress to the already substantial workload they must manage.

Saidin *et al.* (2020) found that novice teachers often receive impromptu or urgent tasks beyond their classroom responsibilities from more experienced teachers who should be handling them, such as accompanying a sports team. This relieves the experienced teachers of their duties but increases the already heavy workload of novice teachers. The authors speculate that this delegation of responsibilities by more experienced teachers may stem from the younger age of novice teachers compared to their colleagues and the novice teacher's desire to show respect by accepting these tasks without addressing the issue with management.

Novice teachers struggle to create a balance between their work and personal demands (Dias-Lacy & Guirguis, 2017). This struggle for balance is confirmed by Zhukova (2018) who found that novice teachers feel that the constant struggle to manage preparations for teaching, and handling difficult learners, while also trying to be there for their families, added to their stress and anxiety. After a full day of teaching and doing extramural activities, they do not have the vigour they need to create additional materials, such as extra worksheets, for their classes (Akcan *et al.*, 2023).

A study by Dickson, Riddlebarger, Stringer, Tennant, and Kennetz, (2014) supports the notion that the first few years of teaching are widely recognised as the most challenging period for newly qualified teachers. It is during this period that they encounter the complexities of the teaching profession (Murshidi, Konting, Elias & Fooi, 2006). Novice teachers often struggle to strike a balance between crafting detailed yet engaging lessons and employing creative teaching strategies within limited time constraints (Romano & Gibson, 2006; Shoffner, 2011).

2.3.2.6 *Classroom Management*

Veenman (1984) notes that classroom discipline and classroom management are terms used interchangeably, encompassing various challenges that novice teachers often require assistance with (Dias-Lacy & Guirguis, 2017).

Arends and Phurutse (2009) state that both novice teachers and school management bodies in South African schools report numerous challenges related to ill-discipline. While both novice and experienced teachers contend with classroom management issues, novice teachers are still in the process of learning how to manage discipline and may struggle with establishing authority in the classroom.

In their analysis of the data in their study, Botha and Rens (2018) determined that novice teachers' insufficient psychological understanding of student behaviour and developmental needs, creates barriers to developing and maintaining relationships with their learners. They also suggest that the complexity of South Africa's multicultural education system adds layers of complexity to relationship-building that teachers in other countries may not encounter.

Novice teachers often aim to be friends with their learners rather than supervisors, which contributes to their perceived lack of control. As noted by a participant in Zhukova's (2018) study, raising one's voice and being strict may not align with some individuals' natural personality types.

2.3.2.7 *Conclusion*

The challenges that novice teachers face are inherent to their profession. They frequently struggle with meeting the demands required to help each learner reach their full potential (Bertram, 2011; Khalid & Husnin, 2019; Mkhazibe *et al.*, 2021). Moreover, teaching as a profession is characterised by uncertainty; teachers cannot always predict whether a lesson will proceed as planned or if their learners will achieve the intended learning objectives (Arends & Phurutse, 2009).

Working with learners means that unpredictability forms part of every moment of a teacher's life (Botha & Rens, 2018), especially within a diverse country such as South Africa where schools range from severely under-resourced to resource-rich. As discussed, novice teachers face a myriad of challenges. Arends and Phurutse (2009) state that factors such as poor remuneration, limited or no resources, underprivileged environments, and onerous workloads contribute to novice teachers' decisions to leave the profession.

2.3.3 Positive Experiences of Novice Teachers

While novice teachers encounter many challenges, they also commonly encounter an array of positive experiences at the start of their teaching careers. These positive experiences also impact their personal and professional development (Akcan *et al.*, 2023; Arends & Phurutse, 2009; Doran, 2020; Saidin *et al.*, 2020).

2.3.3.1 Technology

Many novice teachers consider the use of technology a positive experience, as they can apply their technological and digital skills to prepare and deliver lessons (Doran, 2020). Most novice teachers rely on the internet for lesson planning and view it as their primary source of information, feeling that it fosters creativity and innovation. This use of technology helps them feel well-prepared and confident in presenting lessons to their class (Saidin *et al.*, 2020).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, novice teachers felt that they had unexpected benefits. As newly qualified teachers, they were already familiar with many of the online platforms that schools adopted for the change to online teaching. Suddenly, they were regarded as valuable members of the staff with the ability to assist older or less digitally informed teachers in using various technological and digital tools (Mecham *et al.*, 2021). This supports the findings of Dvir and Schatz-Oppenheimer (2020), whose participants felt that the technological expertise that they had as novice teachers improved their status among the other staff members (p. 664).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, novice teachers unexpectedly had the opportunity to integrate their technological and pedagogical skills into teaching, a challenge that many tenured teachers struggled with, but which most novice teachers excelled in (Mecham *et al.*, 2021). This opportunity helped them recognise their strengths as teachers and further solidified their position among the rest of the staff (Dvir & Schatz-Oppenheimer, 2020b). The novice teachers "learned to recognise the importance of flexibility in teaching goals, of creating alternatives

and of positioning a new layer of their professional identity” (Dvir & Schatz-Oppenheimer, 2020: 652).

2.3.3.2 *Content and Curriculum*

Most novice teachers feel that they have a thorough understanding of the materials they are teaching (Arends & Phurutse, 2009; Doran, 2020). Their lessons are well-planned and utilise innovative and interactive teaching methods, with clearly organised, differentiated approaches to the topic at hand. Arends and Phurutse, (2009) state that school management teams perceive novice teachers as being trained in new areas within the curriculum and willing to explore ways to make the materials more accessible to their learners. The management teams assert that this is an area where more experienced teachers are lacking

Doran (2020) asserts that novice teachers excel in lesson planning because they have a solid understanding of curriculum requirements. This knowledge helps them craft well-balanced lessons that accommodate diverse learning needs, resulting in engaging and relevant class activities.

2.3.3.3 *Informal Assessments*

The concept of assessment during teacher training receives much attention, which results in a solid foundation of what an assessment is, how it is created, and how it should be used (Doran, 2020). School management teams have indicated satisfaction with the assessment methodologies used by novice teachers. Notably, 78% of the respondents in Arends and Phurutse’s (2009) research believed that beginner teachers employed assessments competently.

2.3.3.4 *Good Relationships*

Novice teachers score highly in fostering positive relationships with their fellow teachers and other staff members (Akcan *et al.*, 2023). Socialising with others is common among novice teachers, which enhances the interpersonal relations they establish during the early stages of their teaching careers. All eight hundred participants in Akcan *et al.*’s (2023) Turkish study felt that they had good relationships with school administrators and had no problems working with the principal.

2.3.3.5 *Work Satisfaction*

Despite the challenges, obstacles and setbacks that novice teachers face when starting their teaching careers, most are not dissatisfied with their working conditions (Veenman, 1984). One

can view the struggles they face as a requirement for the transition from novice to competent teachers. This perspective is supported by Arends and Phurutse (2009), who state that novice and experienced teachers, experience teaching differently. Through experience, teachers acquire more effective coping mechanisms. Arends and Phurutse (2009) point out that novice teachers' early experiences affect how motivated and committed they are. Therefore, schools and tertiary institutions should strive to provide student teachers with opportunities to develop their professional identity in a healthy manner.

Teaching is a highly rewarding career for educators who enjoy working with children as they learn about the world around them. Teachers derive satisfaction from contributing to a child's development. A further aspect that contributes to job satisfaction is the holidays that teachers enjoy throughout the academic year (Ali, 2013). Coupled with gratifying working conditions, many novice teachers regularly experience job satisfaction (Ali, 2013; Le Maistre & Paré, 2010; Romano & Gibson, 2006).

2.3.4 Relevance of Reflection for Teacher Development

According to the National Qualifications Framework Act, No. 67 of 2008, which is concerned with policy on the minimum requirements for teacher education qualifications, "learning from practice" is a minimum requirement for teacher education (DHET, 2011). Novice teachers, therefore, cover the concept of reflection within their teacher training.

Gravett (2012) highlights that guided reflection is rooted in the concrete experiences and challenges that teachers encounter within the classroom. This process facilitates their personal and professional growth. Akcan *et al.* (2023) support the notion that teachers should possess inquiry skills enabling them to reflect on their teaching methods, ask questions, receive constructive criticism, and resolve any issues that arise during their teaching practices.

Khalid and Husnin (2019) point out that although the preparation of lessons is important, it is equally important to reflect on the lesson taught. Through reflection, teachers examine their beliefs about teaching and learning, assessing how their classroom practices align with these beliefs. This process helps determine the effectiveness of their teaching practices. A participant in Khalid and Husnin's (2019) study explained that self-reflection helped her become more systematic. Most teacher education programmes cover the concept of reflection (Botha & Rens, 2018; Gaikhorst, Beishuizen, Kortjens & Volman., 2014; Veenman, 1984), and novice teachers can benefit from it if they apply it to their daily teaching (Romano & Gibson, 2006).

Reflection provides novice teachers with the opportunity to make sense of their teaching experiences by identifying the positives and negatives of each lesson. This process helps them recognise recurring patterns that can be addressed using previously acquired knowledge to enhance their teaching practices. Romano and Gibson (2006) explain that this understanding of their teaching practices helps novice teachers understand the unique dynamics within their specific classroom setting.

It is essential for novice teachers to engage in reflection, as this process requires them to objectively examine their own decisions and actions within the classroom (Calderhead, 1989). Unfortunately, due to the stress that novice teachers experience, in terms of struggling to cope with the demands of the professions, reflection often ceases, and the opportunity to gain insight in terms of their approach passes (Romano & Gibson, 2006).

Whitcomb *et al.* (2008) conducted a study called *Why Teach* in the USA. They suggest that teachers make use of the contemplative approach when assessing their emotional and professional input to the profession. Furthermore, they suggest that teachers should reflect on what they are trying to accomplish with their actions. “This contemplative orientation to transformation suggests that through greater awareness of our assumed personal and professional needs, we can discern a bit more clearly our students’ and our own (as teachers) educational paths” (Whitcomb *et al.*, 2008: 269).

To summarise, the journey of novice teachers is characterised by a multitude of challenges and opportunities. The transition from student teacher to fully qualified teacher is a complex process, involving coming to terms with the reality of the classroom, adapting to learner-centred approaches, and coping with the heavy workload. Despite these hurdles, novice teachers show resilience and commitment to their profession, are satisfied with their work, and utilise technology and other resources to improve their teaching practices. The importance of reflection on this journey cannot be overstated, as it helps to recognise strengths and weaknesses and encourages continuous professional development. The findings from the literature reviewed and discussed emphasise the need for further research and support in this area to better prepare novice teachers for their roles and improve the quality of education. The experiences of novice teachers, their challenges and their successes, are not only important for their personal development but also have profound implications for the theory and practice of teacher education.

2.4 Supporting Novice Teachers

Novice teachers entering the profession can become overwhelmed by the demands they face and, therefore, need to develop appropriate coping mechanisms (Dias-Lacy & Guirguis, 2017). Without the support of mentors, peers, and family, novice teachers may feel stressed and anxious which can negatively affect their performance in the classroom (Baker, 2014; Swart, 2013).

2.4.1 Support Systems to Help Novice Teachers

If novice teachers are to succeed in the profession, appropriate support systems can significantly contribute to their success. Positive support from senior teachers in their work environment and their families at home is significantly advantageous (Khalid & Husnin, 2019). Access to technology also plays a key role as it assists novice teachers in creating lesson plans and activities (Doran, 2020; Saidin *et al.*, 2020).

According to the Employment of Educators Act, No. 76 of 1998, the principal of a school must support educators in developing and attaining objectives in line with the needs of the school (Department of Education, 1998). In a study conducted by Arends and Phurutse (2009), attention was given to the support systems available to novice teachers. This study substantiates the significance and value of support systems for novice teachers as they form opinions about their teaching skills and abilities. These self-formulated opinions significantly influence whether novice teachers choose to continue their teaching careers. Arends and Phurutse (2009) implemented a mixed-method approach that combined surveys and in-depth interviews with novice teachers from various schools in South Africa. Their findings showed that many novice teachers felt unprepared for the realities of the classroom, despite their initial training, highlighting the vital role that ongoing support plays in their professional development. The study found that schools with strong induction programmes and mentoring significantly helped novice teachers build their confidence and competence in their new roles. The findings from their study underscore the need for a structured support system to enhance novice teachers' experiences and retention in the profession.

2.4.1.1 Induction and mentoring of novice teachers.

Within the teaching profession, the terms induction and mentoring are often used synonymously, even though they represent different support systems for novice teachers (Baker, 2014). Induction refers to the process whereby new staff members, whether novice or

experienced, are introduced to how a specific school or organisation functions (Bertram, 2023). On the other hand, mentoring refers to the support that a novice teacher receives from an experienced teacher, such as a Head of Department or a more senior teacher (Bertram, 2023).

Both mentoring and induction have several benefits, such as helping the novice teacher to become familiar with the school's culture and administrative requirements and feeling supported in completing various tasks effectively, which leads to work satisfaction and career development (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Swart, 2013).

In 2011, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) created an integrated strategic planning framework for teacher education and development, known as the Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development (ISPFTED). This framework proposes strategies for improving teacher education and development from 2011 to 2025 (DBE & DHET, 2011). Key focus areas include the induction of novice teachers into the profession and the provision of trained mentors (Arends & Phurutse, 2009). However, studies have shown that these focus areas remain largely unaddressed in most South African school structures (Bertram, 2023). In Bertram's (2023) study, only 50% of the participants reported having undergone induction, and 60% reported having been mentored.

School administration has been highlighted as a significant challenge faced by novice teachers. Administrative tasks such as taking attendance, maintaining up-to-date files, creating assignments and rubrics, and writing reports are typically the areas where novice teachers need assistance. Entering marks into the Centralised Education Management Information System (CEMIS) proves challenging for all teachers (Bertram, 2023). Without an appropriate induction programme and mentoring from an experienced teacher, it is understandable that a novice teacher may struggle to perform all the required teaching duties that are part of their daily tasks.

Induction programmes for novice teachers can help them feel less isolated and, as posited by Ingersoll and Strong (2011), create a bridge between being a student teacher and being a novice teacher. This is crucial in areas related to, among others, the code of conduct, assessment application, management structure, and administrative requirements and procedures (Esau & Maarman, 2021). Nash (2010) suggests that induction programmes should also include workshops on teaching strategies and mentor-teacher class observation, wherein constructive feedback can be provided for teacher reflection. Dias-Lacy and Guirguis (2017) posit that

induction programmes should aim to facilitate the growth and empowerment of novice teachers.

The National Framework for Teacher Education in South Africa (Department of Education (DOE), 2006) states that it is unacceptable to place novice teachers within the profession without providing them with “explicit on-site induction” (p. 16).

Arends and Phurutse (2009) agree that the DOE should create support systems for novice teachers. However, their study’s findings indicate that induction processes do not provide sufficient support for novice teachers’ school readiness, skills, and knowledge. This lack of critical guidance leads to the development of poor teaching and learning strategies.

Esau’s (2017) study explores novice teachers’ perceptions of support in relation to the stipulations in the National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa. The study aimed to determine whether novice teachers felt they had received adequate support for personal growth and development to meet the increasing needs of their students. Using semi-structured interviews with novice teachers from various schools, Esau found that novice teachers “feel ill-prepared and unsupported when entering the teaching profession” (p. 1). Participants indicated a disparity between their theoretical instruction and the practical difficulties encountered in the classroom. The results highlight the necessity for extensive support systems beyond initial training, aligning with the National Policy Framework’s advocacy for continuous development and support for teachers throughout their careers.

Ali (2013) that pairing novice teachers with mentors is a key factor in their success, as it provides the novice teacher with emotional support and guidance on coping with the typical challenges of teaching. A mentor can be defined as an experienced colleague who shares methods and offers advice on how to approach the challenges faced by novice teachers (Dias-Lacy & Guirguis, 2017).

A Malaysian case study determined that novice teachers were cognisant of both internal and external factors influencing the challenges they faced and successfully overcame. The participants indicated an understanding and acceptance of external factors beyond their control, focusing on internal factors such as adaptability and creative thinking skills (Khalid & Husnin, 2019). Mentors and senior teachers can assist with both these aspects of teaching as a form of support that makes the transition from student to teacher less disconcerting.

Experienced teachers can support novice teachers in various ways to adapt to the demands of teaching. By providing guidance on selecting appropriate teaching strategies and offering advice on classroom management, experienced teachers can help novice teachers overcome classroom challenges through effective problem-solving, thereby reducing the stress they experience (Çakmak *et al.*, 2019). This will, in turn, “promote beginning teachers’ personal and professional well-being” (p. 157). Positively influencing a novice teacher’s teaching strategies is beneficial to both learners and reduces the likelihood of the novice teacher leaving the profession (Ali, 2013; Zhukova, 2018). It also helps the staff, as a whole, to increase and better their skills (Saidin *et al.*, 2020). A mentor can provide a novice teacher with an outlet to express and address feelings of inadequacy and ineffectiveness, thereby increasing their feelings of professional competence and teaching proficiency through improved teaching strategies and effective classroom management (Dias-Lacy & Guirguis, 2017; Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Mkhasibe *et al.*, 2021).

2.4.1.2 *Communities of Practice*

In her study on teacher learning and knowledge, Bertram (2011) discusses Wenger’s theory of communities of practice. Wenger’s theory posits that learning is not static but develops through interactions within such communities (Wenger, 1999). This aligns with the assertion by Lieberman and Pointer Mace (2008) that most people learn best within communities of practice, where collaborative and constructive interactions facilitate the sharing of ideas and experiences.

Zulu and Bertram (2019) elaborate on the concept of communities of practice as a means for teachers to expand and enhance their professional knowledge. Within these communities, novice teachers find opportunities for professional development through group support and constructive feedback. Peer support groups also serve as a valuable support system for novice teachers. Teachers with similar classes or concerns can discuss their challenges and collaboratively find solutions (Ali, 2013; Romano & Gibson, 2006; Shoffner, 2011). Peers can also exchange ideas on how to make lesson plans more engaging, how to manage misbehaviour, and how to effectively utilise available class time (Dias-Lacy & Guirguis, 2017).

A study conducted by Mecham *et al.* (2021) examined the impact of collaboration and support from other teachers on novice teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study emphasised how schools adapted to remote learning, highlighting the increased significance of support systems. Teachers shared ideas and knowledge about technology tools and online engagement

strategies while fulfilling their classroom responsibilities. These collaborative efforts helped novice teachers navigate the challenges associated with online learning (Mecham *et al.*, 2021). These findings are supported by a recently undertaken study by Akcan *et al.* (2023), which found that communities of practice among novice teachers helped them cope with typical challenges such as lesson planning and classroom management. The study emphasised the value of shared experiences and collaborative problem-solving in fostering a supportive environment that aids novice teachers in their professional growth and resilience. Both studies highlight the importance of collaboration and support for novice teachers in managing and overcoming the challenges of their early teaching experiences.

2.4.1.3 *Conclusion*

There is no doubt that novice teachers face many challenges and require assistance to adapt to the demands of teaching. A robust induction programme, a supportive mentor, and guidance from fellow teachers can be immensely valuable to them. As Saidin *et al.*, (2020) succinctly state “a mentor plays a big role in pragmatically sustain [*sic*] the novice teacher’s motivation” (p. 74). This aligns with one of Dias-Lacy and Guirguis’s (2017) findings, wherein a participant noted that their emotions and frustrations improved as the first year of teaching progressed, attributed to the pragmatic approach she adopted and the support she received.

2.4.2 *The Impact of Teacher Education Programmes*

There appears to be a dichotomy in people’s opinions regarding teacher education programmes. Some argue that these programmes are overly focused on theory and overlook the practical realities of the classroom, while others contend that the programmes struggle to stay current amidst rapid and unpredictable changes in educational settings (Arends & Phurutse, 2009). Most novice teachers feel that their education programmes impart valuable skills to cope with the demands of teaching. However, like any other education programme, there is always room for improvement (Romano, 2007).

Veenman (1984) found that it is unrealistic to assume that the practice of teaching perfectly aligns with its theory. Therefore, teacher education programmes cannot fully prepare future teachers for every possible scenario they may encounter in the classroom. However, theory can help teachers reflect on their experiences, enabling them to construct new strategies to improve situations they encounter. This notion is supported by Arends and Phurutse’s (2009) report, where they argue against assuming that teacher training programmes alone will adequately aid

novice teachers in adapting to their new environments. The reality is that the “shift from being a university student to being a classroom teacher in most cases is a dramatic one” (p. 6).

Unfortunately, few studies have investigated the notion that tertiary institutions should better equip their student teachers with methods to effectively cope with all the challenges that teaching entails (Botha & Rens, 2018). This sentiment is echoed by Kim and Cho (2014) who caution that teacher education programmes usually focus on the theoretical elements of teaching rather than on the emotional and psychological coping mechanisms required to meet the demands of the profession.

Recent studies, such as that by Esau and Maarman (2021), point out that novice teachers can only meet the demands of the profession if they are suitably equipped with the essential support tools required to teach. To achieve this, professional development needs to be viewed as an ongoing process. Tertiary institutions play a significant role in this process, but other stakeholders also share the responsibility of ensuring that novice teachers are well-prepared for their roles. This sentiment is consistent with findings from nearly forty years ago by Veenman (1984), who argued that experience is the best way to learn, as it contributes significantly to the acquisition of knowledge and skills in the teaching profession. In the South African context, Arends and Phurutse’s (2009) report supports the notion that certain concepts of teaching can only be fully mastered through personal experience. It is, therefore, crucial that the transition from student teacher to novice teacher be handled sensitively and conscientiously.

