

Multicultural Teaching and Learning in Early Childhood Education (ECE): Classroom Perspectives in South Africa

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ABSTRACT:

South Africa, like many nations worldwide, is a multicultural and multilingual society with policies that promote linguistic diversity. Emerging from the legacy of apartheid, the education system continues to grapple with fragmentation, inequity, racism, and intolerance. Whereas apartheid-era policies grouped people into same communities based on language and culture, today's linguistic landscape reflects significant diversity across the eleven official languages and nine provinces. This shifting demographic underscores the growing importance of integrating multicultural education into early childhood curricula, even in communities that were once relatively homogeneous. This study investigates the experiences and challenges faced by learners, teachers, and stakeholders in multicultural early childhood schools. Conducted in four multicultural primary schools located in Gauteng and North West Provinces, the research employed a qualitative case study design. Data were collected through classroom observations, individual and semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions with four Grade 3 female teachers, two from rural areas and two from townships. Guided by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, thematic analysis revealed that while teachers strive to incorporate multicultural elements into curriculum design, significant barriers remain. These include gaps between policy and practice, insufficient teacher training, and limited support for children from diverse cultural backgrounds. The study recommends stronger collaboration between teachers, parents, and the Department of Basic Education (DBE) to enhance teaching in multicultural classrooms. Furthermore, schools should be provided with more in-service training, workshops, and monitoring of language policies, teaching strategies, and learning support materials to ensure effective implementation of multicultural education.

Keywords: Early; Education; Childhood; Classrooms; Multicultural; Teaching.

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

South Africa is a country with diversity, which includes different races, cultures, languages and religions. National Planning Commission (2021) and OECD, (2021) mentions that South Africa is often referred to as the rainbow nation or a multicultural society with language diversity. Such diversity does not mean that the society lives in isolation. People meet at schools, workplaces, shops, and so on. This also applies to learners in schools. The South African society is exciting, because it captivates its people while also expecting them to behave in a sensitive manner Rodriguez, Omidire & Anyosa, (2023).

Immigration is worldwide. National Planning Commission (2021) and OECD, (2021) comments that questions of language, culture and schooling have existed as long as there have been immigrant learners entering schools in their new countries of residence. OECD, (2021) mentions that since the 19th century, people have migrated from neighbouring countries to South Africa. Since the inception of democracy, immigration and shifts in demography have increased. For example, people from the nearby countries like Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Malawi, Lesotho, Botswana and others, are moving into South Africa and the parents register their children in any of the schools in the areas they live in. OECD, (2021) remarks that the collapse of apartheid brought about the forceful reintegration of South Africa into the global economy after years of exclusion, which was accompanied by an increase in trade, investment and immigration.

With the acceleration of globalisation and the implementation of immigration policies in recent years, multiculturalism has gradually become an important social phenomenon in South Africa Hilgart, (2024). However, with the influx of families and children from different cultural backgrounds, early childhood teachers are faced with unprecedented opportunities and challenges. The rise of multiculturalism has put forward new requirements for the curriculum and teaching of South African early childhood education Hilgart, (2024). How to effectively

implement multicultural education in the classroom and build a harmonious and inclusive education environment for children has become a key issue Comstock, Litke, Hill & Desimone, (2023).

The current development in demography in most countries is one of increasing heterogeneity which gives rise to racial tensions and cultural conflicts. People need to come to terms with the fact that we need to co-exist in harmony, and this can only happen if there is genuine respect and acceptance of differences. Attitudinal and value systems can change only with knowledge and understanding Comstock, Litke, Hill & Desimone, (2023). Education therefore plays a key role in bringing about these changes, and the best time to start this process of education is right from Early Childhood Education. As crucial as it is that we embark on this route, we must be aware of the problems and challenges that lie in front of us in order to avoid hurdles and strategise our efforts in the most ideal manner.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The central aim of multicultural education is to transform teaching and learning approaches so that learners of all genders, cultures, and ethnic groups have equal opportunities Banks, (2022). In South Africa's democratic era, education and training have been identified as critical priorities for national prosperity, social transformation, and family well-being. Tremendous changes in schools are driven by social, economic, and political shifts, making education a vital sphere that requires focused attention during this period of transformation Vavrus, (2023).

The government's policy of opening state schools to all racial groups marked a significant move from mono-cultural to multicultural education Armstrong, (2023). Yet, intolerance and a culture of violence continue to challenge schools. Teachers must now manage increasingly heterogeneous classrooms, where learners come from diverse cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds. This requires creating inclusive learning environments that meet varied needs while promoting respect for diversity and

equal educational opportunities Armstrong, (2023).

The rationale for this study lies in addressing these challenges by examining how teachers, learners, and principals experience and manage diversity in early childhood classrooms Department of Basic Education, (2020). By identifying obstacles and exploring strategies, the study seeks to contribute to the transformation of education, inform policy development, and empower teachers to confront racism and inequality. Ultimately, the research aims to support the creation of classroom practices that foster equity, inclusivity, and improved academic achievement in multicultural contexts. Department of Basic Education, (2020).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Teachers in multicultural schools often face challenges such as low morale, absenteeism, stress, large class sizes, disciplinary issues, limited support from education officials, and poor learner performance. These difficulties, combined with the complexities of racial integration, highlight the need for a detailed study of how diversity is experienced and managed in early childhood classrooms.

The study seeks to examine the perspectives of learners, teachers, and principals in multicultural schools, with the aim of understanding how diversity influences teaching and learning. Central to multicultural education is the goal of improving academic achievement Banks & Banks, (2022). By investigating classroom practices, the research intends to provide insights that will help teachers manage diversity more effectively and foster inclusive learning environments.

The focus is on identifying challenges objectively and encouraging teachers to adopt multicultural approaches that transform the educational environment into one that respects cultural diversity and ensures equal opportunities Banks, (2022). However, provincial education departments have provided limited preparation for administrators and stakeholders to engage meaningfully in racial integration, Department of Basic Education, (2024). This gap underscores

the importance of research that can inform policy development and practical strategies.

The researcher argues that multicultural education cannot succeed without appropriate teacher training. Integration is likely to remain accompanied by social and academic challenges, making it essential to develop plans, processes, and mechanisms that support transformation. Empowering teachers to confront racism and equipping them with strategies to overcome barriers is critical to achieving equity and progress in multicultural classrooms Sibanda, (2019).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Guided by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (2020), this study is underpinned by multicultural education theory, literature, culturally responsive pedagogy, social constructivist perspectives, and anti-bias education frameworks. Collectively, these frameworks provide a lens for examining how teachers and learners negotiate diversity in early childhood classrooms, how instructional practices foster inclusivity, and what challenges remain in developing critical understandings of multiculturalism. Vygotsky's (2020) emphasis on the social and cultural context of learning further situates this study within a perspective that views knowledge construction as a collaborative process shaped by interaction, language, and cultural tools, (Coady, 2019; Suri & Chandra, 2021).