Novice teachers will encounter real, and specific situational needs influenced by diverse factors in classroom dynamics. These fluid dynamics cannot be fully predicted and addressed solely by tertiary institutions’ education programmes (Arends & Phurutse, 2009; Bertram, 2023; Gravett, 2012). Novice teachers need to expect and understand that they will encounter the same situations and dynamics as experienced teachers. It is important to recognise that teaching is demanding for all educators. As Arends and Phurutse (2009) state, “No university course can teach a new teacher how to blend knowledge of particular learners and knowledge of particular content in decisions about what to do in specific situations” (p. 6).

Reeves and Robinson (2014) state that many studies recommend a greater emphasis on restructuring the practical aspect of teaching through programmes such as Work Integrated Learning (WIL), which some South African institutions apply. It is assumed that student teachers will fare better in the transition to novice teaching if given the opportunity to gain more practical experience while still studying. Botha and Rens (2018), however, have found

that while WIL provided teachers with a greater sense of self-reflection, it did not alleviate reality shock.

Both Myers *et al.* (2022) and Bertram (2023) suggest that student teachers should be exposed to multiple demanding teaching situations to acquaint themselves with the complexities of teaching. Bertram suggests that teacher education should encourage WIL in diverse school systems to enhance future teachers' adaptability. This will enable novice teachers to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to cope with the challenges they may encounter in the classroom (Myers *et al.*, 2022).

According to Fitriati (2017), peer teaching is an excellent opportunity for pre-service teachers to improve their teaching skills and expand their teaching experiences. This sentiment is affirmed by Fantilli and McDougall (2009) who state that there is a need to teach degrees that expose students to the more practical activities novice teachers usually struggle with.

Tertiary institutions need to pay attention to the experiences of novice teachers during their initial period of employment so that they can make adjustments to the content covered in teacher training (Lang, 2001). Institutions also need to note the successes and struggles of novice teachers to adequately improve education programmes so that they are helpful and supportive. Bertram (2023) asserts that the teacher education curriculum in South Africa should recognise that a substantial number of learners perform at below-average levels, and this requires novice teachers to be creative and inclusive in their lesson planning.

2.5 Emotional Resilience and Adaptability of Novice Teachers

Botha and Rens (2018) argue that the gap between the expectations and realities of teaching can be a crucial point for novice teachers in terms of emotional resilience, which they define as “an internal willingness to adapt and change” (p. 3). Those with emotional resilience will find a way to cope with reality shock, while for others, the demands will prove too great, often resulting in a change in career path (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009). Those who can work through the challenges experience professional growth and typically thrive in this new phase of their lives (DiCicco *et al.*, 2014). Zhukova's (2018) Latvian study supports DiCicco *et al.*'s (2014) findings by stating that the initial teaching period for novice teachers involves a transformation from theory to meaningful practice. Zhukova (2018) conducted in-depth interviews with 25 novice teachers. Her findings revealed that this transformation led to significant changes in how novice teachers think, reason, and process their experiences. The study underscored the

role of reflective practice and continuous professional development in aiding novice teachers to integrate theoretical knowledge with practical teaching.

Relationships with others are integral to the human experience as they connect us with one another. For novice teachers, establishing relationships with peers, students, and student's parents is a crucial goal as it significantly influences their self-perceptions (Çakmak *et al.*, 2019; Dias-Lacy & Guirguis, 2017; Khalid & Husnin, 2019; Saidin *et al.*, 2020). This notion is expanded on by Zhukova (2018), who states that novice teachers are

[...] preoccupied with the efforts to be accepted and appreciated by their students, students' parents, colleagues, and school administrators, as well as to perform well, to show good results, to build good relationships with students and colleagues, to earn respect and appreciation (p. 105).

Many novice teachers struggle to form and sustain relationships with their students' parents which may cause challenges (Veenman, 1984). He argues that a contributing factor to the struggle with these relationships is the lack of confidence learners' parents have in newly qualified teachers. Doran (2020) agrees with this perspective and suggests a solution through mentorship. She notes that some of her participants reported that mentors at their schools provided valuable advice on how to cultivate relationships with colleagues, parents, and students.

Forming healthy relationships with their peers and superiors is crucial for novice teachers, as these relationships support them through the challenges they face in the classroom and in general, given the demands of the profession (Shoffner, 2011).

Building relationships with learners can be complicated for novice teachers as they need to maintain a balance between being the person in charge of the class and being friendly and approachable (Zhukova, 2018). When novice teachers struggle with classroom discipline, it becomes difficult to build positive relationships with the learners. A participant in Dias-Lacy and Guirguis' (2017) study states that in order to deal with an ill-disciplined classroom, various methods, from conventional to unconventional, need to be applied and assessed to reduce classroom disruptions.

It is important to note that the challenges faced by novice teachers often stem not from their lack of skills but rather from issues related to their learners (Khalid & Husnin, 2019). Day

(2018) elaborates on this by stating that learners have a compelling impact on the way novice teachers regard their professional identity.

Although relationships with others are important, it is vital that novice teachers learn how to take care of their mental and emotional needs to prevent feelings of inadequacy (Zhukova, 2018). Struggling with unmotivated learners may have a negative bearing on a novice teacher's self-assurance and commitment to the profession (Khalid & Husnin, 2019).

Khalid and Husnin (2019) identify two categories of challenges that novice teachers experience, namely, intrinsic, and extrinsic. The intrinsic category includes factors such as adaptability, classroom management skills, and innovation. Cultural differences, learner acceptance, motivation, and performance are considered extrinsic. Numerous other studies support this notion (Ali, 2013; Botha & Rens, 2018; Çakmak *et al.*, 2019; Chaaban & Du, 2017; Dvir & Schatz-Oppenheimer, 2020; Tait, 2008; Veenman, 1984), although they do not specifically use the same terminology.

Tait (2008) posits that when newly qualified teachers experience job satisfaction, they are more committed to persevering and can better cope with professional demands, leading to more positive experiences for both learners and teachers. The next link in this upward spiral is that teachers are more productive and can, therefore, achieve their set outcomes (Chaaban & Du, 2017).

Botha and Rens (2018) found in their study that some participants felt their commitment to the teaching profession was often questioned, particularly when they tried to introduce new strategies in the classroom. For instance, one participant mentioned wanting to implement learner-centred strategies but was instructed to continue using teacher-centred methods. Extrinsic factors, such as this, directly impact novice teachers' experiences within the classroom. Poor relationships with colleagues, especially mentor teachers, are further extrinsic factors that novice teachers need to cope with. Similarly, novice teachers who are exposed to a poor management environment inevitably have a lower level of job satisfaction (Lomi & Mbato, 2020).

The disillusionment that novice teachers face at school, related to the socioeconomic circumstances of their learners and the lack of applicable solutions, is an extrinsic factor that can be emotionally and intellectually draining (Whitcomb *et al.*, 2008). An editorial titled *Why Teach?* explains why it is important for teachers, both novice and experienced, to acknowledge the importance of emotions in teaching. This intrinsic factor significantly influences how

teachers experience their work. Engaging in contemplation and reflection on emotions, self-identification, and other influencing factors within the work environment can assist teachers in coping positively (Whitcomb *et al.*, 2008).

For most novice teachers, a positive extrinsic factor is access to and utilisation of the internet to create lessons and gain a better understanding of their roles, enabling them to function effectively as educators (Saidin *et al.*, 2020). Saidin *et al.*'s (2020) Malaysian study found that novice teachers are young and au fait with the use of technology which helps them create innovative 21st-century solutions to teaching issues. This factor helps them become well-equipped with resources for their lessons.

Saidin *et al.* (2020) identify good interpersonal skills as a crucial intrinsic factor influencing novice teachers. These skills are essential for interacting effectively with both students and colleagues. Effective communication ensures that lesson content is conveyed clearly to students, and positive interactions contribute to fostering strong relationships with both learners and colleagues.

Low learner motivation can negatively impact a novice teacher's motivation. Similarly, as found by Khalid and Husnin (2019), if learners or a group of learners exhibit poor performance, it may affect the novice teacher in a way that prevents them from covering the required content effectively.

The 2018 study conducted in Latvia found that novice teachers' epistemological beliefs are not always congruous with the theory that they are taught in their teaching qualifications (Zhukova, 2018). These beliefs encompass aspects such as teaching, learning, and classroom practices. The study further discovered that both the novice teachers' professional identity and self-related core beliefs affect, shape, and guide the way in which they conduct themselves in the classroom. These beliefs are influenced by intrinsic and extrinsic factors (Çakmak *et al.*, 2019).

Lomi and Mbato (2020) explore a further intrinsic factor, namely, self-appreciation. When teachers feel that they can accomplish meaningful objectives, their self-sufficiency is enhanced, leading to improved professional participation. Vonk (1989) explains that educator professional development can be seen as a culmination of learning that focuses on the attainment of four main aspects, namely, knowledge, insight, attitude, and skill. These aspects are the foundation on which teachers build everyday classroom practices. Zhukova (2018) concludes that when novice teachers interact with their teaching environment, significant changes take place within the four aspects that Vonk (1989) has identified.

In a Malaysian study, findings indicate that participants who had two years of teaching experience adapted more easily to educational changes, such as a different class, than participants who only had two months' experience (Saidin *et al.*, 2020). This aligns with Zhukova's (2018) Latvian study, which found that significant growth occurs in the first few years of teaching as novice teachers learn to adapt to their roles in the classroom and meet the professional demands of the occupation. A study conducted in Türkiye and Norway found that once novice teachers have a year's experience, they realise that many of the challenges they face are aspects of teaching that they cannot fix. This realisation helps them face the reality that not all problems can be solved (Çakmak *et al.*, 2019). With the right frame of mind, novice teachers can overcome many of the challenges they face at the start of their teaching careers. Adaptability is an asset that will stand them in great stead if they decide to remain in education.

Zhukova (2018) states that over time, there is typically a noticeable shift from merely surviving the school day to focusing on the learners. This awareness includes a commitment to helping learners reach their full potential, addressing social and emotional challenges, and motivating them to achieve their goals. As teachers gain experience and exposure to various aspects of their learners' lives, they become better equipped to understand and support learners based on their individual learning abilities or challenges. This insight also helps novice teachers identify variables outside of the classroom that influence their learners' lives and learning, such as relationships and health (Zhukova, 2018).

A key strategy that novice teachers can benefit from is the knowledge and application of critical thinking. Being able to critically reflect and analyse their teaching practices can lead to the development of improved and more effective teaching methods. This assists in strengthening and improving their professional identity (Lomi & Mbato, 2020). Successful engagement in self-reflection when confronted with challenges as a novice teacher can result in an experience-driven learning process (Botha & Rens, 2018). Lomi and Mbato (2020) state that internal struggles, such as emotions, teaching ability, and personal beliefs, can be overcome if novice teachers adopt a positive attitude.

Zhukova (2018) states that by the second year of teaching, novice teachers undergo significant changes from the person they were within the first few months of teaching. Their pedagogical views, thinking processes, and classroom practices become more focused on the broader perspective rather than individual aspects of teaching. Their focus shifts from internal concerns

centred on personal experiences to external concerns about the lasting impact of their teaching on students.

Novice teachers need to accept that certain challenges, such as the socioeconomic conditions of their learners, are beyond their control and they must also be determined to cope with the overwhelming feelings they will inevitably face (Whitcomb *et al.*, 2008). Therefore, it is important for novice teachers to be emotionally resilient.

Arends and Phurutse (2009), in their South African study, reported that most novice teachers expressed confidence in their ability to manage classes and create lessons that connect theory and content to learners' real-life experiences. It is noteworthy that if novice teachers can maintain this confidence, they are likely to navigate successfully through the challenges they face during their initial year of teaching.

Resilience is intricately linked to an individual's perception of events, as highlighted by Botha and Rens (2018). This suggests that perspective plays a crucial role in promoting resilience. When novice teachers have an external locus of control, meaning they attribute problems to external factors, they are likely to seek support from external key players. Conversely, if novice teachers have an internal locus of control, they will initiate resilience, enabling them to face adversity more effectively. They conclude that resilience largely depends on an individual's willingness to critically reflect and their openness to change. This aligns with the discussion on the importance of reflection in teacher development.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

2.6.1 Selecting a Theoretical Framework

Driscoll's (2007) model of reflection provides a suitable theoretical framework for exploring novice teachers' experiences. The aim is to determine how novice teachers learn and what they learn from their experiences during their first year of teaching.

This model provides the framework to gain a deeper understanding of lived experiences and the process through which novice teachers comprehend who they are and who they are becoming. Using this model of reflection as the theoretical framework is suitably appropriate to yield detailed accounts of participants' lived experiences in line with qualitative research methodology.

2.6.2 Introduction

John Driscoll formulated the Driscoll model of reflection over thirteen years. Although there is a strong link to Terry Borton, Driscoll did not design his model based on Borton's work. Driscoll states the following in his 2007 publication:

What has been fascinating and also rather embarrassing was almost seven years later to find that the What–So What–Now What question headings had previously been utilized by Terry Borton (1970) as part of an experiential curriculum development initiative in schools in the USA (p. 43).

It is through reflection that an individual learns to practice introspection. This process of discovery is often prompted by an event or experience and provides an avenue for deeper self-awareness and personal development. Driscoll sums it up by stating that reflecting is “an intentional learning activity requiring an ability to analyse the self in relation to what has happened or is happening and make judgements regarding this” (p. 29). The importance of reflection lies in its deliberate nature, aimed at gaining a better understanding of both the event itself and oneself.

2.6.3 Learning from Reflection

In order to gain a deeper understanding of an event it is crucial to understand the lived experience in context. Once a deeper understanding of context is reached, the process of analysing experiences to improve performance can occur. Using Driscoll's Reflective Cycle (2007) can assist in improving individual performance, thereby enhancing personal efficacy (Gladd, 2020).

Driscoll (2007) posits that novice practitioners should be taught how to critically reflect during their professional training. He explains that the act of reflection is as important as theoretical knowledge when it comes to professional development. Reflection enables novices to gain confidence in their chosen careers.

2.6.4 The Three Stages in Driscoll's Cycle of Reflection

Driscoll's cycle of reflection follows a “What?, So what?, Now what?” pattern. The “What?” cycle was originally created in 1994 to assist healthcare practitioners, however, over the years it has been adopted by many other academic fields (Gladd, 2020).

The following is an explanation of each stage:

1. The “What?” question requires the participant to objectively describe what happened, as well as the circumstances in which it happened.
2. The “So what?” question requires the participant to analyse the event. This is used to identify patterns, and significant or critical moments within the event/experience and reflect on emotions and thoughts occurring during the event/experience.
3. The “Now what?” requires the participant to anticipate what future practice will work, based on what knowledge is gained through the reflection process (Gladd, 2020).

Driscoll’s reflection cycle (2007) is appropriate for this study, as the three stages are used to gain an understanding of novice teachers’ experiences. By utilising this reflection cycle to review experiences from the first year of teaching, novices can identify events and circumstances during the initial stage (the “What?”) of the cycle.

In the second stage (“So, what?”), the emerging patterns can be identified. Finally, in the third cycle (“Now what?”), the knowledge that novice teachers have gained from their first year of teaching can be determined. See Figure 1 below, 2.6.5.

2.6.5 Driscoll's Reflective Cycle

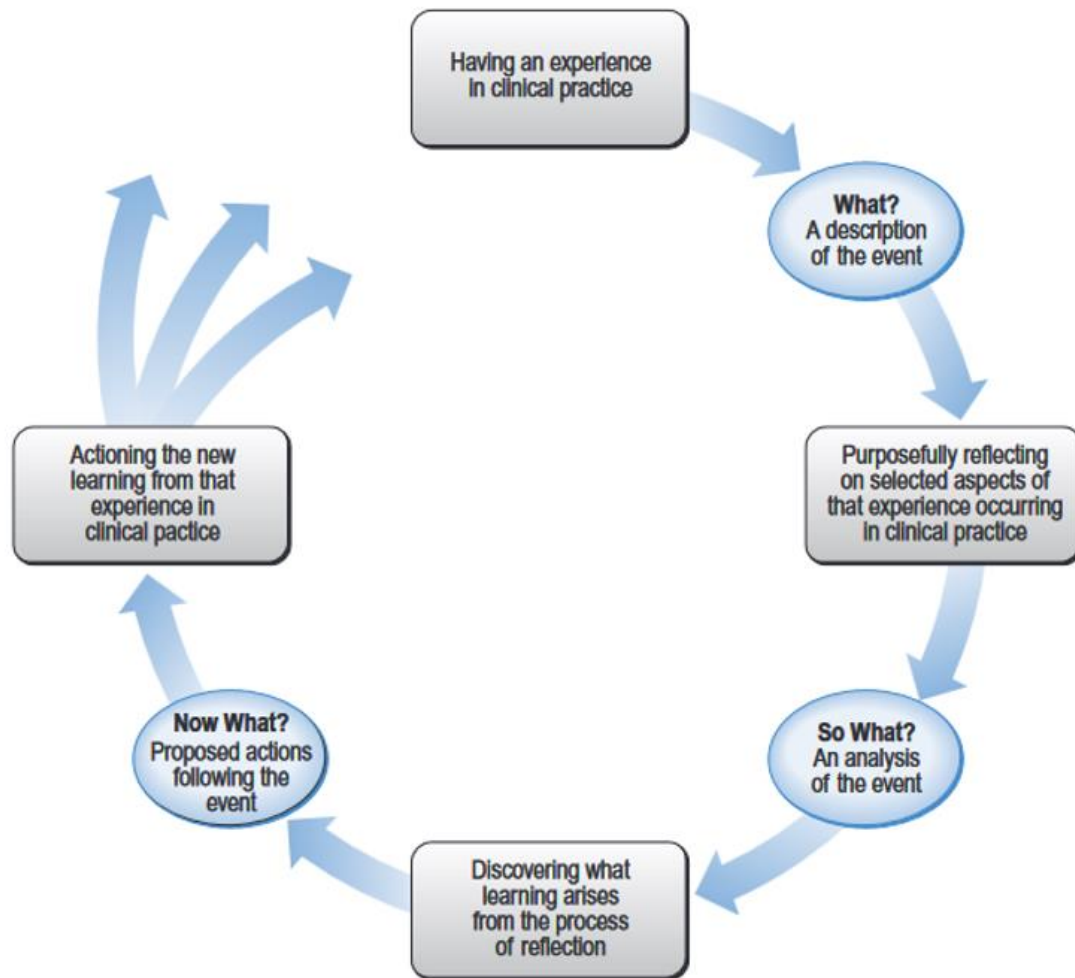


Figure 1: Driscoll's Reflective Cycle

Source: Driscoll, 2007: 46

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter reviews literature that focuses on the experiences of novice teachers and the theoretical framework that will be utilised in the study.

The literature discusses how the knowledge and worldview of novice teachers evolve with experience. It also explores the experiences of novice teachers during their first year of teaching, highlighting how the reality of the profession differs from their initial expectations. The importance of emotional resilience in coping with challenges further elucidates the difficulties novice teachers encounter. Similarly, the significance of support systems is underscored in terms of what schools can do to assist novice teachers in transitioning from student teachers to effective classroom educators.

Arends and Phurutse (2009) emphasise that while most novice teachers possess solid theoretical knowledge, they often lack practical application experience. Despite comprehensive theoretical training, it is impossible to fully prepare future teachers for the realities they will face in the classroom (Whitcomb *et al.*, 2008).

The theoretical framework of Driscoll's Reflective Cycle (2007) is also discussed. This cycle will be used to identify the experiences of the participants during their first year of teaching.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, a literature review was conducted to identify relevant literature concerning the experiences of novice teachers. This review was divided into three distinct sections. The first part focused on defining novice teachers, exploring various definitions and characteristics across diverse contexts. The second part examined the experiences of novice teachers, highlighting the challenges they face and the gap between expectations and reality. The third part explored the support systems available to novice teachers, including mentorship and professional development programmes. This research focus was underpinned by Driscoll's model of reflective practice, which provided a framework for understanding how novice teachers learn and develop through their experiences.

The purpose of the methodology chapter is to thoroughly examine the research design and methodological procedures that were followed to explore the experiences of novice teachers during their first year of teaching in South African educational institutions. The significance of methodology in ensuring the reliability and rigour of research findings, particularly within the qualitative research paradigm, is widely recognised in literature (Cohen *et al.*, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This chapter offers a comprehensive rationale for the selection of specific research methods, the methodology employed for data collection, the data analysis techniques used, and the strategies implemented to maintain research validity.

The choice of research method is crucial to guarantee the trustworthiness of any study. In this study, the decision to use semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions was based on a thorough understanding of their suitability for exploring the complex experiences of novice teachers (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017). These methods provide participants with an opportunity to share their thoughts and emotions freely, offering valuable insights into the challenges and successes they encounter during their first year of teaching. Additionally, this chapter highlights the case study approach used in this research, which is essential for providing a comprehensive and detailed account of novice teachers' experiences within the South African educational context (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Crowe, Cresswell, Robertson, Huby, Avery & Sheikh, 2011; Hyett, Kenny & Dickson-Swift, 2014).

The methodology employs meticulous strategies to enhance the fundamental principles of credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability which are crucial for ensuring the

reliability and trustworthiness of the research (Cohen *et al.*, 2018; Nieuwenhuis, 2019b). For instance, to establish credibility, the researcher utilised multiple data sources and continuously engaged participants to verify their interpretations of their experiences. The concept of transferability has also been carefully considered and by providing comprehensive descriptions of the research context, the potential applicability of the findings in various settings can be systematically evaluated (Polit & Beck, 2010; Shenton, 2004). The research design, data collection, and analysis processes were executed with rigour and attention was paid to the details to ensure the trustworthiness of the study.

The research design and methodology employed in this chapter have inherent limitations, including the limited scope of participant selection, data collection challenges, potential researcher bias, and the exclusive focus on novice teachers' experiences within their first year of teaching, which narrows the study's scope (Cohen *et al.*, 2018). A detailed examination of these limitations is important as it helps delineate the parameters of the study and serves as a catalyst for further research (Cohen *et al.*, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Crowe *et al.*, 2011).

In summary, this study's methodology serves as a rigorous framework that forms the foundation for the chosen research design, data collection, analysis, and trustworthiness of the investigation of novice teachers' experiences in South Africa. This chapter establishes a robust groundwork for exploring this important topic in the South African educational context.

3.2 The Research Paradigm

In the social sciences, a paradigm serves as a research guide and framework for a researcher's investigation. It provides a structure for approaching research with a focus on the researcher's purpose, motivation, and expectations (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014). When doing research, paradigms influence the way in which the research is done as they direct the research perspective and the interpretation of the findings (Cohen *et al.*, 2018). Several paradigms are widely recognised, including positivist, constructivist, interpretive, and critical. Each paradigm offers a unique perspective on how to understand and interpret the world or reality (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006).

The interpretive paradigm, utilised in this study, is characterised by its ability to embrace various experiences with a focus on explanation rather than causality (Maree, 2019). Cohen *et al.* (2018) suggest that the interpretive paradigm seeks to comprehend individuals' emotions and perceptions of the world by exploring the interpretation of meaning, actions, and

experiences in daily life, therefore the ontological focus. As noted by Mackenzie and Knipe (2006), research within this paradigm aims to understand the world through the lens of human experience, highlighting the belief that reality is socially constructed. Bertram and Christiansen (2014) distinguish the interpretive paradigm from the positivist paradigm by highlighting that its objective is not prediction and control, but rather a heightened understanding of how individuals attribute meaning to their surroundings. They maintain that research within this paradigm aims to gain a deeper understanding of how people make sense of the environment in which they live and work.

The interpretive perspective adopted in this study strives to unveil the subjective realm of human experience (Cohen *et al.*, 2018). This perspective prioritises descriptive analyses to attain a thorough interpretative understanding of social phenomena (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Thus, this study explores the world of novice teachers in order to comprehend their interpretations, motivations, beliefs, values, reasonings and explanations of their experiences.

The primary objective of this research is to explore the diverse experiences of novice teachers, recognising that there is no universal truth but rather a multifaceted array of individual realities. This study aims to analyse the information gathered, through diverse data-gathering methods, based on the understanding that multiple realities exist, moulded by social construction and subjectivity, as posited by (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Maree, 2019).

Epistemologically, this study embraces the notion that knowledge is constructed through collaborative efforts between researchers and participants, allowing for a deeper understanding of participants' experiences from their unique perspectives. Bertram and Christiansen (2014) highlight the researcher's role in describing and understanding how individuals make sense of their world and give meaning to their actions, rather than predicting behaviour. Given the study's focus on exploring the experiences of novice teachers, the interpretive paradigm is appropriate, as it facilitates interaction with participants and the contextual construction of their realities.

This research approach acknowledges the limitations of objectivity in investigating novice teachers' experiences, as humans create meaning and shape their understanding of the world (Cohen *et al.*, 2018). Individual interviews with the teachers were conducted to their willingness to freely express themselves in one-on-one interactions.

3.3 Qualitative Approach

The primary research approaches adopted by researchers are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods research (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; Maree, 2019; Wahyuni, 2012). Qualitative research is characterised by the collection and analysis of non-numeric data often used to understand phenomena in their natural context. This approach employs techniques, such as interviews, observations, and content analysis, to explore subjective experiences, meanings, and social processes (Cohen *et al.*, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Jackson, Drummond & Camara., 2007; Nieuwenhuis, 2019). Quantitative research, on the other hand, involves the collection and analysis of numerical data through structured surveys, experiments, or statistical analyses. This approach aims to quantify relationships, patterns, and associations, allowing for statistical testing and generalisability (Devers & Frankel, 2000; Eyisi, 2016; Maree, 2019). Mixed methods research combines both qualitative and quantitative research methods within a single study. This approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the research problem by gathering both numerical and non-numerical data. Researchers select the most appropriate approach based on their research objectives, the nature of the research problem, and the type of data needed to address their research questions effectively (Cohen *et al.*, 2018; Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014; Maree, 2019).

For this study, a qualitative approach was chosen, as it enables the gathering of rich, in-depth data within a natural setting. Qualitative research, as outlined by Brynard, Hanekom and Brynard (2014), is characterised by its focus on producing descriptive data that captures participants' perceptions, and experiences. This approach explores the real-life experiences of participants, allowing researchers to understand and know them personally without reducing their experiences to mere numbers. Similarly, Krauss (2005) emphasises the unique epistemological assumptions of qualitative researchers who believe in the value of observing phenomena within their natural contexts. They argue that quantifying data limits the richness and depth of understanding, as only a fraction of the true reality is captured. Qualitative researchers immerse themselves in the subject of study and become active participants in the research process.

Nieuwenhuis (2007) highlights that qualitative research centres on describing and comprehending meanings conveyed by respondents, often described as “seeing through the eyes of the participants” (p. 51). This aligns with the objectives of the current study, which aimed to develop a deeper understanding of novice teachers' experiences in their first year of

teaching. The qualitative approach was instrumental in exploring and questioning these experiences, allowing for a nuanced examination of how novice teachers construct their reality. As Nieuwenhuis (2007) posits, qualitative researchers acknowledge that individuals hold their own assumptions, intentions, attitudes, beliefs, and values. Qualitative researchers engage with others' experiences and investigate how individuals construct their understandings of specific phenomena.

In this study, a qualitative approach was used to explore and gain insight into novice teachers' experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The primary objective of this research was to understand the meanings assigned by the teachers to their experiences, the manner in which they constructed their understanding, and their experiential insights and interpretations of the teaching process.

As suggested by Nieuwenhuis (2019a), this qualitative approach involved data collection through semi-structured interviews and observations, which addressed the central research questions.

The analysis of this type of data typically involves identifying common themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nieuwenhuis, 2019a; Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017). Given the study's aim of exploring novice teachers' experiences, the research design did not prioritise generalisability. Instead, the focus was on selecting a limited number of participants in order to generate authentic and in-depth data on their experiences. The data generated from the interviews represents the participants' unfiltered responses, capturing their individual perspectives and offering an in-depth view of their teaching experiences.

Qualitative research presents the opportunity to employ a versatile approach that accommodates variations in responses and facilitates the modification of interview questions during the data collection process to better suit the research context (Cohen *et al.*, 2018). This method encompasses a broad range of techniques such as document review, analysis of audio-visual materials, case studies, interviews, and observations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Maree, 2019; Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Through the use of these techniques, qualitative research unveils multiple truths, permitting participants to respond to questions from their individual perspectives and even rephrase their answers, if desired. In this study, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were utilised as data collection methods, leveraging the flexibility and depth afforded by qualitative research.

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) highlight that the prolonged duration of qualitative research and its analysis may require a substantial allocation of resources, which can be construed as a limitation. Furthermore, researchers should be aware of the potential impact of their actions and biases on participants' responses, which could further prolong the investigation process. These considerations emphasise the significance of maintaining impartiality and sensitivity in qualitative research.

3.4 Research Design

The research design serves as a strategic plan for the systematic investigation of a specific research topic (Cohen *et al.*, 2018; Maree, 2019; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). A research design encompasses well-defined research objectives that are closely tied to the research questions, specifies the selection of data collection methods, and methodically outlines any limitations and ethical considerations relevant to the research. Gosper and Ifenthaler (2014) further emphasise the importance of a research design in identifying and recruiting an appropriate participant sample, as well as guiding the selection of data collection and analysis tools to effectively address the research questions. This study's research design employed a qualitative research method, primarily using a case study as the principal research methodology. This carefully structured design operates within the overarching framework of an interpretive paradigm, as per the insights of Yin (2009), Nieuwenhuis (2007), and Cohen *et al.* (2011). This holistic approach enabled a comprehensive exploration of novice teachers' experiences during the first year of teaching.

3.5 The Case Study as the Methodology

Cohen *et al.* (2018) stress the extensive scope of educational research methodology and its pivotal role in systematically collecting and interpreting data, and offering comprehensive insights within academic contexts. Brynard *et al.* (2014) emphasise the centrality of research methodology in guiding the entire research process and influencing critical decisions.

Mackenzie and Knipe (2006) introduce a nuanced distinction between methodology and methods, characterising methodology as the overarching framework aligned with the underlying paradigm or theoretical orientation, and methods as the specific techniques and systematic procedures for data collection and analysis. Pavan and Kulkarni (2014) elaborate on this distinction, clarifying that research methods encompass precise data collection techniques, whereas research methodology embodies a systematic, rationale-driven problem-solving approach.

These comprehensive perspectives highlight the intricate interplay between research methodology and methods, with the former providing an overarching framework and theoretical grounding, and the latter involving practical techniques. Together, they establish a robust research framework that allows for exploration, explanation, and understanding of complex educational phenomena.

The research design for this study is a case study, which is defined by Yin (2009) and characterised by Cohen *et al.* (2018) as a systematic and in-depth examination of a specific case within a particular situation. As described by Creswell and Poth (2017), this approach involves an empirical investigation of a current phenomenon within its real-life context, utilising various sources of evidence to gain insight into a singular issue. In line with the interpretive paradigm, a case study serves as a valuable strategy for gaining profound insights into complex real-life issues (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; Crowe, Cresswell, Robertson, Huby, Avery & Sheikh 2011).

Nieuwenhuis (2019b) highlights that case studies seek to obtain a holistic understanding of how individuals interact within a particular situation and how they construct meaning related to the subject under investigation. This approach facilitates in-depth exploration of the complex dynamics of real-life scenarios. Using a case study design, this research aimed to provide a comprehensive view of novice teachers' experiences in their teaching contexts, aligning with a qualitative approach and interpretive paradigms (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; Cohen *et al.*, 2018; Crowe *et al.*, 2011).

This study focused on the reflections of second-year teachers regarding their first year of teaching, regardless of any subsequent transitions to other schools. The commonality among the participants was their status as second-year teachers, which made them a single case to study. Aligning with Yazan's (2015) definition of case study research, this involves an in-depth exploration of a single case, such as an entity, event, programme, individual, or group, within its unique circumstances. Yin (2009) posits that a single case study is particularly well suited for investigating the complexities of a solitary person or group in its ability to capture the nuances of everyday situations. The unit of analysis in this study was a novice teacher, and the focus of the research was to comprehensively understand the multifaceted experiences of these teachers through detailed descriptions of their first year of teaching.

It is important to note that case studies typically involve a limited number of participants, and findings cannot be readily generalised. In this study, the primary objective was not

generalisation but rather an in-depth exploration of novice teachers' experiences within a respective school. These narratives provided valuable insights into the complexities and challenges the teachers faced during their first year of teaching and fostered a heightened awareness of the critical phase of their professional development. Such insights are in line with Nieuwenhuis's (2019b) assertion that case study research aims to gain a holistic understanding of how participants interact within a given setting, and how they attribute meaning to the phenomenon under examination.

Case study research is highly valued because of its thorough data-collection approach which utilises various methods (Nieuwenhuis, 2019b). Yin (2009) stresses the significance of developing close researcher-participant relationships to convey real-life experiences through storytelling, thereby deepening the understanding of participant behaviours within the research context. This method provides invaluable information by capturing all the cases within their natural settings (Crowe *et al.*, 2011). The particularistic and heuristic nature of a case study focuses on specific phenomena and provides rich descriptions (Crowe *et al.*, 2011), resulting in new insights and perspectives. In this study, multifaceted data-collection approaches were used to unravel the complexities of the initial teacher experience (Creswell & Poth, 2017). In addition, the case study approach enabled both semi-structured interviews and a focus group discussion as data collection methods, encouraging data triangulation. These combined strengths contribute to the depth and wealth of data in case study research.

Case study research has been criticised for its narrow focus and lack of generalisability (Crowe *et al.*, 2011; Nieuwenhuis, 2019b; Starman, 2013). Yin (2009) raises concerns about the rigour, limited sample size, and time-consuming nature of case studies and Cohen *et al.* (2018) note additional weaknesses such as potential subjectivity and observer bias. Despite these limitations, many researchers opt for case study designs due to their descriptive and comprehensive nature (Crowe *et al.*, 2011). The strengths of a qualitative case study often outweigh its weaknesses, making it a suitable choice for this research study.

3.6 The Selection of the Participants

The selection of participants in a research study is a crucial step in obtaining relevant insights into the research topic (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Devers & Frankel, 2000). This process, known as purposive selection, involves the use of specific criteria such as ethnicity, age, gender, qualifications, or other relevant factors (Devers & Frankel, 2000; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In the context of this study, a cohort of seven novice teachers, actively

engaged in their second year of teaching in 2022, was selected through various communication platforms including WhatsApp, Facebook, and Email. The final selection of participants was based on their willingness to participate in the study and conformity with predetermined criteria. The sample size was deemed sufficient to answer the research questions, allowing for an in-depth exploration of individual experiences and perspectives. According to Cohen *et al.* (2018), qualitative studies usually involve smaller sample sizes, typically ranging from six to twelve participants, to achieve data saturation and ensure a detailed exploration of the research topic.

The decision to have a sample size of seven was based on a rigorous methodological foundation aimed at obtaining comprehensive and in-depth data, while also allowing for potential participant attrition without compromising the feasibility of the planned focus group interview (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg & McKibbon, 2015; Landreneau & Creek, 2009). The criteria for participant selection included graduation from a private institution and active involvement in their second year of teaching. Factors such as school type, race, age, and gender were considered non-influential in the selection process. Consequently, the participants were diverse, representing various school settings and educational phases within the South African educational landscape, thus offering a multifaceted perspective (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; Nieuwenhuis, 2019b; Pavan & Kulkarni, 2014). This diverse group represented various school settings, providing a multifaceted perspective on the research questions.

This study adhered to a rigorous methodological approach centred on amassing a highly informative dataset, with the aim of thoroughly examining the research enquiries. The participation of second-year educators provided a reflective analysis of their initial teaching experiences, which enabled a comparative exploration of novice teachers' evolving insights (Cohen *et al.*, 2018; Nieuwenhuis, 2019b).

3.7 Data Generation Methods

Qualitative researchers often employ a variety of data collection methods to suit their study designs and participant characteristics (Cohen *et al.*, 2018). In this study, two primary techniques were used: semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Judicious selection of data collection instruments is essential for research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data from the participants, with an interview guide to facilitate the sessions. All sessions were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy and comprehensive data capture. Prior to initiating data collection, requisite permissions were obtained from

participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014). These interviews provided participants with the flexibility to share their experiences, insights, and perspectives on the challenges and dynamics encountered in their first year of teaching (Cohen *et al.*, 2018; Wahyuni, 2012).

A focus group was used as a supplementary data collection method. Focus groups provide a forum for participants to engage in group discussions, enabling the exploration of shared experiences, opinions, and insights (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; Cohen *et al.*, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The use of focus groups is particularly beneficial for uncovering group dynamics and encouraging in-depth dialogue among participants, thereby facilitating an examination of collective and diverse perceptions and experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Morgan, 2014).

3.7.1 Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are a commonly used research method that involves a flexible approach with open-ended questions to encourage in-depth responses from the participants (Ryan, Coughlan & Cronin, 2009). This method is well suited to the interpretive paradigm, as it prioritises human interaction and serves as a valuable primary data generation approach (Nieuwenhuis, 2019b).

The researcher herein used semi-structured interviews as they allow for interactive questioning, which aligns with Maree's (2019) view of interviews as a two-way conversation that elicits data regarding participants' opinions, views, ideas, beliefs, and behaviours. The interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes, and no follow-up sessions were required as data sufficiency was achieved. The interviews were conducted utilising the Zoom video communication platform. This offered the advantage of accommodating participants in their familiar home environments, promoting a relaxed interview atmosphere, as suggested by Creswell and Poth (2017). The interviews were recorded, enabling focused analysis and easy navigation to specific excerpts (Tessier, 2012). The recorded interviews were transcribed, verbatim, using Zoom's dictation function and thematic analysis was employed to identify the nuances of novice teachers' experiences, effectively addressing the core research question.

Semi-structured interviews proved advantageous for this study because of their capacity to elicit in-depth insights and explanations from participants regarding their experiences as novice teachers. This method facilitated the collection of meaningful data and a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences within their specific contexts (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et*

al., 2014; Nieuwenhuis, 2019b). Notably, semi-structured interviews offer flexibility, adaptability, and versatility (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Furthermore, they provide the researcher with opportunities for continued interaction with participants beyond the formal interview, contributing to a deeper exploration of their experiences.

However, it is essential to acknowledge that semi-structured interviews can be time-consuming because they often necessitate the use of probing questions to gather in-depth data (Cohen *et al.*, 2018). Despite this, semi-structured interviews have proven to be appropriate in research studies such as this one (Doody & Noonan, 2013). This method provided the researcher with a valuable means of exploring the multifaceted challenges and opportunities encountered by novice teachers, as they embark on their teaching careers, offering essential insights for educational research and professional development within the teaching profession.

3.7.2 Focus Group Discussion

Ritter and Barnett (2016) describe a focus group as a gathering of six to ten individuals, who provide qualitative data on a particular research topic. Contrary to the pursuit of absolute truths, the focus group method aims to uncover the nuanced significance of a specific situation. Cohen *et al.* (2018) note that focus group discussions offer a structured setting in which participants can share their experiences, thoughts, and viewpoints often resulting in a dynamic interchange that may uncover shared experiences and perspectives. Nieuwenhuis (2019a) highlights the popularity of focus group discussions due to their interactive format which facilitates data collection and provides insights that are not easily obtained through individual interviews. This collaborative approach is particularly effective for thoroughly examining a wide range of perspectives and experiences related to a particular research topic (Gundumogula & Gundumogula, 2020; Krueger, 2014).

For this study, the individuals who participated in the semi-structured interviews were assembled approximately a month later for the focus group discussion. The central themes that emerged from the semi-structured interviews were thoroughly discussed and analysed. This arrangement provided participants with a unique opportunity to engage in a collective exchange of their teaching experiences, ultimately resulting in a more comprehensive understanding of their first year as educators (Kitzinger, 1995).

The focus group session was strategically scheduled for a Saturday afternoon at a home-based location central to most of the participants, to accommodate their availability and create a relaxed, conducive atmosphere for open dialogue and reflection (Cohen *et al.*, 2018; Krueger,

2014). The choice of venue was deliberate, intending to foster a comfortable environment that encouraged candid and insightful discussions among the participants (Gundumogula & Gundumogula, 2020; Krueger, 2014).

To ensure equitable participation and continued contribution to the research, despite geographical dispersion, the focus group discussion was conducted face-to-face with a Zoom connection to accommodate a participant who had relocated to a different province. Discussions were transcribed using voice recognition transcription software.

Ritter and Barnett (2016) highlight the usefulness of the focus group method in exploring diverse individual perspectives, opinions, ideas, desires, and anxieties regarding a specific phenomenon. This study focused on elucidating the experiences of novice teachers. Researchers are granted the opportunity to actively engage with participants during discussions, enabling the exploration of emergent thematic elements (Krueger, 2014; Maree, 2019).

However, it is important to acknowledge that a limitation of small-scale focus group discussions is the difficulty in extrapolating expressed views and opinions to a broader population (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014; Krueger, 2014). Despite the limited number of participants in the current study, the data obtained remained relevant and valuable to the study's research objective.

3.8 Data Analysis

In qualitative research, data analysis is a crucial process that involves organising and interpreting qualitative data to uncover patterns, concepts, themes, and meanings derived from participants' responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell *et al.*, 2017). Qualitative data analysis aims to understand the participants' views by identifying patterns, themes, categories, and regularities (Cohen *et al.*, 2018).

In this study, the data analysis process focused on transforming the content from semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions into a coherent account of participant experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The analytical method employed in this study involved thematic classification, a systematic technique that identifies and organises patterns of meaning to reveal overarching themes across a dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Thematic analysis is an intricate process that involves the systematic sorting, organising, conceptualising, refining, and interpretation of the generated

data (Nowell *et al.*, 2017). Thematic analysis provides rich, detailed, and complex insights into the meaning of data (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

Table 1: Braun and Clarke’s six phases of data analysis (2012)

Phase one	Become acquainted with the data by reading and rereading the textual data.
Phase two	Create initial codes in which you divide the data into manageable chunks that are similar to discover patterns within the data.
Phase three	Arrange similar codes into groups to create themes.
Phase four	Review the proposed themes against the coded data.
Phase five	Define and label themes by specifying how each theme is distinctive.
Phase six	Write a report in the format of a thesis.

To gain a thorough understanding of novice teachers’ experiences during their first year of teaching, this study used the six phases as described in the table above (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Once the interviews were concluded, data was transcribed verbatim. The data was read and reread critically and analytically to discern its implications. This process facilitated the identification of aspects relevant to the research question. Subsequently, the data was coded, and themes emerged during the iterative process of revising the coded data and identifying similarities. These emerging themes were reviewed against the coded data. The themes were then defined and labelled according to their distinctive characteristics. Each theme was thoroughly deliberated in the analysis.

This research was grounded in Driscoll’s reflective model, providing a theoretical framework for data analysis. Thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2012), Nowell *et al.* (2017), and Nieuwenhuis (2019b), is critical for extracting detailed and nuanced insights from the data. The analytical process was guided by a series of stages, including transcription, iterative reading, coding, theme identification, validation, and the formulation of conclusions.