This study reviews key theories and research on multicultural education. This section provides an introduction and historical background, tracing the legacy of apartheid education that shaped current inequalities and examining the shift toward change and desegregation, including comparative insights from other countries. The literature highlights how conceptions of culture and language challenge apartheid-era notions and redefine the meaning of multicultural education, Cummins, (2021).

Central to the review is the issue of equality in education Vygotsky (2020). Attention is given to defining equality, exploring how it can be achieved, and examining the perspectives of different educationists on multicultural

education. Common goals identified across the literature include promoting inclusivity, respect for diversity, and equitable access to learning opportunities, (Coady, 2019; Suri & Chandra, 2021).

The review also considers strategies and policy frameworks for implementing multicultural education. These include approaches to curriculum design, teacher training, and institutional transformation aimed at fostering environments that support diversity and equal participation Cummins, (2021). By synthesising these perspectives, the literature provides a foundation for understanding the challenges and opportunities in advancing multicultural education in South Africa's early childhood classrooms, (Coady, 2019; Suri & Chandra, 2021).

Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism emerged from the liberal pluralist approach to education and society, offering a framework that sought to respond to demands from black radicals for the restructuring of school knowledge. In South Africa, multicultural education was regarded as the most effective response to challenges arising from desegregation. Siyu Chen & Haotao Lai, (2024), endorsed multicultural education as a pedagogically sound approach rather than a politically driven one that could promote equal educational opportunities. The South African Department of Education appeared to embrace this notion, with the Minister of Education expressing support for multiculturalism in the government's 1995 White Paper UNESCO (2020). Nationally, multiculturalism gained traction, symbolised by the idea of the 'Rainbow Nation,' which reflects unity in diversity within South African society OECD (2021).

The researcher views a multicultural society as one in which different groups maintain distinct ways of life. However, multiculturalism has been criticised for sidestepping issues of race and racism by focusing instead on the more ambiguous concept of culture. Another challenge lies in the role of teachers, who have often been accused of racism, ethnocentrism, and a lack of sensitivity toward cultural diversity Kultti, (2022).

In South Africa, multiculturalism has sometimes been reduced to the celebration of lifestyles, with the expectation that this alone will foster cultural tolerance OECD (2021). The researcher argues that apartheid education never promoted tolerance among diverse groups. Kultti, (2022) contends that multiculturalism in South Africa provides a framework for acknowledging differences among learners UNESCO (2020).

As an alternative to apartheid education, multicultural education recognises that learners in diverse classrooms represent different social, religious, and cultural groups. The challenge, therefore, rests with teachers: they must help liberate learners mentally, fostering awareness of differences and cultivating respect for diversity an essential foundation for effective teaching Kultti, (2022).

Multicultural Education

Multicultural and global education share common goals, particularly in fostering cross-cultural competence and appreciation of diversity Zhou, (2024). Banks (2022) argues that citizens who understand and empathise with cultures within their own society are better equipped to engage effectively with cultures beyond national borders. Thus, a key aim of multicultural education is to equip learners with the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to participate successfully in pluralistic and democratic societies (Banks & Banks, 2022).

Early childhood education plays a critical role in this process, as young learners begin to internalise moral values and cultural norms during these formative years Razak, Ahmad, Suhaimi, Saidin & Mahda, (2020). Teachers, alongside families and preschools, influence the development of positive attitudes toward diversity. In South Africa, where multicultural education emerged from the struggle against apartheid, the demand for inclusive approaches remains urgent Aziz, (2024). Research is needed to understand how teachers conceptualise multicultural education and how curricula can reflect cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic diversity Scarino, (2022).

Definitions of multicultural education vary, but common themes include recognition of cultural

diversity, promotion of equity, development of cultural awareness, and transformation of school environments to meet diverse learner needs Güven, Çam-Aktaş, Baldan-Babayiğit, Şenel, Kip-Kayabaş & Sever, (2022). In the South African context, multicultural education is often linked to anti-racist education, which challenges discrimination and promotes equality. Successful implementation requires teacher training, multilingual teaching, unbiased curricula, and strong home-school relationships Scarino, (2022). Ultimately, multicultural education should be viewed not as a challenge but as a strength, enriching learning and fostering values of equity, tolerance, diversity, and openness Kultti, (2022).

Early Childhood Education

Some scholars suggest that multicultural education should be reserved for older learners who are less egocentric or ethnocentric. However, the Department of Basic Education (DBE, 2024) emphasises that cultural understanding begins early, with young learners more capable than adults of adopting new cultural patterns. Research shows that learners as young as three notice differences such as skin, eye, and hair colour Razak, Ahmad, Suhaimi, Saidin & Mahda, (2020), and they begin forming biases and preferences based on these observations.

Through socialisation, learners develop self-identity by comparing themselves with others and observing societal responses to differences Raudiene, (2021). These reactions shape evaluative judgments that can evolve into prejudice if framed negatively, for example, learners exhibit preferences for same race when selecting dolls, refusing to hold different race learners' hands National Planning Commission, (2021). Family, peers, early childhood services, and media play critical roles in shaping attitudes toward race, gender, age, ability, religion, and culture, Güven, Çam-Aktaş, Baldan-Babayiğit, Şenel, Kip-Kayabaş & Sever, (2022).

Introducing multicultural education in the early years is therefore essential, as learners are less entrenched in stereotypes and more open to positive influences Aziz, (2024). Early learners

can even challenge adult biases by questioning or correcting prejudiced remarks Cummins, (2021). Preschools, alongside families, serve as powerful agents of socialisation, enabling children to develop respect, tolerance, and cross-cultural understanding Scarino, (2022). By fostering inclusive attitudes early, educators can lay the foundation for democratic citizenship and equitable participation in diverse societies Vavrus, (2023).

Preparing Early Childhood Teachers Multicultural Classroom

Few can deny that apart from their own family, employees working in learners' services potentially influence learners' developing attitudes towards cultural diversity more than any other persons in a child's life Baker, Wright & Wigglesworth, (2020). Therefore, it is essential that employees undergo and receive appropriate training or employees' development programmes, which incorporate the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes for such a responsibility Naz, Afzal & Khan, (2023). In countries that have a well-developed early childhood education system in place, most employees, if not all, would have acquired a minimum standard of qualification before they can be recruited into the service Liebenberg, (2024).