To clarify the findings of the study, inductive reasoning was employed to synthesise insights derived from semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. This required a painstaking examination of a substantial dataset to obtain pertinent information. The analysis

of these data culminated in broad generalisations regarding the reflection of novice teachers' experiences during their first year of teaching.

3.9 Trustworthiness of Data

The concept of trustworthiness is crucial in qualitative research as it determines the validity and reliability of the data collected. Four fundamental principles contribute to qualitative studies' overall trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). These principles, as explained by Shenton (2004), serve as pillars to guarantee the rigour and authenticity of research results.

The credibility of research findings in terms of accuracy and truthfulness is vital in determining whether a study reflects the experiences and perspectives of the participants (Nieuwenhuis, 2019b). To enhance the dependability of the study, a range of techniques, including triangulation, member checking, and the incorporation of multiple data sources, were implemented. Triangulation was achieved by integrating data from semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, thereby facilitating the identification of shared themes and discrepancies (Cohen *et al.*, 2018). Member checking entailed sending transcripts to participants to verify the accuracy of the recorded data and interpretations, ensuring that their perspectives were accurately captured (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

It is also important to consider the transferability of research findings, which evaluates their applicability and adaptability in different contexts, thereby increasing the generalisability of the results (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; Nowell *et al.*, 2017). Confirmability and dependability emphasise the researcher's responsibility to acknowledge and mitigate potential biases, ensuring the objectivity and consistency of the study's outcomes (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014).

An audit trail is a transparent record of all steps taken during the research process, including decisions made and changes implemented. Maintaining an audit trail is essential for enhancing the dependability and confirmability of a study, as it provides a clear and detailed account of the research methodology and analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this study, an audit trail was documented and maintained throughout the entire research process, ensuring that all steps, decisions, and changes implemented were accounted for. By adhering to this record-keeping process, the validity and reliability of the findings were demonstrated to external audiences.

As emphasised by Nieuwenhuis (2019b), the importance of trustworthiness in data analysis, conclusions, and findings serves as a benchmark for the credibility of qualitative research. In this study, the researcher adhered to established procedures for evaluating data trustworthiness, demonstrating a steadfast commitment to upholding rigorous standards of qualitative research.

The following strategies were employed to ensure the trustworthiness of the research: semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were recorded and transcribed verbatim, the data were coded using an established framework (Braun & Clarke, 2012), and transcripts were sent to the participants for accuracy checks. Triangulation of the data sources was also employed to strengthen the findings (Cohen *et al.*, 2018). The use of multiple data-collection methods allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study. The data generated from the transcribed semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were rigorously examined before drawing any conclusions.

3.9.1 Credibility

The credibility of the research findings, as delineated by Bertram and Christiansen (2014), is contingent upon the extent to which the research accurately reflects the experiences and realities of the participants. Rigorous measures were implemented to ensure the credibility of the research. A comprehensive approach was employed, which included semi-structured interviews and focus-group discussions. This methodological versatility enabled the participants to freely express their opinions, while also allowing the researcher to gain familiarity with their context. The convergence of perspectives through the integration of these data collection methods enhances the overall credibility of the data (Shenton, 2004).

The credibility of research findings is inextricably linked to the accuracy of the researcher's data interpretation (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014; Nowell *et al.*, 2017). To enhance the dependability of the research based on participant data, triangulation was adopted, as recommended by Bertram and Christiansen (2014). Triangulation involves obtaining data from multiple sources and methods, such as semi-structured interviews and focus-group discussions. This multi-faceted approach not only provides a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic but also mitigates potential researcher biases, thereby reinforcing the overall credibility and trustworthiness of the research outcomes (Shenton, 2004).

3.9.2 Confirmability

The significance of the quality of a qualitative study cannot be overstated, and it is directly linked to the confirmability of its findings. Confirmability is a critical component of qualitative research that ensures the accuracy and reliability of study results. To reinforce the confirmability of this study, several rigorous protocols were followed. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim to avoid any subjective interpretations and ensure an objective examination of the data. To further enhance the dependability of the results, transcripts were provided to the participants for review, allowing them to verify their responses and ensure that their perspectives and experiences were accurately reflected in the study. Through the implementation of these procedures, research maintained dependability and preserved the credibility and objectivity of its conclusions (Morrow, 2005).

Peer debriefing sessions were held to discuss the research process and outcomes with colleagues who were not part of the study. The feedback and insights from these peers served as an external check on the interpretations, helping to identify any potential biases or assumptions that could impact the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Furthermore, participants were provided with transcriptions for member checking, ensuring that the findings accurately reflected their perspectives.

These steps collectively helped to establish the confirmability of the study by ensuring that the data and findings were rooted in the participants' experiences rather than the researcher's preconceptions. Engaging in peer debriefing and member checks improved the objectivity and credibility of the study's results.

3.9.3 Dependability

The quality of dependability is essential for establishing the reliability of qualitative research (Morrow, 2005). This pertains to the consistency, stability, and replicability of the research process (Shenton, 2004). Dependability signifies that research can be replicated by other researchers or in similar contexts (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014). To enhance dependability, it is crucial to comprehensively and transparently document the research process, including a complete account of the data collection and analysis methods (Shenton, 2004). By adhering to these principles, the research process becomes more credible and contributes to the overall trustworthiness of the research (Nowell *et al.*, 2017).

The significance of a robust research methodology in ensuring the trustworthiness of the research findings cannot be overstated. The quality of the research methodology is directly linked to the dependability of the research findings, which is a critical aspect of methodological rigour (Morrow, 2005; Shenton, 2004). Dependability can be enhanced through the use of a combination of research methods, a clear chain of evidence, and opportunities for participants to review and verify data reports (Yin, 2009). In this study, the researcher took great care to implement these measures, as described in detail in Chapter 4, which provides a comprehensive examination of the data-analysis process. By adhering to these best practices, researchers aim to enhance the credibility of their research within the academic community.

3.9.4 Transferability

The transferability of research findings, as explained by Shenton (2004), refers to the extent to which they can be generalised to similar contexts. To increase the adaptability of the research findings, it is necessary to utilise diverse data collection methods, as suggested by Polit and Beck (2010). A detailed depiction of the research environment and participants allows fellow academics and scholars to assess the relevance of findings in alternative settings (Morrow, 2005).

Thick descriptions were utilised to provide detailed accounts of the participants' work settings and backgrounds. This approach involves supplying in-depth, comprehensive information about the social, cultural, and institutional surroundings in which the participants operate. Such descriptions enable readers to understand the context impacting the study's outcomes, allowing for informed decisions about the applicability of findings to other contexts (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The study incorporated detailed accounts of the participants' teaching experiences and the challenges they faced within their educational environments. This detail ensures that the findings are rooted in context and applicable to comparable educational settings, thereby enhancing scholarly peers' ability to assess the relevance and transferability of the findings to other contexts (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014).

3.10 Ethical Considerations

Research ethics, an indispensable facet of the research process, are firmly grounded in principles that delineate ethical acceptability (O'Leary, 2017). This encompasses safeguarding participants' rights and well-being while upholding pivotal principles such as autonomy, non-

maleficence, and beneficence (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). Autonomy, which is a cornerstone of ethical research, necessitates the process of obtaining informed consent from participants. This process is characterised by voluntariness, ensuring participants have the freedom to choose whether to participate, and the capacity to withdraw from the study at any point (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014).

Additionally, ethical research mandates a thorough assessment of potential harm, prioritising the welfare of participants above all else. Ideally, research should provide direct or indirect benefits to the participants (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014). Aluwihare-Samaranayake (2012) highlights critical ethical considerations in research design, which encompass informed consent, confidentiality, and the mitigation of potential harm to participants. In summary, ethical research emphasises the rights, welfare, and dignity of participants, ensuring the ethical execution of research endeavours (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; O'Leary, 2017).

Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of KwaZulu-Natal's College of Humanities Research Ethics Committee to ensure compliance with ethical principles throughout the study. Participants were provided with a comprehensive overview of the study's purpose, data requirements, intended use, timeframe, and the implications of their involvement as well as their rights as participants. This study was guided by the principles of research ethics including informed consent, autonomy, non-maleficence, and beneficence (Cohen *et al.*, 2018).

To protect the identities and privacy of study participants, pseudonyms were used to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, and all relevant information was carefully safeguarded in a password protected file on Google Drive. This study was conducted following the principle of non-maleficence, which involves taking measures to prevent potential emotional, social, or physical harm (Cohen *et al.*, 2018) and providing relevant support services. The informed consent operationalisation process ensured that the participants fully understood their roles and responsibilities. This commitment to ethical considerations from the study's inception to its final report aligns with Creswell and Creswell's (2018) assertion that ethical considerations should be integrated throughout the research process. This study's ethical framework was consistently followed, encompassing informed consent and confidentiality (Cohen *et al.*, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014).

3.11 Limitations of the Study

The recognition of research limitations is of paramount importance as it acknowledges the obstacles that researchers may encounter during their research, such as time constraints and the need to align with participants' schedules, as highlighted by Cohen *et al.* (2011). In this study, interviews were meticulously scheduled via Zoom so that participants could choose a time that suited them best and be in the comfort of their own homes. This arrangement presented limitations related to the interpretation of participants' expressions and non-verbal cues, potentially affecting the depth of understanding that could be achieved compared to face-to-face interactions. The focus group discussion took place at a convenient location accessible to all participants on a Saturday afternoon, a time that did not require special arrangements for attendance by most participants.

When working with people, there are always limitations present (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014; Krueger, 2014; Maree, 2019). In this data collection method, some limitations include that in a group discussion, individuals may not express subtle body language as openly as they would in a one-on-one interaction. The group dynamic can influence participants' willingness to share their perspectives, thereby affecting the depth and range of their responses. Additionally, some participants may provide socially acceptable responses rather than expressing their true feelings (Krueger, 2014).

The limitations of this study include the limited scope of participants, despite efforts to select a diverse group of novice teachers in South African schools (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, the findings may only be applicable to this specific group of participants and may not be easily transferable to other populations such as novice teachers in different countries or educational systems. Novice teachers' experiences are highly context-dependent, and while this study provides valuable insights into their experiences within South African schools, variations may exist in other settings. Future research could address this limitation by expanding the participant pool to include a broader spectrum of novice teachers in diverse contexts, thereby enhancing the generalisability of the findings.

A further limitation of this study pertains to the data-collection process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher relied principally on semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions to gather data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Although these techniques provide insightful and comprehensive accounts of novice teachers' experiences, the qualitative nature

of the research may not fully capture the complete range of their experiences (Crowe *et al.*, 2011).

Furthermore, this study acknowledges the potential for researcher bias (Nowell *et al.*, 2017). Despite the researcher's efforts to maintain objectivity and impartiality, a background as an educator could have influenced the research process and interpretations (Nieuwenhuis, 2019b).

Finally, it should be noted that the current study did not delve into the long-term experiences of novice teachers beyond their initial years of teaching (Cohen *et al.*, 2018).

3.12 Conclusion

This chapter highlights the significance of employing rigorous methodological strategies to uncover novice teachers' experiences during their initial years of teaching in South African educational institutions. The choice of semi-structured interviews and a focus group discussion as research methods was based on their established ability to deliver a deep understanding of the experiences of novice teachers (Cohen *et al.*, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018)

Furthermore, the study's adoption of a case study design allowed for a thorough examination of these experiences in the South African educational context.

Ensuring research trustworthiness was a priority, and this chapter explains in detail the measures taken to achieve this. The study's emphasis on credibility is evident in the use of multiple data sources and participant engagement to validate interpretations (Devers & Frankel, 2000). This study also focused on confirmability, ensuring the integrity and transparency of the research process (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014), and dependability, creating a chain of evidence (Krauss, 2005; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

It is imperative to note the inherent limitations associated with the research design and methodology of this study. These limitations, such as participant scope, data collection complexities, potential researcher bias, and specific focus on novice teachers' first-year experiences, must be considered to delineate the boundaries of the study and generate avenues for future research (Cohen *et al.*, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The methodology chapter serves as the primary basis for this research and functions as the foundation for the entire research process. It establishes the framework used to explore the experiences of novice teachers in a South African educational setting and emphasises the

significance of adhering to methodological rigour to derive a valuable understanding of this crucial educational context.

CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapter, I elaborated on the methodology applied to this study, including the selection of participants, the data collection process, and ethical considerations. The trustworthiness of the study, as well as its limitations, were also considered.

In this chapter, the objective is to provide a comprehensive presentation and analysis of the data collected through semi-structured interviews. The analysis will explore the seven themes that emerged from the interviews with the seven participants, using Driscoll's reflective model as the framework.

This chapter is structured to first present the data, followed by the analysis supported by connections to relevant literature. It is worth noting that there may be some overlap between data descriptions and analysis sections. This overlap is essential for presenting a more comprehensive overview of the participants' perspectives and ensuring a thorough interpretation and analysis of their experiences. The goal is to provide detailed insight into the challenges and insights shared by novice teachers, supported by relevant literature.

Thematic analysis was used to identify themes, which are presented and discussed. I followed the methods of Braun and Clarke (2006) Braun and Clarke (2006), Nieuwenhuis (2019), and Nowell *et al.* (2017), which required systematic transcription, iterative reading, theme identification, and validation of findings.

The themes that emerged from the interview schedule were guided by Driscoll's reflective model. The first theme addresses the transition from being a higher education student to a schoolteacher. The second theme centres on managing the classroom and student behaviour. The third theme focuses on the teaching strategies and lesson plans of novice teachers. The fourth theme explores the support systems and mentorship provided to some participants but not to others. The fifth theme investigates the emotional and psychological consequences that novice teachers encounter. The sixth theme concentrates on student relationships and their influence on novice teachers. Finally, the seventh theme assesses the work-life balance of novice teachers.

4.2 Theme 1: From Higher Education Student to School Teacher

This theme explores the experiences of novice teachers as they transition from theoretical learning to practical application in the classroom. This theme explores the challenges novice teachers face during their transition from academic training to practical classroom teaching. The phenomenon of "reality shock" is widely recognized in literature as a common experience among novice teachers (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Veenman, 1984). This includes the emotional and psychological stress associated with bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world classroom demands.

Participants in this study reported feeling unprepared for the complexities of managing large classrooms, diverse learner needs, and limited resources. This finding aligns with Bertram (2023), who highlights the disconnect between teacher training environments and the realities of under-resourced schools in South Africa.

Rose – “When you are a student, you have this idealistic way of teaching. First, you just think you’re going to get there... Like you don’t really have a lot of hiccups and then all of a sudden all you have is hiccups. All you have is interruptions. It was a big reality check.”

Heather – “It was a big change in a sense that I have to now make my decisions for myself and design the learning programmes for myself. It became a very trial and error period, and I had to constantly adjust my approach to find what worked best.”

Lily – “It’s quite different to what you are doing on campus. You kind of get thrown into the deep end and you have to fend for yourself and develop your technique of teaching. The transition was overwhelming at first.”

Iris – “When I applied at a school and I got accepted at a school, it was a very big adjustment because now I’m looking at like 28 faces back at me. It was very different from the controlled environment during our practicals.”

Jasmine – “It was quite an adjustment because I’m really petite and small... I was teaching grade elevens who look twice my size and also very close to me in age. Gaining their respect and managing the classroom was challenging.”

Violet – “I had to quickly adapt and understand that being a teacher means being flexible and prepared for anything. It was nothing like the controlled environment during our practicals, and the real classroom dynamics were a lot more complex.”

Holly – “Transitioning from being a student to a full-time teacher was daunting. The first term was overwhelming, and I had to learn how to manage my time effectively and balance teaching, marking, and preparing for lessons.”

These interview excerpts present a collection of experiences from novice teachers as they transitioned from higher education to the teaching profession. Participants Rose, Heather, Lily, Iris, Jasmine, Violet, and Holly, shared their challenges and struggles during this period. Based on their accounts, the transition from university studies to the teaching profession often results

in a reality shock for prospective teachers. This shift from theoretical learning to practical application can be overwhelming and challenging for those entering the teaching profession.

Rose, one of the participants, describes the transition as a clash between idealistic expectations and practical challenges. She describes the unexpected interruptions she experienced as “hiccups” during her initial teaching experiences, highlighting the discrepancy between her expectations and the reality of the classroom. Similarly, Lily reflects on the stark contrast between the controlled academic environment and the demands of a real classroom as overwhelming. These experiences underscore the steep learning curve, and the necessary adjustments novice teachers face, as they establish themselves in their new roles.

Heather refers to this transition period as a “trial and error” phase in terms of making independent decisions and designing learning programmes. This highlights the need for novice teachers to cultivate autonomy and adaptability. Similarly, Holly reflects on the significance of acquiring effective time management skills and balancing teaching commitments during this transitional phase, emphasising the necessity for strong organisational skills and self-confidence.

Iris focuses on the challenges of adapting to the unpredictable nature of a real classroom with diverse learners, which starkly contrasts with the structured environment of educational practicums. This experience underscores the complexities of real-world teaching and elucidates the difficulties novice teachers encounter in managing classroom dynamics. Reflecting on this, Iris acknowledges the importance of flexibility and adaptability.

Jasmine, who is petite, describes the challenges she encountered in maintaining authority and managing the classroom effectively, especially when dealing with students who are physically larger than her. These experiences highlight the difficulties novice teachers face in asserting themselves and managing student behaviour in diverse classrooms.

Violet’s account underscores the significance of adaptability and flexibility for novice teachers. She emphasises the necessity of readiness for the intricate and unpredictable dynamics of real classrooms, highlighting the stark contrast with the controlled environment of practicum teaching experiences.

The literature indicates that adaptability and flexibility are crucial for novice teachers. Botha and Rens (2018) emphasise the necessity of adaptability to respond effectively to the dynamic nature of classroom environments. Violet’s experience, characterised by the requirement to be

flexible and prepared for various challenges, serves as a pertinent example of the significance of adaptability and flexibility in educational settings.

Finally, Holly's narrative highlights the emotional and psychological impact of the transition from student to teacher. She characterises this transition as "daunting" and describes her first year of teaching as overwhelming, highlighting the emotional challenges that novice teachers encounter as they navigate their new roles and the related professional demands.

The experiences of these participants provide a detailed depiction of the challenges and struggles they face during the critical transition period from student to teacher. This transformative stage in a teacher's career encompasses reality shock, the need for autonomy and choice, the complexities of classroom management and student interaction, the necessity for adaptability and flexibility, and the emotional and psychological strain of the transition. By examining these experiences, we gain a deeper understanding of the specific challenges faced by novice teachers and the areas where they may need additional support and counselling to successfully navigate their entry into the teaching profession.

Analysis

The term 'reality shock' refers to the sense of disorientation and distress that novice teachers experience when the actual conditions of their teaching environment do not match their expectations. This often includes a sudden realisation of the complexities and demands of teaching that were not fully understood during their teacher training. Reflecting on "what?" happened (Driscoll, 2007), novice teachers, like those in this study, often faced significant stress as they struggled to meet unexpected demands amidst intense pressure and anxiety. Reality shock can lead to significant stress for novice teachers, as they struggle to meet unexpected demands amidst intense pressure and anxiety. It can manifest as feelings of overwhelm and apprehension, resulting in an inability to cope with the magnitude of responsibilities that come with their new role.

The reality shock that novice teachers experience when entering the teaching profession with idealistic expectations, shaped by their academic training, often contrasts sharply with the realities they face in the classroom (Khalid & Husnin, 2019). Reflecting on this, Rose's experience with unexpected interruptions exemplifies this notion. Rose's experience with unexpected interruptions exemplifies this notion. This mismatch can be disheartening, potentially affecting the novice teacher's initial teaching performance and confidence (Botha

& Rens, 2018). Such experiences illustrate the significance of reality shock, emphasising the necessity for better support and realistic preparation in teacher training qualifications.

Recent research underscores the considerable influence of reality shock on novice teachers. According to Heffernan *et al.* (2022), this emotional toll and substantial workload often greatly influence a novice teacher's decision to leave the profession. The gap between theoretical knowledge and its practical application contributes to the overwhelming feelings experienced by novice teachers (Botha & Rens, 2018). Referring to the "so what?" element (Driscoll, 2007), novice teachers, despite their training in educational theories, pedagogical strategies, and classroom management techniques, often face real-world teaching complexities that their training may not fully prepare them for. For instance, a teacher may have studied differentiated instruction in their coursework but could struggle to implement this approach effectively in a classroom with 30 students of diverse abilities and learning needs (Tomlinson, 2001). Managing classroom behaviour may also prove more challenging than anticipated, as handling disruptions, maintaining student engagement, and addressing behavioural issues demand practical skills and experience that theoretical knowledge alone cannot provide (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). The experiences shared by Rose and Lily underscore the daunting nature of this transition, illustrating the steep learning curve that novice teachers encounter. Rose's reference to "hiccups" and Lily's sense of being overwhelmed highlight the disparities between academic preparation and the practical realities of the real-world classroom.

Considering the "now what?" aspect (Driscoll, 2007), the significance of developing autonomy and decision-making skills during the transition phase is highlighted by Heather's description of "trial and error". This emphasises the importance of developing independent decision-making skills regarding lesson planning and classroom management, without relying on a mentor for supervision or direction. Autonomy within the classroom, including the ability to make decisions and demonstrate organisational skills, enables novice teachers to effectively manage the multitude of daily tasks they face. The necessity for substantial self-direction and adaptation, as touched on by Heather and Iris, is supported by Feiman-Nemser, (2001).

According to Arends and Phurutse (2009), effective classroom management is essential to create a conducive learning environment. This is consistent with the experiences shared by participants, who discussed their challenges in establishing authority and managing student behaviour within the classroom. Reflecting on her experience, Iris emphasised the challenges of addressing diverse learning needs and typical classroom behaviours. Jasmine's efforts to

establish authority, particularly due to her small stature, exemplify the difficulties new teachers encounter when attempting to assert control and provide direction within the classroom.

Both Violet and Heather stress the importance of adaptability and flexibility. This is supported by Botha and Rens' (2018) study, which underscores the need for teachers to adapt to the classroom environment. Effective classroom management requires novice teachers to be flexible so they can respond effectively to classroom dynamics. Holly's emphasis on effective time management while balancing teaching commitments highlights the importance of organisational skills. Novice teachers need to balance lesson planning, marking, and various administrative tasks. Developing the necessary skills to manage these responsibilities can boost a novice teacher's self-confidence and reduce feelings of being overwhelmed (Dias-Lacy & Guirguis, 2017; Strom *et al.*, 2018).

The transition from student to novice teacher has a profound impact on emotional and psychological well-being. Holly describes this shift as “daunting” and her first year as “overwhelming”, effectively illustrating the emotional and psychological challenges that novice teachers face. This transition period is characterised by elevated stress and anxiety levels, influencing novice teachers' teaching experiences. This perspective is supported by Feiman-Nemser (2001), who examined the emotional impact of the transition from student to teacher and emphasised the necessity of developing coping mechanisms to manage stress within the teaching profession

Recent studies, such as the one by Jung and Woo (2022), highlight the significance of allocating personal time and engaging in self-care practices to prevent burnout and maintain job satisfaction. Establishing support systems can offer substantial emotional and professional assistance to novice teachers, helping them effectively navigate the early stages of their teaching careers (Bertram, 2023; Dvir & Schatz-Oppenheimer, 2020a; Heffernan *et al.*, 2022).

4.3 Theme 2: Managing the Classroom and Student Behaviour

This theme explores the strategies used and the challenges faced by novice teachers in managing classroom dynamics and student behaviour. It highlights the importance of establishing authority, maintaining consistency, and demonstrating adaptability to foster a conducive learning environment.

Rose – “I thought that it would be like an airy-fairy world. I'd be like oh learners you can do this, and you can facilitate your own learning. And I just need to provide support. I had to realize that direct instruction was the preferred instruction, and the results would show it.”

Heather – “Classroom management was definitely a big challenge. Keeping 40 kids on task and managing behaviour, while also trying to teach, was overwhelming at times. I had to develop new strategies to keep the class engaged and focused.”

Lily – “I had to be very firm with the students. Establishing rules and routines was crucial. If you don’t set the boundaries early on, it becomes very difficult to manage the class later. Consistency was key to maintaining order and ensuring that everyone knew what was expected of them.”

Iris – “I felt cooperative learning to be told very challenging. In my first year I think because my classroom management skills were not at 100 where it needs to be because it was my first year, I was just getting to know the kids.”

Jasmine – “It’s really hard for me to set out to follow what I’m doing because learner A in the back is doing something else and then I’m trying to do this and then there’s an issue in the back because you’re dealing with 55, or 56 learners.”

Violet – “I found it very difficult in my first year with discipline. The policies weren’t very outlined for the COVID regime that happened, it was our on-off and spacing. And so, it made it very difficult to maintain discipline in the classroom.”

Holly – “Managing a large class size with limited resources made it challenging to give each student the attention they needed. Classroom management was a constant struggle as I tried to balance teaching with maintaining order.”

These excerpts address the primary challenges participants encounter during their first year of teaching in managing classrooms and student behaviour. Insights from Rose, Heather, Lily, Iris, Jasmine, Violet, and Holly underscore the significance of employing effective strategies and adaptability to establish conducive learning environments.

Novice teachers frequently face challenges in establishing authority and garnering respect in the classroom. Initially embracing optimistic perspectives on student-focused learning, they often discover that employing a more direct instructional approach proves more effective for managing their classes.

Rose initially envisioned the learning environment as a carefree space where she would primarily provide guidance. However, she quickly realised that adopting a more direct instructional approach yielded better results. Lily highlights the necessity of establishing clear rules and routines. She stresses the importance of consistency in maintaining order and ensuring that everyone understands expectations. For effective classroom management, it is crucial to establish rules and routines promptly. The absence of these structures makes it significantly challenging to manage the classroom effectively.

Managing disruptive behaviour posed a common challenge for the participants. Heather described the overwhelming nature of this task, emphasising that classroom management presented a significant challenge. Balancing the responsibility of guiding 40 students to stay focused, and managing their behaviour, while teaching proved daunting at times. Nevertheless,

this challenge spurred her on to develop innovative strategies to enhance engagement and maintain focus. Finding a balance between firmness and consistency is essential for effective classroom management. Lily's emphasis on establishing boundaries and maintaining consistency was echoed by other participants, who agreed that clear expectations contribute to creating a stable learning environment.

Jasmine emphasises the challenge of adhering to lesson plans while accommodating students with diverse interests and abilities. Holly further notes that limited resources in large classes exacerbate these difficulties, making it challenging to provide adequate attention to each student. Two other participants touched on the importance of adaptability and versatility in their teaching approaches. For instance, Iris struggled with implementing cooperative learning during her first year of teaching, attributing this to her initial lack of classroom management skills and the process of getting to know her students. Violet discussed the additional challenge of maintaining discipline during the COVID-19 pandemic, noting the absence of clear policies for handling pandemic-related issues, which complicated disciplinary processes.

In summary, managing classroom and student behaviour presented a multifaceted challenge for the participants. They had to shift from idealistic practices to practical strategies, effectively manage large class sizes, establish clear rules and consistency, develop strong cooperative learning practices, and demonstrate adaptability.

Analysis

The key challenges that novice teachers typically face within their first year of teaching, as highlighted by the participants Rose, Heather, Lily, Iris, Jasmine, Violet, and Holly, underscore the importance of employing effective strategies and demonstrating adaptability to establish a conducive learning environment.

Novice teachers frequently encounter substantial challenges in terms of establishing authority and gaining respect in the classroom. Initially drawn to learner-centred teaching approaches, they often find that adopting a more direct instructional method yields better classroom management results. Rose initially anticipated that the learning environment would be a relaxed setting where her primary responsibility would be providing guidance. However, she soon discovered that employing direct instruction proved more effective in achieving better results. This is consistent with the findings of Botha and Rens (2018) who emphasise the importance of structured teaching methods in maintaining classroom discipline and achieving educational outcomes.

Reflecting on the “what?” aspect of their experiences (Driscoll, 2007), Lily emphasised the significance of establishing clear rules and routines from the outset. Maintaining consistency in these rules is crucial for establishing a stable learning environment where expectations are clear to all. Arends and Phurutse (2009) assert that setting boundaries early is essential for effective classroom management. They further stress that establishing authority involves not only setting rules but also consistently enforcing them, which aligns with the experiences shared by the participants.

The management of disruptive behaviour is a common challenge that novice teachers face. Heather, one of the participants, expressed the overwhelming nature of classroom management, highlighting it as a significant challenge. Managing the behaviour of 40 students while teaching often proved overwhelming, prompting her to develop innovative strategies to maintain engagement and focus. Feiman-Nemser (2001) echoes this sentiment, discussing how large class sizes complicate classroom management and necessitate effective strategies to keep students engaged and focused.

Jasmine, another participant, also conveyed the challenges of managing large classes with diverse student behaviours, which can hinder the effective implementation of lesson plans. This aspect is also underscored by Feiman-Nemser (2001), who stresses the importance of novice teachers developing a range of strategies to address disruptive behaviours and maintain student engagement.

Effective classroom management requires both firmness and consistency. Literature emphasizes the importance of developing robust classroom management strategies to address behavioural issues and promote an effective learning environment (Hobson et al., 2009; Botha & Rens, 2018).

Participants described struggles with maintaining discipline in overcrowded classrooms. These challenges are consistent with findings by Howie *et al.* (2017), who note that overcrowding and learner diversity exacerbate behaviour management difficulties in South African schools.

Teachers need to be firm in setting and enforcing rules while also applying these rules consistently to maintain fairness and predictability. Being firm involves addressing instances of transgressions by providing a reminder or implementing a predetermined consequence. Consistency means applying these rules uniformly to all students whenever an infraction occurs. In terms of “so what?” (Driscoll, 2007) Lily emphasises the importance of setting boundaries and maintaining consistency, a sentiment echoed by other participants. Clear

expectations help create a stable learning environment. Research by Arends and Phurutse (2009) highlights the significance of clear rules and consistent enforcement. Lily's emphasis on early rule-setting aligns with these findings, illustrating the crucial role of structured management for novice teachers. Research by Arends and Phurutse (2009) highlights the significance of clear rules and consistent enforcement. Lily's emphasis on early rule-setting aligns with these findings, illustrating the crucial role of structured management for novice teachers. The importance of firmness and consistency in the classroom was affirmed by the participants' experiences. Ensuring that students understand limits and expectations within the classroom reduces the likelihood of disruptive behaviour.

Iris and Violet emphasised the importance of adaptability and versatility in their teaching approaches. During her first year of teaching, Iris struggled with implementing cooperative learning, attributing this challenge to her developing classroom management skills and the process of getting to know her students. Khalid and Husnin (2019) explain that the initial struggles novice teachers face in implementing cooperative learning can be attributed to developing classroom management skills and a lack of practical understanding of its application.

Violet discussed challenges in maintaining discipline during the COVID-19 pandemic, attributing these to unclear guidelines for navigating discipline processes. The pandemic necessitated rapid and complex adaptation and flexibility on the part of teachers (Bertram, 2023). It underscored the critical importance of teacher adaptability and flexibility in addressing daily unforeseen challenges. This is evident in Iris and Violet's first-year teaching experiences. Novice teachers must embrace flexibility in rapidly changing and dynamic educational environments (Bertram, 2023; Khalid & Husnin, 2019).

The transition from student teacher to teacher is often characterised as emotionally and psychologically challenging. Jasmine discusses the difficulty of adhering to a lesson plan while managing a sizable group of students with diverse interests and abilities. Holly adds that the challenge of managing a large class size with limited resources makes it difficult to provide each student with the attention they need. Botha and Rens (2018) emphasise the need for novice teachers to acquire a range of teaching strategies to keep students engaged and focused while managing behavioural issues. Developing these strategies is essential for effective classroom management and achieving teaching outcomes. Challenges in classroom management can profoundly impact the emotional and psychological well-being of novice teachers, leading to

increased stress and anxiety, which, in turn, affects their job satisfaction. Feiman-Nemser (2001) asserts that novice teachers must develop coping mechanisms and strong support systems to effectively navigate these challenges, thus maintaining their overall well-being and job satisfaction.

In conclusion, managing student behaviour and classroom dynamics presents a multifaceted challenge for novice teachers. It necessitates a shift from idealistic practices to practical strategies, effective management of large class sizes, the establishment of clear rules and consistent enforcement, the development of strong cooperative learning practices, and adaptability. With regard to the “now what?” aspect (Driscoll, 2007), the experiences of Rose, Heather, Lily, Iris, Jasmine, Violet, and Holly, together with relevant literature, provide valuable insights into the complexities of classroom management and the strategies required to address them effectively.

4.4 Theme 3: Teaching Strategies and Lesson Plans

This theme focuses on the development of teaching strategies and lesson plans by novice teachers. It explores how they adapt their pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) and integrate inclusive practices to address the diverse requirements of their students.

The ability to design and implement effective lesson plans is critical for novice teachers. Bertram (2023) critiques the rigidity of South Africa's Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS), noting that its prescriptive nature often leaves novice teachers feeling constrained. Participants in this study echoed these sentiments, sharing experiences of sacrificing learner understanding to meet curriculum deadlines.

Rose – “I had to teach out of phase often. I wasn’t prepared for the different levels of understanding within one class. Adapting my lessons to include all learners was a challenge I hadn’t anticipated.”

Heather – “I learned to implement different teaching strategies to accommodate diverse learning styles. Inclusive practices were essential, but they required a lot more planning and creativity than I initially thought.”

Lily – “My PCK (Pedagogical Content Knowledge) did change because I never really explored first additional language content before up until my first year when I needed to. Adapting to teach out of phase was quite demanding.”

Iris – “My teaching strategies evolved as I gained more experience and understood the needs of my students better. The practical application of what I learned in university was key, especially when it came to inclusive education.”

Jasmine – “My lesson plans did change as I went on but not like where it set me totally out or where it was like this lesson plan is not working leave it out let's move on. I had to include more visual aids and hands-on activities to cater to all learners.”

Violet – “I don’t think teaching works very well if you stick to your plan. There’s always a question that’ll throw the whole lesson on its head. So often there’s changes that need to be made to how you go about explaining something or doing an activity.”

Holly – “I had to be very flexible with my lesson plans and teaching methods, constantly adjusting based on the students’ responses and understanding. Inclusive practices required me to be creative and resourceful.”

The participants’ experiences reveal significant challenges in developing and adapting teaching strategies and lesson plans to meet the diverse needs of their students. This theme explores their efforts to implement inclusive practices, evolve teaching strategies, and maintain flexibility in lesson planning, and highlights various dimensions of these difficulties.

The novice teachers frequently encountered a wide range of learning levels within their classrooms. One of the participants, Rose, observed that this situation left her feeling ill-prepared to manage her class and lessons, often necessitating teaching that deviated from the standard curriculum expected for that grade.

Heather encountered the challenge of out-of-phase teaching. Although she had trained as an intermediate-phase teacher, she found herself instructing Grade 1 students in her first year. This scenario posed substantial difficulties, as she was unfamiliar with the syllabus and the specific learning needs and developmental stages of young children in the foundation phase. Teaching out-of-phase required Heather to rapidly adjust her teaching methods to accommodate a younger group whose cognitive and social development differed significantly from those she had trained to teach. She had to learn and implement new strategies without the standard foundational training typically provided for educators of younger children.

Similarly, Jasmine, who also studied to teach the intermediate phase, found herself teaching English to Grades 8 to 11 at a high school. She needed to adapt her lesson planning and instructional strategies to meet the needs of older students who were at different developmental stages from those she had trained to teach. Jasmine provided insights into her evolving lesson planning, revealing that it became more refined as she progressed and gained a better understanding of her students’ needs and the teaching strategies that worked best for them. She noted that she did not discard her original lesson plans or regard them as ineffective. Instead, she found it essential to incorporate more visual aids and hands-on activities to address her students’ diverse learning needs. This approach proved beneficial in making lessons more engaging and accessible, despite the initial gap between her training and experience.

Implementing inclusive educational practices proved to be both essential and challenging for the participants in their first year, as Heather highlights. She describes having to adopt various teaching strategies to accommodate diverse learning styles. Despite the critical importance of inclusive practices, Heather notes they demand more extensive planning and creativity than she had anticipated. Holly agrees, emphasising the necessity for flexibility in lesson plans and teaching methods, which she found essential in responding to her students' reactions and comprehension levels. Inclusive teaching methods, she argues, require teachers to be resourceful and innovative. Iris further elaborates that her teaching strategies evolved as she gained experience and insight into her students' needs. She stresses that the practical application of her university education was pivotal to this evolution, particularly in the context of inclusive education.

Jasmine observed that during lessons, she frequently encountered situations where aspects of her planned lesson did not work as intended. In response, she would omit those parts and proceed with the remainder of the lesson. Initially, this caused her considerable anxiety as she struggled with uncertainties about how to effectively proceed or adapt her plans. This sentiment was echoed by Violet, who advocates for the necessity of deviating from lesson plans when necessary. She emphasises that rigid adherence to a plan could hinder effective teaching, especially when unexpected challenges arise, such as questions that fundamentally "throw the whole lesson on its head". This evolution is crucial for the professional development of novice teachers, as they often find it necessary to modify or adjust their initial strategies in response to practical classroom experiences.

Novice teachers frequently encounter challenges in adapting their PCK. Lily notes that her PCK evolved significantly as she had not previously explored content for teaching in a first additional language. In South Africa, it is common to teach subjects in English to students whose first language is not English, thus making it their first additional language. During her first year of teaching, she found herself needing to adapt her teaching strategies due to teaching out-of-phase, which proved demanding for her. Other participants highlighted the necessity of adjusting their PCK to accommodate diverse subject matters and student needs. This often required learning new content areas or teaching methods that were not extensively covered in their studies.

In summary, the experiences of the participants reveal significant challenges in adapting teaching strategies and lesson plans to cater to diverse student needs. They frequently

encountered situations where they lacked the necessary preparation to address diverse learning needs, leading to deviations from their planned lessons. Implementing inclusive teaching practices necessitated extensive planning and flexibility, as demonstrated by Heather and Holly. Jasmine and Violet underscore the importance of deviating from lesson plans to respond to immediate classroom dynamics. Lily highlights the need to acquire new content knowledge and teaching methods to enhance her Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK). These experiences emphasise the critical importance of adaptability and ongoing professional development in teaching practice.

Analysis

Novice teachers frequently struggle with the overwhelming task of catering to diverse learning abilities in their classrooms. This challenge is exacerbated when teachers are required to teach out-of-phase, as seen in Rose's experience. Linking with the "what?" aspect of reflective practice, Rose states that, having been trained for the intermediate phase, she felt unequipped to teach a different grade level and to manage her class effectively. Heather acknowledges the necessity of implementing different teaching strategies to accommodate diverse learning styles, thereby highlighting the complexity of addressing varied understanding levels within one class.

Botha and Rens (2018) emphasise the importance of teachers engaging students at different levels of understanding, necessitating a flexible and inclusive approach to lesson planning. This aligns with the participants' experiences, stressing the importance of flexibility in their teaching strategies. Furthermore, Feiman-Nemser (2001) underscores the need for novice teachers to develop strategies that bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, reinforcing the importance of flexibility and adaptability in teaching.

In terms of "so what?" (Driscoll, 2007), it is clear that inclusive practices demand significant planning and creativity, as highlighted by Heather and Holly. Heather noted the requirement for more extensive planning and creativity compared to her previous experience, while Holly stressed the necessity of continual adjustment based on student responses. Khalid and Husnin (2019) emphasise that inclusive education requires teachers to employ diverse strategies to meet students' varied needs, requiring both planning and creative implementation. Iris underscored the evolution of her teaching strategies through experience, enhancing her ability to address diverse student needs in a practical way. Gravett (2012) discusses the importance of inclusivity in education, noting its positive impact not only on students with special educational needs but also on the overall learning environment.

As novice teachers gain experience, their teaching strategies and PCK expand. This evolution is essential as it integrates effective teaching methods for specific content with an understanding of how students comprehend that content. This integration is crucial for novice teachers to effectively adjust their strategies and meet their students' diverse needs.

Reflective practice, as emphasised by Botha and Rens (2018), is pivotal in shaping teaching strategies. They urge novice teachers to continually adapt their methods to meet the dynamic needs of their classrooms. Feiman-Nemser (2001) stresses the importance of ongoing learning and adaptation in teaching, highlighting the continuous refinement of teaching strategies for novice educators. Jasmine reflected on the evolution of her teaching approach, mentioning adjustments over time such as incorporating more visual aids and interactive activities to accommodate diverse learners. Iris called attention to the importance of the practical application of theoretical knowledge from university studies in classroom settings, particularly in inclusive education.

Recent findings by Heffernan *et al.* (2022) underscore the significance of ongoing professional development in enhancing both PCK and teaching efficacy. According to Shulman (1986), Professional Continuing Education (PCE) encompasses not only mastery of subject matter but also the ability to effectively teach it. As novice teachers integrate classroom experiences with theoretical knowledge, their PCK evolves, enabling them to design more effective and inclusive teaching strategies (Henning & Gravett, 2012). Developing PCK goes beyond knowledge acquisition; it requires teachers to refine their teaching methods based on classroom experiences and student feedback. Shulman (1986), posits PCK represents the intersection of content knowledge and pedagogy, emphasising that teachers must understand not only what to teach but also how to teach it effectively to diverse students. Henning and Gravett (2012) agree, noting that novice teachers must adapt their teaching strategies to their specific classroom contexts, understanding the unique needs of their students and employing appropriate methods to meet those needs. Kloser (2014) reinforces this perspective by emphasising that effective teaching practices evolve through reflection and ongoing professional development, enabling teachers to refine their strategies and enhance their effectiveness progressively. Jasmine and Heather's experiences of integrating visual aids and interactive activities into their lesson plans illustrate the practical application of evolving PCK, demonstrating the intersection of theory and practice in real classroom settings.

It is clear that, through the lens of “now what?” (Driscoll, 2007), effective lesson planning requires flexibility and responsiveness. Jasmine and Violet emphasise the importance of adapting lesson plans to incorporate visual aids, hands-on activities, and real-time responses to students’ questions, underscoring the need for flexibility. Jasmine noted that her lesson plans evolved over time to ensure effectiveness and inclusivity, while Violet highlighted the necessity of being prepared to deviate from plans when circumstances require, acknowledging that teaching rarely adheres strictly to a predefined plan in dynamic classroom interactions.

Holly acknowledged that handling a large class size with limited resources presents challenges in providing necessary individual attention to students. This underscores the need for novice teachers to utilise flexible teaching strategies and suitably effective classroom management skills. Henning and Gravett (2012) and Strom *et al.* (2018) emphasise the importance of adaptive teaching strategies to cultivate engaging and productive learning environments, reinforcing the significance of flexibility in lesson planning.

Novice teachers’ experiences in adapting teaching strategies and lesson plans highlight the challenges of addressing diverse student needs, implementing inclusive practices, refining PCK, evolving teaching strategies, and maintaining flexibility and responsiveness. These experiences, supported by relevant literature, underscore the importance of adaptability, creativity, and ongoing professional development in effective teaching. The evolution of PCK is essential for novice teachers to enhance their content knowledge and adapt their teaching methods effectively.