However, for those developing countries who have only just recognised the importance of having a strong foundation by having quality early childhood education, the picture might not be as encouraging Vavrus, (2023). It is possible that many staff members would only have had high school education or less, without any specialised training in early childhood education Razak, Ahmad, Suhaimi, Saidin & Mahda, (2020). Education courses for early childhood employees should have elements, in both content and delivery that address diversity of cultures Vavrus, (2023).

Pre-service preparation in the form of authentic situations where student teachers are placed in multicultural or classrooms made up of cultures different from their own are especially effective in getting teacher candidates to re-examine their

existing beliefs and preconceptions Aziz, (2024). For example, Scarino, (2022) reports that service learning positively affects teacher candidates' dispositions toward teaching in diverse settings. Teacher candidates learned about diversity and even began to question societal inequities that they encountered Kamali & Nazari, (2023). Service learning has the potential of empowering teacher candidates to confront difficult issues of societal inequities and to begin the deconstruction of lifelong attitudes and the construction of socially just teachers McKinney, Makoe & Zavala, (2023).

Developments need to recognise and reflect differing beliefs about childhood held by different cultures Kamali & Nazari, (2023). Within relevant developments, particular emphasis is to be given to the understanding of how learners develop language, and teachers ought to be provided with practical experiences in teaching a second language. Besides pre-service training, continuing education on multicultural issues should be made readily available for all staff working with young learners Baker, Wright & Wigglesworth, (2020). Teachers are to be assisted to engage in professional development, which enables them to examine their own values and assumptions in relation to race, culture, class, sexuality and gender and the impact these may have on their practice Liebenberg, (2024). Once again, this provision will differ depending on the state of development of early childhood education in that country. Additionally, the commitment to teachers' continuing professional development will also be dependent on the centre's own philosophy and belief in this critical pedagogy and reflective practice, which underlies an authentic perspective of diversity Güven, Çam-Aktaş, Baldan-Babayiğit, Şenel, Kip-Kayabaş & Sever, (2022).

All learners' services should, in their employment practices, seek to employ teachers who reflect the cultural diversity of the country even if the actual enrolment of learners does not reflect it Liebenberg, (2024). In societies which are multi-ethnic and multicultural, there is usually a corresponding representation of early childhood personnel that are available for engagement in the

services McKinney, Makoe & Zavala, (2023). However, there might be concerns regarding the balanced representation of all cultures at all levels of responsibility or category of service. In other countries, there might also be issues with such cultural representation, for example, if a specific cultural group dominates certain categories of early childhood services Naz, Afzal & Khan, (2023).

Language teaching in a multicultural context

South Africa is a wonderfully multicultural country, which is also exciting, because it captivates its people while also expecting them to behave in a sensitive manner. South Africa has 11 official languages and the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996) recognises 15 others. The fact that there are cultural differences in South Africa necessitates an education system that recognises the value of diversity McKinney, Makoe & Zavala, (2023). Multicultural education attempts to provide for the needs of learners from different cultures and social circumstances, Cummins, (2021). In order to bring about meaningful reform in education, sociocultural factors should be taken into account Banks & Banks (2024).

Learners are all unique individuals and cultural beings. Each of them comes from a particular culture, comes to school with his or her own convictions, value systems and experiential world, and these influence their dispositions, perceptions and behaviour in the classroom Cummins, (2021). In order to perform their tasks efficiently, teachers should be informed about their learners' background, be aware of the influence that culture and social circumstances have on instruction and learning, and be capable of designing learning experiences that allow for learners' backgrounds Phajane, (2021), for example:

One teacher elaborated in her lesson that misunderstandings often occur when speakers of African languages use pronouns in English or Afrikaans. For instance, a speaker might say '*She walked down the road*' when referring to a man, which English and Afrikaans speakers interpret as incorrect. This happens because many African

languages do not mark pronouns for gender. In Setswana, for example, the phrase; ‘*O tsamaile*’ applies to both men and women, meaning ‘*he or she walked*.’ This is not a flaw in African languages but rather a reflection of their grammatical structure, where nouns are organised into classes. Since both *monna* (man) and *mosadi* (woman) belong to the *mo* class, the pronoun *O* is used to connect them to the verb (e.g., *O tsamaile*). The teacher stressed that teachers should avoid assuming learners are making mistakes when they transfer patterns from their home language into English or Afrikaans. Instead, teachers should acknowledge these differences as natural aspects of linguistic diversity and provide scaffolding to help learners navigate across languages Phajane, (2021).

Furthermore, it is equally important to create a learning environment that will spur learners on to acquire the necessary skills, knowledge and attitudes that will make meaningful participation in a multicultural society possible Kano & Quay, (2023). Baker, Wright & Wigglesworth, (2020), believe that it is necessary to offer *culturally responsive teaching*. As a result of the multicultural and multilingual communities in South Africa, the learner population in schools is extremely diverse: since 1994, more and more learners with different home languages and cultural backgrounds have found themselves sharing the same classroom Kano & Quay, (2023). Consequently, teachers, particularly language teachers, are faced with a huge variety of communicative needs in a diverse group of learners whose language proficiency in the target language is spread across various levels Cummins, (2021).

The Shift Towards Multiculturalism

South Africa’s separate education system was challenged for decades by resistance movements involving learners, parents, and community organisations OECD (2021). These efforts culminated in the 1976 Soweto uprising, which marked a turning point in widespread opposition to apartheid education policies Statistics South Africa, (2018). One of the most significant reforms was the opening of schools to all racial

groups, a step toward dismantling apartheid structures Auger (2023). However, this transition introduced new challenges, particularly in communication. Learners from diverse cultural backgrounds often face language barriers when moving from home environments where their mother tongue is spoken to schools where English is the medium of instruction DBE, (2024). This discontinuity can hinder learning and exacerbate difficulties in adapting to new educational settings UNESCO (2020).

In response, the researcher argues that multicultural education must be embedded in early childhood education. Growing demographic diversity worldwide has heightened racial tensions and cultural conflicts, making respect and acceptance of differences essential for social harmony Auger (2023). Education plays a critical role in shaping attitudes and values, and the early years provide the best opportunity to instil respect, tolerance, and cross-cultural understanding Baker, Wright & Wigglesworth, (2020).

Teachers, therefore, have a responsibility not only to instruct but also to acknowledge and integrate learners’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds into classroom practice Banks & Banks (2024). Emphasising the use of home languages alongside English fosters security and belonging, enabling children to fully engage in the learning process Liebenberg, (2024). Multicultural education, when implemented thoughtfully, can transform classrooms into inclusive spaces that celebrate diversity and promote equity Baker, Wright & Wigglesworth, (2020).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research design to guide data collection and analysis. Qualitative data were generated through semi-structured, face-to-face interviews and subsequently analysed using qualitative data analysis tools, Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, (2020). A case study approach was employed, consistent with Hancock, Algozzine & Lim, (2021), definition of case study as an experiential inquiry that investigates a

contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context.