Recent studies, including that of Heffernan *et al.* (2022), emphasise the role of professional development in enhancing PCK and improving teaching effectiveness. Novice teachers develop their PCK by integrating classroom experiences with theoretical knowledge, resulting in the creation of more effective and inclusive teaching strategies (Henning & Gravett, 2012). This evolution involves gaining a deeper understanding of student needs and adjusting teaching methods accordingly (Kloser, 2014).

4.5 Theme 4: Support Systems and Mentorship

This theme explores the role of support systems and mentorship in the professional development of novice teachers, focusing on the availability and impact of informal support, mentorship programmes, and collegial collaboration.

The presence of structured support systems, such as mentoring programs, significantly impacts the experiences of novice teachers. Research highlights the role of mentorship in providing emotional and professional support, helping novice teachers navigate their early careers (Hobson et al., 2009; Arends & Phurutse, 2009).

Participants reported mixed experiences with mentorship, with those in rural schools often lacking access to experienced mentors. This observation aligns with Botha and Rens (2018), who note the disparities in support structures across South African schools.

Rose – “I had to find someone like that on my own but it was a very welcoming environment. I could pretty much go to anyone and ask a question and I would definitely get an answer.”

Heather – “My mentor was incredibly supportive, providing guidance and feedback that helped me navigate my first year. Her advice on classroom management and lesson planning was invaluable.”

Lily – “We were actually just thrown into the deep end sort of. I did have a grade partner but I initiated first to make the effort to do things so I was not really provided with the necessary support.”

Iris – “It was very helpful. I had a senior teacher who guided me through the lesson planning process and classroom management strategies. Her mentorship made a significant difference in my confidence and effectiveness as a teacher.”

Jasmine – “My mentor helped me a lot by providing me with the right resources and guiding me on how to manage the classroom better. The mentorship I received was instrumental in my development as a teacher.”

Violet – “My colleagues were very supportive and helpful, which made a significant difference in my teaching experience. Having a network of experienced teachers to lean on helped me overcome many challenges.”

Holly – “The school had a mentor programme that paired me with an experienced teacher who provided invaluable support and guidance. This mentorship was essential in helping me adjust to the demands of teaching.”

These participant accounts highlight the critical role of support systems and professional relationships during the early stages of their teaching careers. This theme examines their experiences with informal support, mentorship, and the challenges arising from inadequate support, emphasising the significance of collegial support and collaboration.

Most participants noted they relied on informal support networks during their initial teaching experiences. Rose described seeking guidance independently despite finding her school environment welcoming. She felt comfortable approaching any staff member for assistance and received prompt responses. This highlights that although the environment was supportive, novice teachers may need to take the initiative to seek help themselves.

Mentorship is crucial in the development and confidence of novice teachers. Heather highlights the significant support she received from her mentor, who provided guidance and feedback that

proved invaluable in navigating her first year of teaching. Specifically, Heather emphasises the mentor's assistance with classroom management and lesson planning. Similarly, Iris and Jasmine emphasise the invaluable role of mentorship in their development as teachers. They both received guidance from experienced educators on developing effective classroom strategies. Iris benefited from ongoing support throughout the lesson planning process from a senior teacher, while Jasmine highlights her mentor's pivotal role in providing resources that supported her professional growth. Iris mentions that her mentor's guidance significantly enhanced her confidence and effectiveness in the classroom. Holly notes the existence of a mentorship programme at her school, which pairs novice teachers with experienced educators. These mentors provide essential support and guidance throughout the novice teachers' initial year of teaching. According to Holly, this structured mentorship was crucial in facilitating her adjustment to the demands of teaching. Unfortunately, not all novice teachers receive sufficient support. Lily's experience, for instance, was markedly different from that of other participants. Novice teachers at her school were thrust into challenging situations without adequate preparation. Despite having a grade partner, Lily had to proactively seek support, which left her feeling unsupported and ill-prepared. This lack of structured support resulted in some novice teachers feeling overwhelmed and unprepared for the demands of the teaching profession.

Collegial support and collaboration are crucial for novice teachers. Violet emphasises that her colleagues provided valuable assistance that significantly impacted her teaching experience. Access to a network of experienced teachers helped her overcome many challenges during her first year of teaching. Multiple participants echoed the importance of a supportive professional community, highlighting collaboration and shared expertise as vital in facilitating the transition into teaching.

Analysis

As per previous themes, novice teachers face significant challenges that highlight the necessity for effective teaching strategies and continuous professional development. When exploring the "what?" element of the reflective cycle (Driscoll, 2007), it is evident that classroom management is a challenge, however, effective approaches include establishing clear rules, using positive reinforcement, and implementing consequences for misbehaviour. A further challenge is adapting instruction to meet the diverse needs of students. Teachers can address

this by employing various teaching methods to accommodate different learning styles and effectively engage students.

Novice teachers also contend with managing their workload, which encompasses lesson planning, grading student work, and handling administrative duties. Time management techniques such as prioritising tasks and utilising planning tools can alleviate this burden. Continuous professional development remains essential to effectively address these challenges.

Mentorship programmes, where experienced teachers offer guidance and feedback, also play a vital role in helping novice teachers overcome challenges and improve their teaching practice. In their interviews, Jasmine and Holly reflected on how mentorship aided them in refining their teaching strategies and managing classroom dynamics more effectively.

The use of informal support networks among novice teachers is consistent with findings in the literature that emphasise the significance of a supportive school environment. These networks provide an essential sense of community and accessibility for novice teachers as they navigate the complexities of their new positions. Rose's initiative to seek help reflects the proactive nature necessary to benefit from such environments, which further highlights the importance of fostering a culture of openness and support in schools. Feiman-Nemser (2001) discusses the significance of informal support networks, noting that novice teachers often turn to more experienced colleagues for advice and assistance. Furthermore, Ingersoll and Strong (2011) stress the importance of an effective informal support network to enhance teacher retention and effectiveness.

Mentorship has been widely documented as having a positive impact on novice teachers (Botha & Rens, 2018; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Hobson *et al.*, 2009). The accounts of Heather, Iris, Jasmine, and Holly illustrate how effective mentorship provides crucial direction, feedback, and emotional support to novice teachers, improving their teaching skills and confidence. This finding is consistent with existing literature that highlights the advantages of mentoring programmes. Structured mentorship programmes, as seen with Holly, illustrate how formalised support systems can effectively bridge the gap between teacher training and practical classroom applications. Feiman-Nemser (2001) emphasises the critical role that mentors play in helping novice teachers develop their instructional skills and navigate the complexities of the teaching profession. Additionally, Hobson *et al.* (2009) posit that mentored teachers are more likely to develop effective teaching practices and report greater job satisfaction. Botha and Rens (2018) further highlight the importance of mentorship in promoting adaptability and reflective practice

among novice teachers, thereby contributing to their professional development and retention in the teaching profession.

Lily's experience of being "thrown into the deep end" demonstrates the negative consequences of inadequate support for novice teachers. This lack of structured support leads to feelings of isolation, stress, and burnout, exacerbating the challenges that novice teachers already face in developing effective teaching practices and managing classroom dynamics effectively. According to Ingersoll and Strong (2011), inadequate support during the induction period can negatively impact teacher retention and effectiveness. Furthermore, Fantilli and McDougall (2009) stress that without proper support, novice teachers are more likely to experience significant stress and burnout, leading to higher attrition rates.

Violet's experience with supportive colleagues underscores the importance of collegial support and collaboration. Establishing professional relationships fosters an environment in which teachers can collaborate, share resources and strategies, and receive moral support. These elements are crucial for managing the demands of teaching. Research suggests that cultivating collegiality and creating professional learning communities can enhance teacher efficacy and job satisfaction, while also mitigating the sense of isolation often felt by novice teachers. Vangrieken *et al.* (2015), found that collaborative practices among teachers lead to enhanced instructional strategies and increased levels of professional satisfaction. Furthermore, Hargreaves and Fullan (2015) contend that professional collaboration is essential for continuous professional development and for fostering a supportive teaching environment.

In conclusion, the participants' experiences underscore the crucial role of support systems and professional relationships during their initial years in teaching. Areas such as reliance on informal support, the pivotal role of mentorship, challenges due to inadequate support, and the benefits of collegial collaboration align with current literature. Addressing the "now what?" aspect of the reflection cycle, these findings underscore the importance of schools fostering supportive environments, establishing structured mentorship programmes, and promoting professional collaboration to facilitate the effective transition of novice teachers into the teaching profession.

4.6 Theme 5: Emotional and Psychological Impact

This theme explores the emotional and psychological difficulties encountered by novice teachers. It sheds light on the stress, emotional strain, and mental health issues that arise from

the demands of teaching. Simultaneously, it underscores the significance of effective coping mechanisms and emotional support in mitigating these challenges.

The emotional toll of teaching can lead to burnout, particularly among novice teachers. Dias-Lacy and Guirguis (2017) emphasize the psychological challenges novice teachers face, including stress and feelings of inadequacy. Participants in this study described feelings of frustration and exhaustion, particularly when trying to meet the needs of learners with limited resources.

Rose – “I felt overwhelmed with the amount of paperwork and marking, and balancing this with teaching was very stressful. The first term was incredibly challenging as I tried to keep up with everything.”

Heather – “The emotional toll of dealing with students’ personal issues and maintaining my own mental health was challenging. Balancing the emotional demands of teaching with personal life was a constant struggle.”

Lily – “The pressure to ensure that every learner succeeds can be overwhelming, and managing my emotions was crucial. There were days when I felt completely drained, both physically and emotionally.”

Iris – “Seeing students struggle and not being able to help every one of them was emotionally draining. The emotional highs and lows of teaching were something I had to learn to manage.”

Jasmine – “There were times where there were so many issues that affected me deeply, like learners being raped or not having enough food. The emotional burden of these issues was heavy.”

Violet – “You can have a bad day and then go home, recentre, come back to work, and your colleagues are there helping you recentre to start the day fresh and new. So, it’s very helpful. The emotional support from colleagues was invaluable.”

Holly – “Dealing with the emotional needs of my students while managing my own stress was a constant challenge. The emotional and psychological impact of teaching was significant.”

Novice teachers often struggle with the administrative aspects of teaching. For example, Rose mentions feeling overwhelmed by extensive paperwork and marking responsibilities while managing classroom dynamics during her challenging first term. Balancing these tasks with effective teaching methods adds to the stress faced by novice teachers, who already contend with heavy workloads, including lesson planning and marking. This contributes significantly to their overall stress and well-being.

Many participants emphasised the ongoing struggle for emotional well-being. Holly explains that the emotional and psychological impact she experienced had been significant. Lily describes feeling overwhelmed by the pressure to ensure every learner succeeds. She often felt completely exhausted, both physically and emotionally, but learned to recognise the importance of managing her own emotions. This highlights the emotional challenges that novice teachers face as they balance their own mental health with the needs of their students. The mental and

emotional burden of addressing students' emotions, personal issues, and traumatic experiences exacerbates the daily stress faced by teachers.

Iris notes that seeing students struggle and being unable to help each one was emotionally draining. She clarifies that she had to learn to manage the emotional highs and lows of teaching. Heather conveys that dealing with students' personal concerns while maintaining her own mental health was a significant challenge. She highlights that balancing the emotional demands of teaching with personal life is a constant struggle.

Handling traumatic student experiences can be challenging for teachers, as it adds to the emotional burden of teaching. Jasmine mentions that there were times when issues such as cases of rape or instances where students did not have enough food affected her profoundly. Such emotional experiences deeply impact novice teachers, adding to their already heavy load. These experiences underscore the significant emotional challenges novice teachers face when dealing with their students' personal and traumatic issues, often leading to feelings of helplessness and emotional exhaustion.

However, support from colleagues can be invaluable in helping novice teachers cope. Violet states that on challenging days, she could return home, regroup, and resume work with renewed energy and enthusiasm thanks to her colleagues' support. This support was instrumental in helping her cope with the challenges she experienced. The presence of a supportive professional community significantly alleviates the emotional burden novice teachers face by providing the necessary encouragement and practical guidance to navigate their early years of teaching.

Analysis

The stress and emotional toll of paperwork and administrative tasks on novice teachers are underscored by Rose's narrative and supported by various literary sources. Novice teachers are particularly vulnerable to the overwhelming nature of these administrative demands, which can exacerbate their overall stress. Focusing on the "what?" aspect of reflection, research conducted by Ingersoll and Strong (2011) reveals that the additional administrative responsibilities placed upon novice teachers can lead to higher levels of stress, challenging their ability to effectively balance these tasks with their teaching responsibilities. Fantilli and McDougall (2009) similarly emphasise the importance of novice teachers preparing for the administrative aspects of teaching, as lack of preparation can lead to feelings of overwhelm and stress. Failure to address these demands can detrimentally affect the effectiveness and well-

being of novice teachers, highlighting the crucial need for adequate support and resources to manage these tasks.

Heather's experience with students' personal problems and her efforts to maintain her own mental well-being underscore the broader psychological challenges faced by novice teachers. The emotional demands of teaching can be profound, as educators often confront students' personal and psychosocial issues alongside their academic needs. For instance, a novice teacher may encounter a student grappling with family problems such as a divorce, which can significantly affect their behaviour and academic performance. In such cases, the teacher may offer emotional support while ensuring the student remains engaged in the classroom. Another scenario might involve a pregnant student, requiring the teacher to demonstrate patience and understanding while collaborating with school counsellors to provide necessary support. Within the "so what?" phase of the reflective cycle, such situations necessitate a high level of emotional resilience and the ability to balance empathy with maintaining a productive classroom environment.

Feiman-Nemser (2001) discusses how the emotional consequences of teaching, compounded by inadequate support, significantly impact the mental well-being of novice teachers. Ingersoll and Strong (2011) emphasise the crucial role of emotional support in enabling novice teachers to effectively manage the demands of their profession. Heightened and ongoing emotional and psychological stress can lead to emotional exhaustion and burnout. Lily's remarks about feeling drained underscore the necessity for strategies to assist teachers in managing their emotional and psychological health, essential for sustaining their overall well-being and effectiveness in the classroom.

Jasmine's account of managing traumatic student experiences highlights the significant emotional impact on teachers. Novice teachers often face students with profound personal challenges or trauma, which can be emotionally draining. Hargreaves (2000) notes the emotional strain teachers experience when addressing these issues, leading to feelings of helplessness and frustration. This emotional burden can lead to secondary traumatic stress, where teachers take on the emotional and psychological burdens of their students. This can potentially result in compassion fatigue, defined as a gradual decrease in compassion over time, particularly in those who work in high-stress environments (Brunzell, Waters & Stokes, 2021; Luthar & Mendes, 2020). Supporting novice teachers is crucial in preventing emotional fatigue and ensuring effective student support (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Without adequate support,

novice teachers may experience burnout, negatively impacting their well-being and teaching effectiveness (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009). Ingersoll and Strong (2011) highlight the importance of strong support systems to enhance teacher retention and mitigate the risk of emotional fatigue and compassion fatigue.

Iris and Jasmine's experiences underscore the critical need for emotional resilience in teaching, highlighting the pivotal role of comprehensive training and support. The significance of emotional support from colleagues, as emphasised by Violet and Holly, is substantiated by the literature. Collegial support serves as a crucial buffer against the emotional challenges of teaching, empowering teachers to navigate stress and safeguard their mental well-being. Ingersoll and Strong (2011) and Vangrieken *et al.* (2015) highlight that collegial support and collaborative practices cultivate a sense of community, boosting teacher efficacy and increasing job satisfaction. According to Hargreaves and Fullan (2015), professional collaboration is indispensable for ongoing professional growth and for fostering a supportive teaching environment. The testimonies of Violet and Holly underscore the critical role of a strong support network within schools in assisting novice teachers in navigating the emotional and psychological challenges inherent in their profession.

The development of coping strategies is crucial for novice teachers to effectively manage the emotional challenges they face. One effective strategy is seeking mentorship and professional guidance, that provides both emotional support and practical advice. Feiman-Nemser (2001) highlights the significance of mentorship in assisting novice teachers to develop effective coping strategies and enhance their resilience. Additionally, incorporating regular self-care practices such as exercise, hobbies, and effective time management can help teachers maintain their mental health (Herman *et al.*, 2018). Building solid and robust support networks both within and outside the school provides teachers with emotional outlets and resources to effectively cope with the demands of teaching.

In conclusion, the experiences of the participants underscore the significant emotional and psychological impacts during their initial teaching years. The stress of paperwork, managing students' personal issues, ensuring student progress, navigating emotional highs and lows, coping with traumatic experiences, and the importance of emotional support from colleagues align with existing literature. These findings emphasise the imperative for schools to establish comprehensive support systems, foster collaborative environments, and empower novice teachers with effective strategies to address the emotional challenges inherent in their

profession. Incorporating coping strategies such as mentorship, mindfulness, and self-care practices can enhance novice teachers' ability to navigate these demands, ultimately contributing to their well-being and professional success.

4.7 Theme 6: Student Relationships and Impact

This theme explores the connections new teachers establish with their students and their profound impact on both parties, highlighting the joy of teaching and the power of positive student-teacher interactions.

Building positive relationships with students is a source of motivation and professional satisfaction for novice teachers. Research suggests that strong teacher-student relationships enhance both learning outcomes and teacher morale (Bertram, 2023; Gravett, 2012). Participants highlighted how supportive student interactions provided a sense of accomplishment amidst their challenges.

Rose – “She became the most confident young lady and then the following year she became a prefect. She was like, I would have never been a prefect without your help.' Seeing that transformation was incredibly rewarding.”

Heather – “The connections I made with my students were very rewarding. Seeing them succeed and grow was one of the best parts of teaching. It made all the challenges worthwhile.”

Lily – “I had a learner who struggled a lot, and by the end of the year, he was doing so much better. His confidence had grown, and it was a proud moment for me to see that improvement.”

Iris – “One of my students who had a lot of difficulties ended up excelling by the end of the year. It was amazing to see the progress and know I was a part of that. The impact we have on students is profound.”

Jasmine – “I did what I could to support them, and seeing their improvement was incredibly fulfilling. Building strong relationships with my students made a huge difference.”

Violet – “I saw one of my students, who was struggling socially and academically, grow and become the top student by the end of the year. It was a remarkable transformation and very rewarding.”

Holly – “Seeing my students grow and become more confident in their abilities was incredibly rewarding and reinforced my passion for teaching. The impact we have on students' lives is immense.”

The experiences shared by the participants clearly demonstrate the considerable impact that novice teachers have on their students' development, as well as the immense satisfaction derived from building strong student-teacher connections. These experiences illustrate the transformative effect that positive interactions can have on both students and teachers. For the participants, observing their students' growth, increased confidence, and academic achievements reinforces their passion for teaching and highlights the powerful role they play in their students' lives. The participants' accounts emphasise the dual benefit of these relationships, showing how effective and supportive connections can lead to significant

improvements in student outcomes and provide profound professional and personal fulfilment for teachers.

Rose shares her experience of witnessing the significant transformation of a shy young student into a self-assured young woman who later became a prefect. The student expressed gratitude to Rose, acknowledging that without her help, achieving the position would not have been possible. This transformation was immensely rewarding for Rose. Similarly, Violet comments on observing one of her students who initially struggled socially and academically but progressed to become the top student by the end of the year. This development was remarkable and gratifying. These transformations underscore the profound impact that teachers can have on students' lives

Most participants observed the development of student confidence and success. Heather finds the relationships she forms with her students highly rewarding. Witnessing student progress and development, she notes, is one of the most gratifying aspects of teaching. Lily echoes this sentiment, recalling a student who initially struggled but made remarkable progress by the year's end. His increased confidence was a proud moment for her. Iris and Jasmine also emphasise fostering student confidence and success. Iris recalls a student overcoming numerous difficulties to excel by year-end, describing it as amazing to witness and be a part of. She believes in the profound impact teachers have on students' lives. Jasmine shares fulfilment in supporting a specific student's improvement, underscoring the difference strong relationships with students make. Participants consistently reported that teaching was a rewarding experience, with many expressing a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment in their roles. Holly reflects on the joy of observing her students' progress and gaining confidence, reinforcing her passion for teaching. These experiences underscore the importance of building strong, supportive relationships with students to foster their growth and confidence.

Analysis

The impact of teachers on the transformation of their students is well-documented in the literature. As demonstrated by the experiences of Rose and Violet, teachers can bring about profound changes in their students' lives through support and guidance. Hattie (2008) asserts that teacher-student relationships are among the most significant factors influencing student achievement. The ability of teachers to facilitate remarkable transformations highlights the importance of positive interactions between teachers and their students, as well as the crucial role of teacher support for students. Darling-Hammond (2012) also stresses that effective

teaching can contribute to significant student growth, both academically and personally. Additionally, Pianta (1999) underscores the importance of strong, positive teacher-student relationships for the social and academic development of students. These relationships foster a sense of belonging and motivation, crucial for student growth.

Heather and Lily's experiences in cultivating student confidence and success align with literature emphasising the critical role of teacher support in fostering student growth. When teachers establish healthy, supportive relationships with their students, they nurture a positive learning environment that enhances student confidence and academic achievement (Tomlinson, 2001). According to Feiman-Nemser (2001), the emotional and academic support teachers provide significantly influences student outcomes. The development of student confidence, as illustrated in Heather and Lily's experiences, is crucial for long-term academic and personal success. Additionally, Brophy (1981), emphasises the importance of teacher expectations and encouragement in helping students build self-efficacy and achieve higher academic outcomes.