The focus of this study was on the experiences and challenges encountered by learners, teachers, and relevant stakeholders in multicultural early childhood education settings (Abacioglu, Epskamp, Fischer & Volman, 2023; Kurian, 2023). Research sites comprised four multicultural primary schools; School R, School F, School C, and School P located in Gauteng and the North West Provinces of South Africa. Four female teachers (Teacher M, Teacher D, Teacher Boledi, and Teacher Pebetsi) participated, each representing a Grade 3 classroom.

Data collection involved systematic classroom observations, during which the researcher attended lessons to examine instructional practices within their natural teaching environments Morgan, (2022). The selected schools were relatively disadvantaged: while infrastructure was functional and electricity was available, classrooms were severely overcrowded, with up to 67 learners accommodated in a single space. The surrounding communities were characterised by high unemployment rates and limited economic opportunities, with only a small proportion of working-class families. Consequently, between 80–90% of learners qualified for fee exemptions, as parents were unable to afford school fees Hancock, Algozzine & Lim, (2021).

In this way, a process of interpreting and recontextualising individual phenomena within a conceptual framework or a set of ideas (Chafe, 2024; Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025), was applied to answer the **research question:**

How do teachers and learners experience and negotiate multicultural teaching and learning practices within early childhood education classrooms in South Africa?

THE DATA COLLECTED

A total of four lesson observations were conducted across the four multicultural primary schools, with one lesson observed for each participating female teacher. The observations focused on identifying the experiences and

challenges encountered by learners, teachers, and other stakeholders in relation to multicultural teaching and learning within early childhood classroom contexts. The data obtained from these observations are summarised below:

First Observation: Teacher M's Classroom

Classroom Situation: The first observation was contacted at School R, in Temba District of Gauteng Province. The observed lesson took place in a Grade 3 classroom comprising 67 learners (34 boys and 33 girls). The classroom was overcrowded, with learners seated in rows, which limited opportunities for movement and collaborative learning. The lesson was facilitated by Teacher M, an experienced teacher with 22 years of teaching practice.

The lesson focused on: *Kgethololo ya Bong* (Gender Discrimination), as presented in the prescribed textbook. Teacher M adopted a highly structured, text-based approach. After greeting the learners, she directed them to the relevant passage, which contained four perspectives on sexism. Learners were asked to read the passage aloud, paragraph by paragraph, while the teacher frequently interrupted to correct pronunciation. Following each reading, she summarised the content and clarified difficult concepts, writing key vocabulary on the chalkboard and providing example sentences to reinforce understanding.

In addition to the thematic content, the teacher integrated a language component, focusing on *puo* *jaaka e builwe le puo e seng ya sebui* (direct and indirect speech). She explained the rules governing the transformation of sentences, wrote these rules on the chalkboard, and required learners to repeat them multiple times. Learners were subsequently asked to recall the rules individually. Exercises from the Reader Book were used to provide practice in converting sentences between direct and indirect speech.

Observed Challenges: Despite these strengths, several challenges were evident. The overcrowded classroom constrained learner participation and limited opportunities for collaborative or dialogic engagement. The lesson was predominantly teacher-centered, with learners positioned as passive recipients rather

than active contributors. While the topic of gender discrimination was introduced, the focus shifted toward language mechanics, reducing opportunities for learners to critically engage with the social dimensions of the theme. Frequent interruptions for pronunciation correction, though intended to support accuracy, appeared to hinder fluency and learner confidence. Therefore, even though the method used by Teacher M was irrelevant to current method, the activity was entertaining and promoted learners' involvement (Kumi-Yeboah & Amponsah, 2023; Jonsdottir & Einarsdóttir, 2024).

Second Observation: Teacher D's Classroom

Classroom Situation: The second observed lesson took place at School F, same Temba District in Teacher D's Grade 3 classroom, which consisted of 62 learners (33 girls and 29 boys). Teacher D, a Head of Department with 26 years of teaching experience, organised the learners into groups of six. Some groups were mixed (boys and girls), while others were single-gender.

The lesson focused on: *Ditiro tsa bong tsa setso* (cultural gender roles). Before commencing, Teacher D placed a large poster on the board with the title *Ditiro tsa bong tsa setso*, (cultural gender roles). Learners were instructed to examine the posters displayed on the wall and discuss the gender roles depicted. She encouraged them to use their Setswana varieties and borrow words from other languages during discussion, but required that their reports be presented in standardised Setswana.

The posters illustrated traditional gender roles and gender discrimination, with examples such as *mosetsana o tlhatswa dijana* (the girl washes the dishes) and *mosimane o rema dikgong* (the boy chops the wood). Statements reflecting gender discrimination were also included, such as *basimane ba maatla go gaisa basetsana* (boys are stronger than girls) and *basetsana ba bontsha basimane tiro ka metlha* (girls always show boys how to work).

After greeting the learners in Setswana, Teacher D introduced the researcher and explained the objectives of the lesson. She divided the class into

two groups: those supporting traditional gender roles and those opposing them. Learners engaged in group discussions, while Teacher D moved around the classroom to assist struggling learners and monitor the nature of the conversations. Following the group work, she invited both sides to present their views. She concluded by explaining that the lesson aimed to explore traditional gender roles and sexism within their communities.

Observed Challenges: Overall, Teacher D's lesson demonstrates the potential of participatory, discussion-based pedagogy to advance critical awareness of gender roles in early childhood education. By integrating visual aids, group work, and debate, the lesson moved beyond linguistic mechanics to engage learners in questioning cultural norms Collett, Nomlomo, Ngece, Jansen, Mackier, (2021). However, the findings also highlight the importance of designing activities that allow for multiple perspectives and deeper exploration of gender relations. Such approaches would strengthen the transformative potential of multicultural education, enabling learners not only to acquire linguistic proficiency but also to develop critical consciousness around issues of equity and social justice Collett, Nomlomo, Ngece, Jansen, Mackier, (2021). Additionally, the large class size (62 learners) posed challenges for equitable participation, with some voices potentially marginalised in group discussions.

Third Observation: Teacher Boledi's Classroom

Classroom Situation: The third observed lesson was conducted at School C, that is located within the Brits District of the North West Province, in Teacher Boledi's Grade 3 classroom. Teacher Boledi is a highly experienced educator, having taught Setswana Home Language to Grade 3 learners for 24 years. The class comprised 56 learners in total, with 34 boys and 22 girls. The topic of the lesson was: *Losika lwa Batswana* (*The Batswana family structure*). The lesson commenced punctually, with the teacher arriving before the learners. Her early arrival provided an opportunity for a brief discussion of the lesson

plan prior to the start of the session. Upon the learners' arrival, Teacher Boledi greeted them and introduced the theme: *Losika lwa Batswana (the Batswana family structure)*. She explained that the Batswana family differs from the Western nuclear family, as it extends beyond parents and children to include members of the wider kinship network. She elaborated on the titles given to various extended family members to indicate their roles and standing within the family. To scaffold understanding, she posed questions such as: *Ngwana wa rangwane o bidima mang?* (What do we call your uncle's child from your paternal side?) and *Ausi wa ntate o bitswa mang?* (What do you call your father's sister?).

Teacher Boledi attempted to link this lesson to a subsequent focus on *diaparo tsa setso* (traditional wear). She explained that introducing family structures first would help learners understand cultural differences before moving to traditional attire. However, she struggled to connect the previous lesson on *puo tse farologaneng* (different languages) with the current one. She emphasized the importance of creating engaging introductions, giving examples such as *mme o apere mosele wa setso* (mother is wearing a traditional dress) and *ntate o tsuba motsoko ka peipi* (father is smoking a pipe).

Observed Challenges: Several difficulties emerged during the lesson. The sentences used as examples were lengthy and complex, making them difficult for Grade 3 learners to pronounce and comprehend. One learner remarked that the words were too long and difficult to say. The lesson presentation lacked coherence, and the teacher did not provide sufficient explanations for unfamiliar concepts. As a result, learners gradually lost interest, with some yawning or staring into space.

The lesson was teacher-dominated, with minimal learner engagement. According to Collett, Nomlomo, Ngece, Jansen, Mackier, (2021), teacher-centered classrooms often result in limited learning, a pattern evident in this observation. Teacher Boledi did not employ teaching aids, nor did she ask questions to check learners' understanding. Although the stated

focus was family structure, much of the lesson shifted toward traditional wear, reducing clarity and alignment with the intended objectives.

Fourth Observation: Teacher Pebetsi's Classroom

The fourth observed lesson took place in Teacher Pebetsi's Grade 3 classroom at School P, located in the same Brits District of the North West Province. The school is characterised by diversity in learners' ethnic backgrounds and religious affiliations. Learners in Teacher Pebetsi's class came from a range of ethnic groups, including Batswana, Bapedi, Basotho, Tsonga, Venda, Xhosa, and Zulu, many of whom had migrated from different districts.

The lesson was from the Bible text and story: To promote a sense of belonging and inclusivity, one learner was assigned to lead prayers and hymns at the start of the lesson. When asked about this practice, Teacher Pebetsi explained that prayer was a compulsory stage in her teaching routine and that learners were accustomed to it. Each learner was given the opportunity to lead prayers and hymns according to their religious background. Catholic learners recited prayers in English, while non-Catholic learners used Setswana. This practice was intended to foster diversity, tolerance, and mutual respect among the learners.

During the lesson, learners were organised into small groups, which facilitated interactive discussion and peer engagement. Learners were given time to freely discuss the text and accompanying questions. As Musweweshiri, (2024) notes, group work offers several advantages: it increases opportunities for individual participation, reduces interpersonal difficulties, encourages cooperation and negotiation, provides a more private space than whole-class work, promotes learner autonomy, and allows learners to choose their level of participation Baker, Wright & Wigglesworth, (2020). These benefits were evident in the observed classroom.

In terms of teaching materials, Teacher Pebetsi selected culturally familiar texts to support learning. She used the Setswana traditional story

of *Tselane*, chosen to promote authenticity in the Setswana lesson, as well as the biblical story of *The Prodigal Son*. Both texts were familiar to learners and provided opportunities to integrate cultural awareness with moral and social lessons. This approach reflects culturally responsive teaching, as described by Baker, Wright & Wigglesworth, (2020), where learners build on their cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles to make learning encounters more relevant and effective.

Overall, Teacher Pebetsi's lesson illustrates the potential of culturally responsive strategies to foster belonging, respect, and engagement in multicultural classrooms. Auger (2023) by integrating diverse cultural practices, encouraging group work, and drawing on familiar narratives, the lesson created meaningful learning encounters for ethnically and religiously diverse learners. As Liebenberg, (2024) notes, group work increases opportunities for individual expression, fosters cooperation, and promotes learner independence.

However, while the lesson demonstrated inclusivity and cultural responsiveness, it also raises questions about balancing diversity with curriculum coherence. The reliance on prayer as a compulsory classroom practice may risk privileging religious expression over secular inclusivity, particularly in contexts where learners may not share the same faith traditions. This approach aligns with Collett, Nomlomo, Ngece, Jansen, Mackier, (2021), who emphasize that culturally responsive teaching builds on learners' cultural knowledge and experiences to make learning more relevant and effective.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

This section will present a cross-case analysis of the findings that emerged in the study. These findings will be presented as themes which were identified and interpreted in line with the theoretical framework and the reviewed literature Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, (2020). This study focused on the experiences and challenges faced by learners, teachers, and stakeholders in multicultural early childhood classroom

perspectives, following a qualitative research approach. The data-analysis process is an important part of any research study, as it assists in bringing about meaning and structure to the massive data collected for the study Hancock, Algozzine & Lim, (2021).

Analysis of the Problem

One factor that may have contributed to the lack of multicultural education was the confusion as to the definition of multicultural education. McKinney, Makoe & Zavala, (2023), listed some of the following as elements of culture from an educational perspective: language, behavioural norms, learning styles, family and kinship patterns, gender roles, view of the individual, historical awareness of cultural community, religious and spiritual beliefs and practices Güven, Çam-Aktaş, Baldan-Babayiğit, Şenel, Kip-Kayabaş & Sever, (2022). The teachers at the schools may have believed they were including multicultural education activities as they moved from one topic to another. They were omitting many other crucial areas of multicultural education because they did not have a correct definition and understanding of the term Aziz, (2024).

Vavrus, (2023) stated that multicultural education encompasses many human differences besides culture: race, occupation, socioeconomic status, age, gender, and various physical traits and needs. Vavrus, (2023) also pointed out that the majority of early childhood programs are racially, culturally, and socioeconomically homogeneous, and teachers often question the appropriateness of multicultural education in these schools. Because the researcher's centre had a somewhat homogeneous group of learners, the need for multicultural education had not been as obvious as it would have been in schools where the population was more varied. Aziz, (2024) indicated that multicultural education was most relevant to learners who were growing up without the opportunity to have contacts with people different from themselves. Their classroom experiences had to compensate for their social isolation Raudiene, (2021).

Another factor that limited the use of multicultural activities in the early childhood classrooms was related to the teachers lack of knowledge concerning how multicultural education could be implemented into all areas of the curriculum. Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, (2020) pointed out that multicultural education must go beyond the presentation of cultural things such as art, food and clothing.