Iris and Jasmine's accounts emphasise the importance of nurturing student confidence and success. Feiman-Nemser (2001), asserts that teachers actively contribute to students' holistic development by helping them overcome academic challenges. Additionally, Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) emphasises the significance of teacher guidance in enabling students to reach their full potential, implying that effective scaffolding by teachers can lead to significant student progress.

Holly's reflection on the rewarding nature of teaching resonates with literature discussing teacher satisfaction and motivation. The sense of fulfilment derived from witnessing students succeed is a significant factor in teacher retention and job satisfaction (Day, 2018). For example, novice teachers find great satisfaction in witnessing a student who previously struggled with a concept finally grasp it through persistent effort and support. This sense of achievement is particularly significant when a student, who has faced challenges in subjects like mathematics, begins to understand the concepts and perform well. Research by Ingersoll and Strong (2011), indicated that teachers who report higher levels of job satisfaction often cite student progress and success as significant contributing factors.

In the context of "now what?" (Driscoll, 2007), the emotional benefits of teaching, such as observing student growth and development, play a crucial role in sustaining teachers' professional satisfaction and passion for their profession, as emphasised by Hargreaves and Fullan (2015). Furthermore, Lortie (2007) examines the notion of "psychic rewards" in

teaching, which encompass the satisfaction and sense of achievement teachers experience from positively influencing their students' lives.

In conclusion, the participants' experiences demonstrate how they significantly influence their students' development and find great satisfaction in building strong student-teacher relationships. The transformative impact they have, the importance of fostering student confidence and success, their role in nurturing student growth, and the deep satisfaction they derive from teaching are all key aspects supported by existing literature. These findings highlight the crucial role of supportive teacher-student relationships in promoting student success and draw attention to the intrinsic rewards inherent in the teaching profession.

4.8 Theme 7: Work-Life Balance

This theme examines the challenges novice teachers encounter in achieving a satisfactory work-life balance. It explores strategies for setting boundaries, managing workloads, prioritising personal time, and practising self-care to prevent burnout and enhance job satisfaction.

Striking a balance between professional and personal life is a common struggle for novice teachers. The literature suggests that the high demands of teaching often lead to a lack of work-life balance, contributing to early career burnout (Hobson et al., 2009; Veenman, 1984). Participants described difficulties in managing their workload, particularly during the first year of teaching.

Rose – “I know I do not take work home. I’ve made it a point that once I’m home, I’m home, and that’s for my own mental health. Otherwise, I just wouldn’t cope.”

Heather – “I found it challenging to balance work and personal life, especially with the amount of marking and preparation needed. It often felt like there weren't enough hours in the day.”

Lily – “Managing the workload was a lot, especially if you’re a person that likes to be involved. It does create a lot of work for you and balancing that with personal life was tough.”

Iris – “I had to learn to manage my time better. The first few months were particularly hard because I would spend all my evenings and weekends on schoolwork. I had to set boundaries.”

Jasmine – “I had to find ways to balance my work and personal life. It was important for me to make time for myself and not let the job consume all my time.”

Violet – “I needed to create a balance. My first term I was just working non-stop, but then I realised I needed to make time for myself to avoid burnout.”

Holly – “Balancing teaching responsibilities with personal life was a significant challenge. I had to make a conscious effort to ensure I didn’t let work take over my life entirely.”

The participants' experiences in managing work-life balance highlight the significant challenges they face in maintaining personal well-being while meeting the demands of their profession. These challenges necessitate the development of effective time-management strategies, setting boundaries, and implementing self-care practices.

The participants consistently emphasise the critical importance of establishing boundaries to protect their mental well-being. For example, Rose stresses the need to avoid bringing work home, highlighting this boundary as pivotal in preserving her mental health. She underscores the necessity of maintaining a clear separation between work and home life to effectively manage the demands of teaching. Similarly, Iris enhanced her time management skills after initially dedicating all her evenings and weekends to schoolwork. She recognised that setting boundaries was essential to ensure adequate time for relaxation and rejuvenation. Jasmine also underscores the significance of achieving a work-life balance by allocating specific time to each domain and preventing work from dominating her schedule.

The participants indicate that, as novice teachers, they faced a significant challenge in balancing their work obligations with personal commitments. Heather states that she found it difficult to strike a balance between her work and personal life, especially given the amount of marking and presentation required. She often felt that she simply did not have enough hours in a day to complete all her tasks while maintaining a fulfilling personal life. Lily agrees, stating that managing workload is a challenge for a teacher who likes to be actively involved in extracurricular activities. She encountered difficulties balancing her professional responsibilities with her personal life. Holly speaks about making a conscious effort to maintain balance and prevent work from dominating her life. She stresses that without conscious effort, the teaching demands would overwhelm her.

Two participants, Iris and Violet, emphasised the importance of learning time management skills. Iris recalls that her first few months were particularly challenging as she devoted all her evenings and weekends to schoolwork. However, recognising the need for boundaries, she adapted to better manage her time. Similarly, Violet recounts an intensive first term, describing how she worked tirelessly but eventually understood the necessity of allocating time for herself to prevent burnout. By learning to prioritise tasks and effectively manage her time, she was able to maintain a satisfactory work-life balance. Both Iris and Violet found that developing time management skills was essential for successfully maintaining a balanced approach to professional demands and personal life commitments.

The importance of setting aside personal time and prioritising self-care was a recurring topic among the participants. Jasmine emphasised the necessity of making time for herself and not allowing work to consume all her time. She found that dedicating time to personal activities helped maintain her mental health and well-being. Similarly, Violet recognised the need for personal time to prevent burnout, realising that working non-stop was unsustainable and that self-care was crucial. Holly echoed this sentiment, noting that balancing teaching obligations with personal life was a significant challenge and required a conscious effort to prevent work from dominating her life entirely.

Analysis

Setting boundaries between professional and personal life is crucial for novice teachers to protect their mental health and prevent burnout. Rose emphasised that she intentionally refrained from taking work home to safeguard her mental well-being, stating that without this boundary, she would not cope. Research supports this approach, indicating that teachers who establish and maintain these boundaries are better equipped to manage the demands of their profession (Day, 2018). Iris highlighted the importance of setting boundaries to avoid spending all her evenings and weekends on schoolwork. She shared that the first few months were particularly challenging, however, she recognised the significance of establishing boundaries to manage her time more effectively. This aligns with Botha and Rens (2018) who note that clear boundaries help reduce the risk of emotional exhaustion, a common issue among novice teachers who often blur the lines between work and personal life. The experiences of Rose and Iris underscore the necessity for novice teachers to preserve their personal time to maintain their well-being.

Heather, Lily, and Holly's experiences in managing heavy workloads reflect the findings of Ingersoll and Strong (2011), which highlight that excessive workloads can lead to high stress levels and job dissatisfaction. Heather faced a significant challenge in balancing her work and personal life, particularly given the substantial amount of marking and preparation required. Lily shared a similar sentiment, stating that managing the workload was especially difficult for those who actively participate in extracurricular activities at school. Holly also discussed the effort required to prevent work from dominating her life, emphasising that maintaining this balance necessitated conscious effort. These experiences resonate with Ingersoll and Strong (2011), who highlight that excessive workloads can lead to high stress and job dissatisfaction.

The literature emphasises the need for effective workload management strategies to help novice teachers balance their professional responsibilities with their personal lives (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). The implementation of such strategies can significantly improve job satisfaction and overall well-being, as per the “so what?” phase of reflection (Driscoll, 2007). Vangrieken *et al.* (2015) emphasise the importance of collaboration and support among colleagues to ensure a more equitable distribution of workload, thereby reducing individual stress. The experiences of participants consistently reflect aspects of struggling with workload and recognising the need for intentional efforts to maintain balance.

Effective time management is crucial for novice teachers striving to maintain a balanced work-life dynamic. Key strategies involve prioritising tasks based on their urgency and importance, such as promptly grading assignments after class to prevent backlog. Additionally, consolidating similar tasks enhances efficiency. Setting boundaries, like refraining from checking work emails after a designated evening hour, further supports achieving this balance. Iris and Violet’s experiences highlight the significance of prioritising tasks and setting boundaries. Iris, for instance, developed these skills to manage her workload effectively. Similarly, Violet learned during her first term the importance of balancing work with personal time to prevent burnout. Both found that mastering time management was essential for maintaining a healthy work-life balance. Heather also stressed the critical need for time management skills to manage the substantial preparation and marking demands.

According to Vangrieken *et al.* (2015), effective time management skills are crucial for reducing stress and enhancing overall well-being among teachers. Tomlinson (2001) supports this by advocating for professional development programmes that specifically target time management and organisational skills, which are essential for novice teachers to balance their responsibilities effectively. Arends and Phurutse (2009) further assert that cultivating these skills early in their careers is vital for teachers to maintain a healthy equilibrium between their professional commitments and personal lives. Iris and Violet’s reflections on the importance of improving their time management skills align with the literature findings, emphasising its crucial role in navigating the demands of teaching. Effective time management enables novice teachers to fulfil their professional responsibilities without compromising their personal lives.

Jasmine, Violet, Holly, and Lily underscored the significance of allocating personal time to attain work-life balance, despite its inherent challenges, with a primary focus on bolstering their mental well-being and mitigating burnout. Iris articulated a distinct emphasis on self-care

for analogous reasons. This aligns with Hobson, *et al.* (2009) who state that engaging in self-care and making time for personal activities are essential for preventing job burnout and maintaining job satisfaction.

The literature supports the notion that teachers who prioritise self-care are more resilient and better equipped to manage the demands of their profession (Day, 2018). This approach not only enhances teachers' well-being but also improves their effectiveness in the classroom. According to Hargreaves and Fullan (2015), fostering a supportive school culture that promotes self-care and well-being is crucial for maintaining teachers' passion and commitment to teaching. Similarly, Bertram (2023) underscores the importance of self-care in preventing burnout and sustaining a long-term career in teaching. The participants' reflections demonstrate a shared recognition of the necessity for personal time and self-care to sustain well-being and effectiveness. Their individual strategies for achieving this balance vary, illustrating the diverse approaches to self-care among novice teachers.

In conclusion, the difficulties experienced by novice teachers underscore the significant challenges they face in achieving work-life balance. Considering the "now what?" aspect (Driscoll, 2007), it is clear that key strategies to address these challenges would include setting boundaries for mental health, managing heavy workloads, learning effective time-management techniques, prioritising personal time, and consciously balancing responsibilities. These strategies align with existing literature, emphasising the critical need for support systems and professional development initiatives focused on time management and self-care. These efforts are essential in helping novice teachers maintain a rewarding and enduring career.

Additionally, providing opportunities for mentorship and networking can further assist novice teachers in developing effective time management and self-care strategies, leading to a more satisfying and sustainable teaching career. The participants' shared experiences highlight common focus areas such as the importance of establishing boundaries and mastering time management skills, alongside varied perspectives on workload management and prioritising personal time. This synthesis highlights the complex nature of achieving work-life balance and emphasises the necessity of tailored support systems to meet individual needs.

CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter synthesises the empirical evidence gathered from this study, which explores the experiences of novice teachers in South African schools. Central to the study is the research question, “What are second-year novice teachers’ reflections on their first year of teaching?” This question served as the foundation for exploring the reality shock and adjustment struggles faced by novice teachers. The study aimed to understand how the transition from theoretical training to practical classroom application affected their efficacy and psychological well-being.

This chapter presents the findings within the context of the theoretical concepts reviewed in the preceding chapters. The discourse addresses the research question, highlights the key findings related to the challenges faced by novice teachers, and examines the role of support systems and their impact on professional development and general well-being. Additionally, this chapter discusses the implications of these findings, the limitations of the study, and suggests further research to enhance support frameworks for novice teachers.

The following sections present the study’s results, exploring the central themes of the research and providing a thorough analysis of the experiences and needs of novice teachers. These sections detail the issues that have arisen, the resilience of novice teachers, the relationship between support systems and self-efficacy, the connection between theoretical knowledge and practical application, the importance of self-reflection, and the role of emotional labour in novice teachers’ well-being.

5.2 Key Findings

This research uncovered vital insights into the participants’ first-year experiences in an educational setting. A key finding was significant reality shock, marked by the disparity between their theoretical education and the practical classroom demands. This often resulted in stress and a steep learning curve as novice teachers managed classrooms and diverse student behaviours. Additionally, the gap between expected and actual teaching conditions often left them inadequately prepared for classroom realities.

Another significant finding was the importance of support systems and structured mentorship in professional development. Effective mentorship and collegial support were shown in this study to significantly enhance participants’ confidence and ability to manage teaching-related stress. The participants emphasised the value of comprehensive induction programmes, which

not only offer practical teaching strategies but also provide opportunities for novice teachers to share experiences and learn from each other.

The challenges faced by the novice teacher participants in terms of emotional and psychological well-being were considerable, emphasising the importance of providing them with the necessary support and resources to manage stress, which promotes well-being and resilience. Establishing strong student-teacher relationships was identified as highly rewarding, reinforcing the participating teachers' passion and dedication to their profession. According to the study findings, achieving a satisfactory work-life balance is crucial to prevent burnout and ensure job satisfaction.

5.3 Discussion of Key Findings

In this section, I provide crucial insights into the complex issues that should be considered when preparing future teachers for a career in education, drawing from the experiences of the participants in this study.

5.3.1 *Teacher Identity in Transition*

A teacher's identity is shaped by their beliefs, values, and job demands, continually influenced by personal experiences, professional interactions, and the broader educational context. Novice teachers often face conflicts between their personal educational philosophies and professional constraints, particularly with the introduction of new policy measures or accountability standards. Successfully navigating these conflicts is crucial for forming a stable professional identity. Reflective practices enable educators to effectively confront these challenges (Calderhead, 1989), especially when supported by mentorship that promotes internal conflict resolution and fosters adaptable professional identities (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Rushton *et al.*, 2023). As teachers gain experience, their identity evolves through adapting to challenges, reflecting on experiences, and integrating new knowledge and skills (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Active engagement in this process supports the development of a resilient professional identity that endures throughout their career.

As the participants gained more experience, they reported increased confidence in their identities. This underscores the importance of ongoing professional development and support for teachers at all career stages. Botha and Rens (2018) emphasise the role of continuous reflective practices and supportive environments in nurturing and developing a robust professional identity.

External accountability measures, including policies and frameworks that sometimes conflict with teachers' pedagogical beliefs, significantly impact teacher identity. Rushton *et al.* (2023) examine the tension teachers face between their professional goals and accountability frameworks. This tension often leads to conflicting identities as teachers attempt to balance policy compliance with their personal teaching philosophies. The constraints imposed by curriculum guidelines often restrict flexibility in implementing innovative teaching methods, which could offer greater advantages for students. Many novice teachers in this study felt overwhelmed by the need to meet external standards, which often contradicted their personal teaching philosophies. Strict adherence to curriculum guidelines restricted their ability to use creative teaching strategies that could benefit students. This internal conflict led some teachers to develop coping strategies to balance their workload and maintain creativity in the classroom. However, for others, it resulted in overwhelming feelings that affected their classroom performance and compliance with administrative demands.

According to Botha and Rens' (2018) research, novice teachers' professional identity and their ability to manage classrooms efficiently can be significantly influenced by the reality shock experienced during the transition. Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) argue that professional identity is how teachers perceive themselves in their roles, influenced by their beliefs, values, and job demands. The significance of teacher training programmes in equipping educators to reconcile external demands with their personal educational beliefs cannot be overstated (Darling-Hammond, 2012).

Policies in education significantly influence how teachers perceive themselves and their professional capabilities. Golzar (2020) explores how educational policies shape teachers' professional identities and sense of agency. Teachers who view policies as supportive and aligned with their values tend to develop a positive identity and enhanced professional agency, enabling them to make independent choices in their teaching practice.

Participants in this study expressed mixed feelings about educational policies. While some viewed policies as facilitating positive change and personal growth opportunities, others perceived them as overly rigid and focused more on 'box-ticking' than genuine improvement. This dichotomy underscores the importance of flexible policies that support positive identity development among teachers. Rigid policies can constrain teacher autonomy, posing challenges to identity development (Nwoko *et al.*, 2023).

The early years of teaching play a crucial role in shaping teachers' professional identities. As highlighted by Foreman-Brown *et al.* (2023) novice teachers often struggle to align their personal beliefs with school expectations. This period is marked by significant identity work in which teachers continuously negotiate their roles and self-perceptions. The presence of supportive networks, such as mentoring programmes, is vital for facilitating this transition and helping novice teachers develop a coherent professional identity. One participant highlighted the challenge of balancing their idealistic views with the realities of teaching. Gravett (2012) posits that guided reflection on classroom experiences is crucial for professional development, helping teachers integrate their personal and professional identities. Supportive networks are essential, providing novice teachers with a platform to voice concerns and receive feedback, which is vital for their professional growth and personal well-being.

Support systems such as mentoring and professional development programmes are crucial in shaping teacher identity. According to Hobson *et al.* (2009), effective mentorship provides novice teachers with guidance, emotional support, and practical strategies, boosting their confidence and proficiency. These relationships enable teachers to reflect on their practices, align their actions with their values, and develop resilient professional identities. Professional learning communities offer a collaborative platform where teachers can share experiences and collectively address challenges in their early teaching years. These communities provide practical solutions and foster a sense of belonging and mutual support among educators, essential for ongoing professional growth.

Furthermore, as a component of professional development, Khalid and Husnin (2019) highlight the importance of structured programmes that aid teachers in comprehending their teaching methods and harmonising them with their educational convictions. This synchronisation is vital for preserving strong professional personas. The implementation of reflective practices and peer collaboration among teachers, allows them to incorporate their personal values into their teaching strategies, thereby promoting their professional identities, and increasing their adaptability and resilience (T. Marshall *et al.*, 2022).

5.3.2 Resilience and Efficacy of Novice Teachers

This section explores how resilience and efficacy are nurtured through comprehensive support systems and the positive impact this has on novice teachers' professional growth and success.

Resilience, defined as the ability to recover from setbacks and grow professionally in teaching (Höl, 2024), and teacher efficacy, referring to teachers' confidence in their ability to impact

student learning and classroom management (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001), are crucial for novice teachers as they navigate the complexities of their early career years.

Resilience enables novice teachers to cope with the stress and challenges they encounter, while teacher efficacy helps them feel confident and competent in their roles. These two concepts are inherently interconnected: when teachers trust their ability to succeed, they become more determined, and this determination strengthens their belief in their ability to succeed (Höl, 2024; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Effective support systems such as mentorship, professional relationships, and reflective practices are crucial for developing resilience and efficacy among novice teachers (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Strom *et al.*, 2018). These systems provide guidance, emotional support, and practical strategies that build confidence and help teachers adapt to challenges while shaping a strong professional identity (Calderhead, 1989; Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Teacher efficacy pertains to teachers' belief in their capacity to influence student learning and manage the classroom successfully (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). A study by Bardach *et al.* (2022) highlighted the significance of support systems and their impact on teachers' well-being and efficacy. Support systems, including mentoring programmes, professional learning communities, and administrative support, significantly enhance teachers' psychological well-being, positively impacting their resilience, professional development, and teaching efficacy. These systems enable novice teachers to navigate the complexities of their roles and adjust to the demands of the teaching profession.

Many participants in this study acknowledged the pivotal role and immense value of mentorship in navigating the complexities of their first year of teaching. This aligns with Hobson *et al.* (2009), who highlight the significance of effective mentorship for novice teachers. Mentorship provides guidance, emotional support, and practical strategies that enhance confidence and professional competence. Participants stated that guidance and reassurance made a substantial difference in their ability to handle stressful situations. Mentors offer personalised guidance and feedback that address the unique difficulties faced by new teachers, which is crucial for their ongoing personal and professional growth.

These professional relationships, and collegial support, are instrumental in fostering resilience, enabling teachers to manage their roles effectively in demanding environments (Strom *et al.*, 2018). Zhabina (2022) underscores these systems' role in seamlessly integrating novice teachers into the profession.

Developing strong professional relationships within an educational institution can foster a sense of community and mutual support, which is crucial for teacher retention and job satisfaction (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). One participant shared that her cooperative team made her transition smoother by handling planning, allowing her to focus on teaching. Other participants described the pressure to perform without adequate support, noting that the reality shock of teaching significantly contributed to this pressure.

Peer support systems, such as collaborative teams and peer mentoring, are essential for reducing feelings of isolation among novice teachers. These support networks provide a platform for sharing experiences, strategies and resources, fostering a sense of community and belonging (Bardach *et al.*, 2022). The significance of peer support was highlighted by several participants' experiences. One participant noted that being part of a learning community within the school not only helped with immediate classroom issues but also fostered professional growth. Another participant emphasised the value of informal peer support, stating that colleagues were invaluable for discussing daily challenges, which made a substantial difference. Darling-Hammond (2012) posits the importance of professional communities, underscoring the need to create supportive and nurturing environments for teachers.

A school environment that fosters a spirit of collaboration and shared responsibility among teachers positively impacts their morale and effectiveness in the classroom (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). When teachers work together in a supportive and cooperative manner, they tend to feel more valued and motivated, which enhances their teaching efficacy (Bardach *et al.*, 2022). The inclusion of novice teachers in professional networks such as team meetings and learning communities can significantly improve their teaching practices and professional growth. Participants reported that their involvement in these networks contributed to their development. This aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory, which underscores the importance of social interaction and collaborative learning in enhancing professional development.

One of the participants highlighted the consequences of insufficient support, stating that being "thrown into the deep end" led to increased stress and feelings of isolation. This highlights the importance of self-efficacy in fostering a sense of belonging, as discussed by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001). Darling-Hammond (2012) also states that extensive support systems are essential to create an environment that nurtures teachers and enables them to flourish. The

relationship between support systems and teaching efficacy underscores the necessity of a comprehensive approach to supporting teachers.