Lack of materials that could have been used in all areas of the curriculum was another factor that affected the use of multicultural education activities in the early childhood classrooms. Coady, (2019) indicated the importance of bringing unfamiliar items into the classroom in order for them to become familiar and part of the learners' frame of reference. Coady, (2019) also pointed out that these items gave the learners real objects and experiences that served as a basis for asking questions and initiating conversations.

Aziz, (2024) reminded teachers that they pass their own values and attitudes onto learners both intentionally and unintentionally; therefore, it is important that they be keenly aware of their own attitudes and values. The homogeneous population in schools made it very easy to focus on those learners, while minority learners faded into the background. Unless the teachers made a conscious effort to meet the needs of the minority learners, all learners missed out on opportunities to experience the diversity which should be included in all areas of the curriculum McKinney, Makoe & Zavala, (2023).

The belief that young learners are too protected or naive to have developed any understanding of, or judgments about, race and ethnicity has gradually changed Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, (2020). Evidence such as: a) learners start developing attitudes about race and ethnicity at a very young age, as early as 3 or 4 Lawson, (2024); b) skin colour is the characteristic that can shape a child's experience more than any other with the possible exception of gender Naz, Afzal & Khan, (2023); c) prejudice based on race and ethnicity remains a major social problem Heritage, (2021); d) not talking about race and ethnicity made learners easy targets of stereotypes to which they

are exposed almost from birth Pretorius & Murray, (2023); and e) learners learning to understand and accept differences among various racial and ethnic groups and to actively fight against instances of racial and ethnic prejudice is essential if we are to create a society where there is equality for all Banks & Banks, (2024). If substantial changes are to be made so all racial and ethnic groups are treated equitably, every person involved with educating learners must take an active role in the process Baker, Wright & Wigglesworth, (2020). As early childhood educators, the teachers in schools needed to do their part to provide the learners in their care with the opportunity to participate in multicultural education activities.

Perceptions of Multiculturalism and Learners' Learning

Observations revealed that while teachers acknowledged the importance of diversity, classroom practices remained largely teacher-centered. Despite claims of following the curriculum, outdated methods such as grammar-translation persisted, with teachers retaining control over materials and activities Banks & Banks, (2024). This limited learner autonomy and reduced opportunities for culturally responsive engagement. Nonetheless, teachers consistently emphasised values of respect, cooperation, and responsibility Sibanda, (2019), Group work was widely used and proved effective in fostering interaction, learner autonomy, and responsibility, aligning with Lawson's (2024), view of collaborative learning as a means to promote supportive classroom climates.

The literature highlights broader roles for teachers in multicultural contexts, including fostering tolerance, respect, and cross-cultural communication Banks & Banks, (2024) and promoting academic achievement, cultural competence, and socio-political awareness Collett, Nomlomo, Ngece, Jansen, Mackier, (2021). In practice, however, teachers functioned mainly as controllers and resource providers rather than facilitators of learner-driven exploration. To strengthen multicultural pedagogy, teachers should adopt more learner-

centered roles acting as prompters or participants to encourage inclusive dialogue and independent thinking Lawson, (2024). Professional development and teacher beliefs appear to significantly shape classroom practices, suggesting the need for further research into how these factors influence the effective implementation of multicultural and culturally responsive teaching.

Beliefs about Teaching for Multiculturalism

Teachers expressed strong convictions about the role of schools in shaping learners' attitudes and values toward diversity. They emphasised that learners acquire prejudices and beliefs from adults, particularly parents and teachers, making schools critical spaces for introducing learners to different cultures Baker, Wright & Wigglesworth, (2020). Early Childhood, in particular, were seen as pivotal in promoting multicultural education, as early exposure to diverse ethnic groups can have lasting effects on learners' development Banks & Banks, (2024). Teachers advocated embedding multicultural content into the curriculum through activities such as celebrating cultural festivals, exploring food, customs, languages, and traditions, and using visual and media resources to illustrate diversity Collett, Nomlomo, Ngece, Jansen, Mackier, (2021). Equality and fairness were highlighted as essential, with many teachers stressing that preschools should welcome learners from all racial and religious groups and teach them to view diversity as a source of unity.

Findings also revealed that teachers' personal experiences influenced their confidence in addressing multicultural issues. Those with positive exposure to diverse environments were more comfortable engaging with sensitive topics, while others expressed hesitation, particularly around race and religion. This underscores the complexity of multicultural education, where teacher beliefs and experiences shape classroom practice Heritage, (2021).

Overall, teachers demonstrated a commitment to fostering respect, cooperation, and responsibility. However, varying levels of confidence suggest that ongoing professional development and

support are necessary to equip teachers with the skills to address multicultural issues comprehensively and sensitively Kumi-Yeboah & Amponsah, (2023).

Early Childhood Teachers' Understandings of Multiculturalism

The study revealed that early childhood teachers held varied understandings of multicultural education. Some viewed it as introducing learners to diversity, while others emphasised exposure to cultural practices or the importance of bringing people together to foster tolerance and harmony Banks (2022). However, these perspectives often lacked clarity on how such understandings translate into broader social outcomes such as equity and cohesion Keles, Munthe, & Ruud, (2024). Research underscores the significance of early childhood in shaping cultural attitudes. Learners begin forming perceptions of their own and other groups during these formative years, with teachers playing a critical role in influencing these attitudes Naz, Afzal & Khan, (2023).

Many teachers equated multicultural education with celebrating cultural practices food, dress, festivals, and customs yet scholars caution against this shallow approach Razak, Ahmad, Suhaimi, Saidin & Mahda, (2020). Instead, an anti-bias framework is needed to highlight both differences and similarities, fostering deeper social cohesion (Kano & Quay, 2023; Kumi-Yeboah & Amponsah, 2023). Teachers' comfort levels in addressing sensitive issues varied. Some acknowledged bias and discrimination in early childhood, while others adopted a colour-blind stance, overlooking their own cultural identities Banks & Banks (2024). This suggests that teacher training programs are essential to help educators critically examine assumptions about race, culture, and ethnicity Jonsdottir & Einarsdóttir, (2024).

Overall, while teachers recognised the importance of multicultural education, their understandings often remained surface-level. Without deeper engagement with issues of bias, identity, and discrimination, multicultural education risks being reduced to cultural celebration rather than a transformative practice

that advances equity and social justice Keles, Munthe, & Ruud, (2024).

Personal and Professional Learning for Multiculturalism

Findings indicate that teachers often framed multicultural experience primarily in terms of race, particularly within the contexts of Gauteng and North West Provinces. While some expressed caution in addressing race, others avoided such discussions altogether. Banks & Banks, (2024) argue that fear, prejudice, and stereotyping can be reduced through knowledge and support, underscoring the need to equip teachers with confidence and skills to engage with sensitive issues Kano & Quay, (2023).

Raudiene, (2021) teachers acknowledged the importance of acquiring greater knowledge and skills in multicultural education but rarely emphasised reflecting on their own biases or building relationships across cultural boundaries Jonsdottir & Einarsdóttir, (2024). A few admitted to personal prejudices, yet strategies for addressing them were not articulated. This highlights the critical role of teacher-training institutions in preparing educators for diverse classrooms Pretorius & Murray, (2023). Pre-service and in-service programs can provide opportunities to conceptualise multicultural education, engage in dialogue, and critically examine cultural assumptions (Banks & Banks, 2024).

Overall, Raudiene, (2021) while teachers expressed a desire for professional growth, their limited self-reflection suggests that without introspective training, multicultural education risks remaining superficial rather than transformative Pretorius & Murray, (2023).

RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

Based on the findings in the study, the researcher suggests the following recommendations in an effort to promote the culture of learning and teaching in a challenging multicultural schools.

Curriculum and Education

Most scholars and researchers argue that for multicultural education to be implemented, successful institutional changes must be made including in curriculum, teaching materials teaching and learning styles, attitudes and perceptions behaviour Kumi-Yeboah & Amponsah, (2023). Curriculum in schools must be transformed in order to help learners develop skills needed to participate in the knowledge construction process Raudiene, (2021). Transformed curriculum change enables learners to view concepts, issues and problems from diverse ethnic and cultural perspectives Collett, Nomlomo, Ngece, Jansen, Mackier, (2021).

The findings of this study suggest that the curriculum does not cater adequately for learners needs. Further research need to be done on how to develop and cater curriculum for multicultural learners, Tshehla, (2023), the curriculum should be viewed as: a) To eliminate all barriers to access, including poverty, race, culture, language, and disability; b) To promote the provisions of sports, arts and culture in schools, as mechanism to enhance integration and ensure funding and facilities for those Raudiene, (2021).

Teachers must be involved in formulating a curriculum that is relevant to the specific needs of learners Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, (2020). Key curriculum elements should be choice, diversity, relevance, learner, interests and community involvement Kumi-Yeboah & Amponsah, (2023). Although the programming of curriculum is the responsible of teachers and schools this should be complimented by specific departmental curriculum support, in service training course, resource centres and incentives for the development of innovative approaches that address the needs of diverse school learner population Güven, Çam-Aktaş, Baldan-Babayiğit, Şenel, Kip-Kayabaş & Sever, (2022). In order to successfully engage learners in constructing curriculum, teachers have to develop, a trusting relationship with them Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, (2020). This takes time. Planning how to incorporate learners' ideas and have to cover prescribed curriculum also

takes time, but tailoring bringing instructions to fit learners is worth the time and effort spent Baker, Wright & Wigglesworth, (2020).

Teachers training and re-skilling

Education and training has been identified as a critical priority of meeting the challenges. It is one of the rationale of this study National Planning Commission, (2021). The demands made by teachers are high and will continue to increase if they are to work effectively in a multicultural and multilingual classroom Cummins, (2021). The study reveals that teachers are not trained to teach in a diverse classroom. The teacher's conventional training is unlikely to have prepared them for what is now expected of them Ituma, (2025). New skills are required of teachers in terms of language and teaching strategies, which is one of the key critical questions Collett, Nomlomo, Ngece, Jansen, Mackier, (2021).

An additional challenge is that they need to develop skills to enable them to form links with parents who are quite different from the parents they have been accustomed to dealing in the past McKinney, Makoe & Zavala, (2023). Teachers who are unable to relate to and understand parents from different social or cultural backgrounds can hardly be expected to create effective learning situations for the learners from such backgrounds Vygotsky, (2020).

From my observation of the study some of the governing body teachers are unqualified whilst some are qualified. Some teachers are thrown into a deep end riding the crest of a wave exposed to theories of teaching and learning but not to serve in their classroom in a multicultural context Vygotsky, (2020). It was also evident from the teacher's responses in this study that they need training pertaining to multicultural education National Planning Commission, (2021). The focus has been tended on the collection of qualifications with little attention being paid to actual ability to transfer newly acquired knowledge to the institutions Naz, Afzal & Khan, (2023).

South Africa lacks a national strategy for dealing with the development needs in the field of planning. Courses tend to be menu driven and

lack the financial resources McKinney, Makoe & Zavala, (2023). Providers are often isolated from active involvement in meeting training needs. Many programmes are delivered by means of distance education are inappropriate to the challenges of restructuring an education system National Planning Commission, (2021). There should be an ongoing Pre-service Education and Training (PRESET) and In-service Education and Training (INSET) courses for teachers with the skills to teach in a diverse school. Teachers should be trained to use appropriate teaching strategies and resources Ituma, (2025).

Finally, the researcher considers training the trainers, teacher trainers bear a heavy responsibility in ensuring that they are equipping future teachers with knowledge and skills which are relevant to the world of today, let alone tomorrow and that they are aware of continuing developments in their own subjects, as well as in the professional sphere McKinney, Makoe & Zavala, (2023). Training the trainers is one of the most neglected yet potentially and is one of the most influential of all future developments. This view is supported by Collett, Nomlomo, Ngece, Jansen, Mackier, (2021). The profession is to match the demands of the future; it has to lift markedly the quality of the experiences provided to the population. If it is to that it must improve the quality of the experiences made available to those who offer themselves as future teachers Naz, Afzal & Khan, (2023).

Teaching strategies and methods

Strategic direction must set the course for schools, institutions and various levels of the education service in order to improve teaching and learning Aziz, (2024). This can be achieved if learners are provided with a variety of classroom activities Ituma, (2025). It is recommended that teachers use a variety of teaching methods, be flexible in their approach and know the learning styles of their learners and match their methods Kano & Quay, (2023).

Classroom activities such as discussions, problem solving, analysing situations and self-discovery's are effective ways in promoting thinking and analytical skills Kano & Quay, (2023). It is

recommended to use co-operative group work as a curriculum approach to help to reduce the difficulties and encourage co-operation Aziz, (2024). Many learners have problems in social relationship at school and experience barriers to integration and friendships Collett, Nomlomo, Ngece, Jansen, Mackier, (2021). The researcher believes that these recommendations can be achieved once teacher training has been transformed to equip teachers with anti-racist education skills.