Schools must establish comprehensive support systems to address the diverse needs of novice teachers effectively. In South Africa, the contextual realities of schools, influenced by the quintile system, significantly shape the nature of these support systems. Quintile 1–3 schools, typically under-resourced, face unique challenges, such as large class sizes, inadequate teaching materials, and limited access to professional development opportunities (Bertram, 2023). In these contexts, support systems should focus on providing practical resources, mentoring programs, and partnerships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to bridge resource gaps.

Conversely, quintile 4–5 schools, which are generally better resourced, often have the infrastructure and capacity to offer more specialized support systems. These schools could focus on advanced professional development programs and innovative teaching strategies tailored to the needs of novice teachers. Regardless of the quintile, the inclusion of mental health resources, structured mentorship, and peer collaboration remains critical for supporting novice teachers' emotional and psychological well-being (Hobson *et al.*, 2009).

A tailored approach to support systems ensures that schools can address the specific challenges faced by novice teachers within their respective contexts. By considering the disparities across the quintile system, schools can create environments where novice teachers are equipped to thrive, and learners can benefit from more effective and engaged teaching practices.

Regalado *et al.* (2021) emphasise the importance of support programmes that address the emotional and psychological demands of teaching, equipping novice teachers with coping strategies for stress. Several participants highlighted the value of comprehensive induction programmes, noting their critical role in teaching them how to manage classroom stress and maintain work-life balance. These programmes provide practical teaching strategies and foster peer learning among novice teachers. According to Bardach *et al.* (2022), school support for the mental health and well-being of teachers is essential for maintaining high levels of teaching efficacy. Schools that offer access to counselling services, stress management programmes, wellness initiatives, and mental health resources help teachers manage their stress levels and maintain their classroom effectiveness. This type of structured emotional and psychological support also contributes to teachers' well-being and resilience (Hobson *et al.*, 2009; Regalado *et al.*, 2021). The participants emphasised the importance of emotional support in their

resilience, noting that without it, they felt isolated and found it challenging to navigate their experiences. Providing mental health resources and ongoing support can significantly alleviate the burden faced by new educators, enhancing their well-being and satisfaction in their profession while fostering resilience and self-efficacy.

Integrating reflective practices into mentorship programmes and support systems helps new teachers gain deeper insights into their experiences and develop effective coping mechanisms, thereby enhancing their effectiveness (Calderhead, 1989; Gravett, 2012). Marshall *et al.* (2022) argue that reflection is essential for novice teachers to critically evaluate their experiences, learn from them, and cultivate resilient mindsets. Self-reflection is pivotal for the continuous personal and professional growth of all teachers (Zhabina, 2022).

Reflective practice emerged as a prominent theme among the participants. Maintaining a reflective journal provided them with an opportunity to process daily experiences and learn from successes and failures. This approach encourages a proactive stance toward professional growth by highlighting areas for improvement and recognising accomplishments. Such practices are integral for novice teachers, aiding in their adaptation to challenges and improving their agency, or ability to act purposefully and constructively, which is crucial for building resilience (Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

According to Höl (2024), when novice teachers feel empowered to make decisions and take charge of their teaching practices, their resilience increases. Participants in this study often expressed feeling empowered in their roles. One participant highlighted that having autonomy to make decisions in her classroom contributed to her sense of control and resilience in the face of challenges. Reflective practices empower educators by encouraging critical evaluation and improvement of instructional approaches (Khalid & Husnin, 2019). Facilitating novice educators to participate in decision-making can foster ownership of their teaching methods, which is essential for their professional development and self-assurance (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). This empowerment is vital for novice teachers in cultivating a sense of professional efficacy.

5.3.3 Bridging Theory and Practice

Bridging the gap between theoretical training and practical teaching applications is a well-documented concern (Veenman, 1984). Rycroft-Smith (2022) discusses the role of knowledge brokering in addressing this gap by translating research findings into practical strategies that teachers can employ in the classroom. This disparity often leaves novice teachers unprepared

for the realities of teaching. Participants expressed frustration with this disconnect between their training and the practical demands of teaching. One noted that the theory covered during their teacher training did not fully prepare them for the complexities within the classroom. This observation aligns with Veenman's (1984) discussion of reality shock.

Practical experience is crucial for bridging the gap between theory and practice (Heikkilä *et al.*, 2020). Weng (2023) emphasises the significance of critical literacy praxis, which involves engaging student teachers in activities that connect theoretical concepts with classroom practices. This approach helps novice teachers develop a deeper understanding of how to effectively apply their knowledge in real-life situations. The value of practical experience emerged prominently among the participants, with one noting that the most valuable aspect of her training was the practicum, where she could apply what she had learned in real classroom settings.

Effective training strategies that utilise diverse classroom settings are essential for preparing novice teachers (Arends & Phurutse, 2009). Heikkilä *et al.* (2020) explore the professional agency of student teachers at the intersection of theory and practice, underscoring the significance of equipping student teachers with strategies to manage diverse student needs and behaviours. The participants highlighted the need for additional practical training in classroom management, noting that it can be overwhelming to keep a large class focused on tasks and manage behaviour while also teaching. This reinforces the findings of Feiman-Nemser (2001) and Botha and Rens (2018), who stress the necessity for teacher education programmes to incorporate more hands-on practical experience.

Mentoring and support are essential for novice teachers to bridge the gap between their theoretical knowledge and practical application (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Experienced mentors can provide invaluable guidance and practical advice, assisting novice teachers in navigating the complexities of teaching and applying theoretical concepts to real-life situations (Heikkilä *et al.*, 2020). The participants reiterated this perspective, indicating that their mentors played a crucial role in clarifying the application of theoretical concepts in practical classroom settings. Regular check-ins with mentors facilitated their ability to maintain focus and enhance classroom management skills effectively.

Structured induction programmes that offer practical support are vital for aiding novice teachers in transitioning from theory to practice (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). These programmes should include opportunities for novice teachers to observe experienced educators, receive

feedback, and engage in reflective practice (Rycroft-Smith, 2022). The participants emphasised the importance of induction programmes in their professional development, highlighting how these programmes provided them with the support and guidance necessary to effectively apply theoretical concepts in the classroom. Ingersoll and Strong (2011) maintain that comprehensive induction programmes can significantly enhance novice teachers' competence and confidence and Feiman-Nemser (2001) notes that effective induction programmes help novice teachers build essential teaching skills and adapt to classroom challenges.

Building a collaborative culture within schools helps novice teachers address the challenges of classroom management (Bardach *et al.*, 2022). Participating in professional learning communities allows novice teachers to share experiences and insights, seek advice, and collaboratively develop effective management strategies with peer-proven practical application. Participants highlighted the significance of peer support, noting that sharing strategies and experiences with fellow teachers greatly impacted their practical approaches to classroom management. Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory underscores the value of social interactions and collaborative learning in professional development.

5.3.4 Role of Reflection

Reflective practice is essential for teachers' professional development, promoting continuous growth and adaptability (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). According to Marshall *et al.* (2022), reflective practice enables teachers to critically evaluate their experiences, identify areas for improvement, and adapt teaching methods to meet students' needs. The participants frequently highlighted the importance of reflective practice in their development, noting that maintaining a reflective journal helped them process daily experiences and learn from successes and failures.

Reflective practice derives its significance from the principles of "reflection-in-action" and "reflection-on-action" articulated by Doran (2020). Reflection-in-action involves teachers critically evaluating their actions in real-time during teaching, enabling immediate adjustments. In contrast, reflection-on-action occurs post-teaching, allowing for a deeper analysis and learning from past experiences. This dual mode of reflection enhances teachers' capacity to continuously develop and advance in their professional practice.

Professional learning communities are crucial for fostering a supportive and nurturing environment for teachers and promoting collaborative reflection, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of reflective practices (Bleakley *et al.*, 2020; Darling-Hammond, 2012). Several

participants affirmed these benefits, noting that participation in a collaborative community within their school helped address immediate classroom concerns, provided practical teaching strategies and classroom management tips, and significantly contributed to their professional and personal growth through shared experiences and feedback.

Mentorship holds a vital position in fostering reflective practice among novice teachers, as indicated by research (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Hobson *et al.*, 2009; Marshall *et al.*, 2022). Experienced mentors guide novice teachers in reflecting on their teaching experiences and providing practical insights for improvement. The significance of mentorship in promoting reflective practices emerged as a key finding in this study. One participant noted that having a mentor who encouraged reflection on lessons and provided constructive feedback was invaluable for their growth as a teacher.

According to Zeichner and Liston (2013), combining reflective teaching practices with mentorship helps novice teachers better understand their teaching contexts and improve their instructional strategies. This perspective is supported by the participants' experiences, as they asserted that mentorship facilitated their reflective practices and professional growth.

The integration of reflection into teacher training programmes is essential for preparing novice teachers for classroom complexities (Zeichner & Liston, 2013). Reflective journaling, peer discussion, and the development of reflective teaching portfolios are effective strategies that help teachers cultivate the habit of reflection, thereby enhancing their teaching effectiveness (Dinham *et al.*, 2021). Participants highlighted the importance of reflection in their training programmes. One participant noted that reflective journaling and peer discussions significantly improved their understanding of teaching practices and ways to enhance them. This finding supports incorporating reflective practices into teacher training.

Reflective practice significantly impacts teacher efficacy and resilience (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Consistent reflection on their teaching allows novice teachers to identify their strengths and weaknesses, thereby enhancing their confidence and resilience in teaching practices. (Marshall *et al.*, 2022). The positive impact of reflective practice on teaching efficacy was evident in the participants' experiences. One participant noted that reflecting on her teaching helped build confidence and resilience by allowing her to see progress and identify areas for improvement. This finding underscores the significance of reflection in enhancing teaching efficacy and resilience.

5.3.5 Emotional Labour and Well-Being

Emotional labour refers to the process whereby teachers regulate their emotions to meet the emotional requirements of their profession (Kariou *et al.*, 2021). Effective management of emotional labour is crucial to avoid significant stress and exhaustion. Novice teachers, in particular, frequently struggle with the emotional challenges of the classroom, which can affect their health and well-being. The participants depicted the psychological impact that reality shock could have. One particular participant described feeling overwhelmed by the immediate pressure to perform without adequate support. A study by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) addressed the stress associated with managing large classes with diverse learner needs and found that these pressures can diminish teachers' sense of efficacy and well-being, potentially resulting in burnout.

According to Feiman-Nemser (2001), the initial years of teaching are critical for developing coping mechanisms that enable teachers to manage the emotional demands of their profession. Insufficient support during this phase can have lasting consequences for teachers' professional growth and well-being. Novice teachers, therefore, require comprehensive support systems to maintain their emotional and psychological well-being (Hobson *et al.*, 2009). Support systems should include formal mentorship, peer support, and professional development opportunities to effectively reduce stress and enhance teachers' emotional well-being (Hascher & Waber, 2021). A participant in this study highlighted the importance of having a supportive relationship with someone who understands her challenges and can offer practical advice, which helped alleviate stress and foster a more positive approach to teaching. This underscores the significance of structured support systems, as noted by Ingersoll and Strong (2011) and reinforced by Feiman-Nemser (2001).

School leaders play a critical role in prioritising teacher well-being (Kariou *et al.*, 2021). They are expected to establish policies and practices that promote teachers' mental health and well-being, including providing ample time for self-care and reducing administrative burdens. Participants explained that school leadership must acknowledge the emotional challenges teachers face and offer the necessary resources and time for self-care. Research conducted by Darling-Hammond (2012) stresses the importance of devising policies that support teachers' well-being and prioritising mental health resources. By adopting a holistic approach, schools can provide comprehensive support to novice teachers, enabling them to succeed.

According to Wang *et al.* (2023), novice teachers often experience positive psychological outcomes from their teaching experiences. Positive interactions with students and successful

teaching experiences can enhance teachers' emotional well-being and job satisfaction. Many participants reported that the connections they built with their students and witnessing their progress are significant motivators, making their efforts worthwhile. This highlights the emotional rewards of teaching, which can counterbalance the stress and challenges they face.

Schools play a vital role in promoting teachers' mental health and well-being (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001) and should foster a supportive culture, implement comprehensive induction programmes, and provide continuous professional development. Nwoko *et al.* (2023) emphasise that these strategies help teachers manage stress, build resilience and maintain well-being. Effective induction programmes and structured mentorship systems are crucial for novice teachers, providing both practical advice and emotional support during their transition into professional roles. Access to mental health resources and stress management training assist in maintaining job satisfaction and preventing burnout. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) highlight the importance of emotional support in enhancing teacher's efficacy and overall well-being. Schools should, therefore, offer tailored mental health services to novice teachers to help them cope with the emotional demands of teaching. Professional development programmes, which include stress management and resilience training, can assist novice teachers in developing appropriate coping strategies.

The collaborative learning environment, as emphasised by Vygotsky (1978), holds significant value in reducing isolation and promoting well-being among novice teachers. Such environments foster a culture of collaboration and peer support, creating an inclusive atmosphere in schools. By encouraging teachers to share experiences, seek advice, and collaborate on common challenges, collaborative learning enhances individual well-being and builds a resilient professional community. Mutual support among colleagues alleviates isolation and fosters connection, reducing emotional stress in the profession. Additionally, professional learning communities provide a platform for ongoing development, where teachers engage in reflection, share best practices, and receive feedback. Fostering a sense of belonging and professional fulfilment is crucial for maintaining teacher efficacy and well-being. Implementing these strategies ensures novice teachers receive essential support to thrive personally and professionally.

5.4 Limitations of this Study

My background and role within the same educational institution as the participants studied introduce the potential for subjectivity and bias. As their lecturer, who was well-liked and

respected by them, there is a possibility that the participants might have been influenced by their desire to impress me. Despite taking measures to maintain objectivity, my familiarity with both the context and participants may have influenced data collection and interpretation. This limitation acknowledges that personal experiences and perspectives can shape analysis. To address these biases, rigorous protocols, such as precise recording and transcribing of interviews, and having participants review the transcripts, have been implemented (Cohen *et al.*, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

To further reduce bias, the study emphasised diversity in the selection of participants. Clear inclusion criteria were established, such as selecting individuals who had graduated recently and begun teaching within the past two years. The researchers employed purposive sampling to ensure a diverse range of teaching environments (including urban, rural, and peri-urban schools) and demographic representation, thereby enhancing the study's representativeness (Nieuwenhuis, 2019). This strategy contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of novice teachers and mitigated the risk of selection bias.

Another pivotal technique employed to address bias was reflexivity. A reflexive journal was maintained throughout the investigation, serving as a repository for personal insights, judgements, and presumptions. This practice of reflexive journaling, as underscored by Morrow (2005), cultivates a keen awareness of the researcher's position and helps to diminish the effect of preconceived notions on both data collection and interpretation processes.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the research outcomes, study participants were invited to examine the transcripts of their interviews. This approach, commonly referred to as member checking, afforded participants the chance to verify the data and rectify any potential misinterpretations or inaccuracies (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). Furthermore, the researchers conducted peer debriefing sessions, which served as an external assessment of the data analysis procedure. This method helped to mitigate the effects of unconscious bias and preserve the integrity of the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The study's reliability was enhanced through the implementation of triangulation. By cross-referencing data obtained from semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, researcher bias was minimised, and a more thorough understanding of the research question was achieved (Shenton, 2004). This approach, utilising multiple methods, ensured that the results were not reliant on a single source of information, thereby bolstering the credibility and dependability of the findings.

By employing these strategies, the study aimed to mitigate the inherent biases of qualitative research while maintaining the authenticity of the participants' experiences. These measures provided a rigorous and transparent framework for data collection and analysis, ensuring that the findings accurately reflect the realities of novice teachers in South Africa.

5.5 Further Research Directives

Future studies could potentially expand the participant pool to include novice teachers from diverse regions across South Africa, encompassing urban and rural areas, as well as diverse types of schools including public, private, well-resourced, and under-resourced schools. This approach would help explore whether the experiences and challenges identified in this study are consistent across varied educational settings. Comparative studies could provide insights into regional disparities and offer a better understanding of the distinct challenges novice teachers face in different contexts.

Conducting longitudinal research that tracks novice teachers over multiple years could offer valuable insights into the evolution of their experiences over an extended period. Such research could provide insight into the long-term impact of early career support systems on factors such as teacher retention, professional development, and classroom effectiveness. These insights could inform the development of policies and practices aimed at supporting teachers throughout their careers.

Research should be conducted to assess the long-term effectiveness of teacher education programmes in preparing novice teachers for the realities of the classroom. Studies could compare various programme structures, curricula, and practicum or work-integrated learning experiences to determine which components are most beneficial for equipping teachers with the skills and knowledge needed for success. This could include the evaluation of practical experiences and classroom training in teacher preparation programmes.

5.6 Conclusion

This study commenced with a sense of excitement and anticipation to uncover the outcomes of novice teachers' first-year experiences. It has been a long and rewarding journey to observe how my former students, now novice teachers, navigated through their initial years in the teaching profession. It was particularly gratifying to discover that their experiences were not negative. Despite the challenges they encountered, most novice teachers expressed a profound passion for teaching and a strong conviction that they had chosen the right profession.

It is evident that novice teachers experience a variety of emotions and challenges. The task of managing diverse and large classrooms frequently surpasses their training, leading to feelings of being overwhelmed. However, some participants reported positive experiences with supportive relationships, such as mentorship and professional learning communities, which provided essential emotional and professional support. For example, Violet benefited from a collaborative team and Jasmine found that professional learning communities were invaluable in improving her classroom management skills. These positive experiences emphasise the significance of nurturing a supportive and collaborative school culture.

Despite facing significant challenges, the participants display resilience and determination that is truly inspiring. Their experiences stress the critical need for comprehensive support systems to facilitate their success. This study highlights the diverse experiences of these new teachers, emphasising both their challenges and the essential support systems necessary for their professional growth. It is my hope that these insights will inform the development of enhanced policies and practices, thereby fostering a more supportive environment for teachers.

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Appendix A: Ethical Clearance



10 August 2022

Joranda Viljoen (221117201)
School Of Education
Edgewood Campus

Dear J Viljoen,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00004473/2022

Project title: Reflections on the first year of teaching by second year novice teachers

Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 13 July 2022 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has 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.

This approval is valid until 10 August 2023.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 Email: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics>

Founding Campuses:  Edgewood  Howard College  Medical School  Pietermaritzburg  Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

Appendix B: Informed Consent



Dear Participant

REQUESTING INFORMED CONSENT FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION

My name is Mrs Joranda Viljoen, and I am a student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. In fulfillment of the Master's degree qualification I am required to conduct research that will require participants. The research is titled: What are second year novice teachers' reflections on their first year of teaching?

This study will focus on the reflections of second year novice teachers on their first year of teaching. The reflections of the participants' experiences of specific aspects of teaching in the first year as qualified professionals, will be the focus of this study. The specific aspects will include curriculum issues, lesson preparation, learner discipline, classroom management, extra-curricular activities, and professional development.

I request permission to include yourself in this study. There will be two methods of data collection. The first one will consist of a face-to-face, semi-structured interview that will take place after school hours at a venue such as a coffee shop, which is suitable for both of us. The interview will last from 60 to 80 minutes. The second method will be a focus group interview where all seven of the participants of my study will get together to discuss their first year of teaching. This discussion will also take place after working hours at a central venue that is convenient for everyone. The discussion will also take 60 to 80 minutes.

Please note:

- The information will be used for scholarly research only.
- There will be no financial benefits for participants in this study.
- Your participation is entirely voluntary. You have a choice to participate, not to participate or to withdraw from participating.
- The identity of the school where you are currently working will remain strictly anonymous as pseudonyms will be used, and all the responses will be treated with confidentiality.

- The recordings as well as other items associated with the group discussion will be held in a password-protected file accessible only to me and my supervisors. After a period of 5 years, in line with the rules of the university, it will be disposed by shredding and burning.
- Should you agree, please sign the declaration attached to this letter.

For further questions/concerns or queries related to the study contact the researcher at:
Cellphone: [REDACTED] email: [REDACTED] or my supervisor is: Dr Nyna Amin. Contact details: E-mail: amin@ukzn.ac.za

For any questions or concerns about the rights of yourself as a participant, then you may contact the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Administration Research Office, Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building Private Bag X 54001 Durban, 4000; KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA Tel: 27 31 2604557 -Fax: 27 31 2604609. Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

DECLARATION

I hereby confirm that I have been informed about the nature, purpose and procedures for the study:

I have also received, read and understood the written information about the study. I understand everything that has been explained to me and I consent to participate in this study.

Thank you

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

Appendix C: Interview Schedule

DATA GENERATION INSTRUMENTS

1. Semi-structured Interview Schedule

Topic: What are second year novice teachers' reflections on their first year of teaching?

Biographical Data

Name/Participant number: _____

Age: _____

1. Grade teaching: _____

School type: public/private

Phase 1: Before becoming a teacher (background)

1. What made you decide to become a teacher?

2. How did you experience your studying? Did you enjoy it or was it a difficult period in your life?

Phase 2: Being a teacher

1. Tell me about your adjustment from being a student to being a teacher in that first term of teaching.

2. How is teaching different from the teaching experience you had while studying?

3. What advice would you give to current students regarding their preparation for their first year of teaching?

Phase 3: Reflection

1. This is your second year of teaching. How has the start of this year been different from the start of your first year?

2. Do you enjoy being a teacher or are you considering a change in career?

3. What are some of the positive experiences you had in your first year of teaching?

4. What are some of the negative experiences you had in your first year of teaching?

2. Focus Group Discussion

Reflect on your first year of teaching.