Use of resources

It is evident in the study that the findings suggest for teaching resources to be utilised in lessons, since it is an integral part of the teaching and learning process Liebenberg, (2024). Use of variety of resources will enhance learners dealing with literacy problems. Therefore, a greater use of visual resource is essential Baker, Wright & Wigglesworth, (2020). The use of chalkboard and textbook makes the lesson boring and sometimes can be the root to discipline problems. Learners are not exposed to resources at home because of the socio background Kano & Quay, (2023). Learners show a preference for using computers, television, telephones and cell phones. It is recommended that the School Governing Bodies (SGB) approach business houses and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to sponsor these resources. School Governing Bodies (SGB) can also embark on a fund raising drive Kano & Quay, (2023).

Attention must be given to very basic needs like, water, electricity, photocopying facilities Baker, Wright & Wigglesworth, (2020). School Governing Bodies (SGB) cannot be effective without access to telephones and transport. The provinces need to analyse current allocations of material resources and to devise strategies for meeting the most urgent needs and reducing current disparities in the provinces Liebenberg, (2024). In contexts where schooling has collapsed, the condition of school buildings and facilities makes an incalculable difference to the climate of teaching and learning in a school Liebenberg, (2024). The morale of school-goers and teachers alike is deeply affected by the

physical environment, Collett, Nomlomo, Ngece, Jansen, Mackier, (2021).

The challenges that face African learners

According to Aziz, (2024), learners of historically disadvantaged population suffer in historically white or racially integrated schools. According to the findings the biggest problem schools encounter with African children in particular is that of language Phajane, (2021). This is especially problematic with learners coming from African Townships Baker, Wright & Wigglesworth, (2020). In schools, learners also face problems with Afrikaans, which is the third language Elias, Mansouri & Sweid, (2021). During the breaks learners do not mix, Blacks are alone, Coloureds are alone, Whites are alone and Indians are alone Banks & Banks, (2024). Everything is in groups. There is no communication between races in their schools. Blacks speak their language Phajane, (2021): Some of the learners come to school without food. They tend to sleep in the class. Some of the learners' parents are unemployed; some are separated or dead due to Aids and Covid-19 McKinney, Makoe & Zavala, (2023). The following suggestions will alleviate some of the problems Phajane, (2021): a) Education should encourage cross culture activities; b) Invite religious leaders to speak to learners on their culture; c) Encourage learners to participate in extracurricular activities; d) Ask business houses to sponsor needs for indigent learners; e) Have HIV/Aids campaign or community programme, Kano & Quay, (2023).

Bullying and intolerance at school

Just before the World Conference Against Racism the attention of people over the world was focused on discriminatory practices in society Baker, Wright & Wigglesworth, (2020). Focus group interviews revealed that although there are success stories and places of hope and transformation, there is still much work to be done before we can really claim a culture of a human rights and inclusivity in over schools Tshehla, (2023). Name-calling is a symptom of intolerance. Bullying is a major threat to tolerance at school, and a moral challenge to education Kano & Quay, (2023). Bullying may not be the

consequence of general prejudice based on ethnicity religion Elias, Mansouri & Sweid, (2021), physical differences and other characteristics of the victim or simply randomly to exert the desire to control and intimidate bullying is always or community and a social issue Tshehla, (2023).

Schools should take bullying seriously and put through and inclusive and anti-bullying initiatives in place or part of their whole school approach, everyone in the main and extended school community is involved in all processes from early discussions through the development and implementation stages Elias, Mansouri & Sweid, (2021). There should be an anti-bullying policy for example learners have the right not to be bullied Kano & Quay, (2023). Intervening in a bullying situation is sensitive but important for both victim and perpetrator Tshehla, (2023). If learners are educated in an environment that ignores or condones bullying by silence, they are not likely to develop the sense of justice and moral responsibility so essential to overcoming the injustices and marginalisation in our local communities, national and world societies Aziz, (2024). Bullying adolescents may grow into adults who foster intolerance and injustice in the communities Raudiene, (2021).

Class size

In most of the classes the learner teacher ratio is 1:67. This causes behavioural problems Pretorius & Murray (2023). Teachers believe that the quality of teaching and their interactions with learners, decline with an increase in the size of the class Zhou, (2024). This is so true; the researcher faces the same problem. Research indicates that teachers experience more positive attitudes to learners and their work when teaching smaller classes Suri & Chandra, (2021). It is recommended that teachers can consider recruiting volunteer parents to serve in the classroom as instructional aides Tshehla, (2023).

Absenteeism

Learner absenteeism and truancy continue to be lingering problems for school management. In order to address the problem of truancy a working, acceptable destination is needed

Pretorius & Murray (2023). The causes of chronic absenteeism and truancy can be placed on two broad categories Chafe, (2024): external-related causes and school related causes Zhou, (2024). The former includes financial and economic problems, familial obligations, peer-group pressures, and socio-cultural and environmental factors Suri & Chandra, (2021). The latter include irrelevant curriculum, poor instructional methods, inflexible school schedules, incentive uncaring teachers, poor academic or social skills. One of the dangers of truancy is that learners will eventually drop out of school Kamali & Nazari, (2023).

CONCLUSION

This study examined the role of teachers in facilitating multicultural education within early childhood classrooms. Observations conducted across four multicultural primary schools in Gauteng and the North West Provinces of South Africa revealed that teachers continue to occupy a dominant position as the primary source of knowledge in teaching and learning. At the same time, teachers demonstrated awareness of pedagogical strategies such as group work that encourage active participation and collaboration among learners McKinney, Makoe & Zavala, (2023). Importantly, teachers approached learners without reference to ethnicity, religion, or gender, a stance that supports inclusivity but has yet to translate into heightened learner awareness of diversity Collett, Nomlomo, Ngece, Jansen, Mackier, (2021).

Overall, teachers' attitudes toward multicultural education was strongly positive; however, the findings suggest limited depth of understanding regarding the complexities of implementing anti-bias curricula and teaching approaches McKinney, Makoe & Zavala, (2023). This highlights significant implications for early childhood teacher education programs across South Africa, particularly the need to strengthen professional learning opportunities that foster critical engagement with multiculturalism and effective classroom practice Raudiene, (2021).

Ultimately, the success of multiculturalism in early childhood classrooms depends largely on

the commitment of teachers, caregivers, and other stakeholders who serve as role models and sources of guidance for learners Banks & Banks (2024). This responsibility requires not only pedagogical adaptation but also, in some cases, a fundamental shift in personal beliefs and values

to embrace respect for diversity Raudiene, (2021). Without such transformation, efforts toward multicultural education risk falling short of cultivating genuine and authentic regard for diversity in practice Banks & Banks (2024).

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DECLARATION OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors reported no potential conflict of interest.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

The study received approval from the authorities at the University of South Africa, with ethical number Ref: 2022/11/09/90214331/50/AM, as well as from the Department of Early Childhood Education in South Africa. Participants provided their consent. Before participating in the study, all participants completed an informed consent form. The identities of the individuals were safeguarded through pseudonyms.

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