

Managing diversity in schools: The place of democratic education and ubuntuism in South Africa



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South African classrooms were highly diversified. The problem, however, was that although democracy has been a critical characteristic of South Africa for over two decades, it is still a very vague concept to many. A teacher who truly understood democracy knew that it was not just about freedom of self, rather the freedom of all, treating others humanely and with kindness. Making power a variable accessible by all was the only way to which diversities can be ameliorated. Observation and personal experiences showed that there were discriminations of many kinds in some high schools. Therefore, to address these maladies, the importance of democracy in diversity must not be jettisoned because they work hand-in-hand. Ubuntu philosophy was used as a theoretical framework, whilst transformative paradigm piloted the study. Participatory research (PR) was adopted as a research design to enable the people student-teachers to jointly participate in this research. Observation and reflections were used to collect data within the high schools in the Free State province of South Africa. Thomas and Harden's three steps of thematic analysis was used to analyse data and the result show that language, cultural and personal relativism, learning impairment and comprehensibility were the dominant challenges faced in diversity management in schools. On the other hand, inculcation of classroom relationships and a sense of belonging, training and retraining of teachers and students were found to be perfect solutions that can nip these problems in the bud. The present study, therefore, concluded that the value of teachers' and students' development towards diversity management must be addressed.

Keywords: diversity; diversity management; democratic education; ubuntu; secondary school.

Introduction

We live in a world of apparent differences, contradictions, contrasts and separations, which are not limited to human existentialism but by extension comprising animals, plants and objects. Within these categories of existence exists the unquestionable variance of differences. One could say this is what diversity entails. This is not in contradiction, however, with the Merriam Webster dictionary description of diversity as 'the condition of having or being composed of differing elements'. In other words, diversity means varieties that must be addressed in equality. The spirit of equality here can only be addressed using democratic education, most notably in schools, which according to Omodan¹ is an educational ideal in which democracy forms both a goal and a method of instruction. One country that has suffered extensively because of intolerance to diversity is South Africa and this has led to many discussions on democratic education to soothe and remedy past injustices and present errors.^{2,3} Although democratic education as a response to the circumvention of diversity may have many unforeseen refutes, it is possible and can yield positive results if implemented correctly and is subsequently well-executed. This study empirically conceptualises the interconnectivity, connections and disconnections of democratic pedagogy in South Africa as it correlates with diversity management in secondary schools.

The South African Constitution and various scholars have conceptualised diversity. In retrospect, the Constitution in its quest for 'unity in diversity' is a pointer to the fact that diversity in the South African Context involves the compulsory accommodation of people regardless of their differences.⁴ This is what the *South African Schools Act*⁵ conceptualised as a deliberate provision to enhance schools' transformation, address the issues of past prejudices in the educational system and replace them with quality education. The same Constitution placed more emphasis on protecting equality, freedom, non-sexism, non-racism and human dignity. This is a confirmation of the protection of right to life regardless of ethnicity, who and what you are. Wilson and Thompson⁶ also confirm that the Republic of South Africa (RSA) Constitution, in its quest to address diversity issues, explains 'who is who' that is 'entitled to what' at any given time. In the same view, the Department of Education (DoE)⁷ reiterates that the RSA Constitution has expressly

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addressed the morality and ethical motivation behind the future of social justice, equality, equity, non-sexism and non-racism. This could further be linked to the expediency culminated in the foraging of diversities killer in South Africa.

As exemplified here, diversity means comprising different inseparable elements. That is, the compulsory amalgamation of people and/or elements that must under any circumstances work and do things together. For something to be diverse, the trajectory should be uniform, identical or the same. This means that the nature of diversity requires variations of differences. South Africa, which is the scope of this study, is so diverse to the extent it has been nicknamed the 'rainbow nation'. This means a country that derives pleasure in the beauty of diversities. Like any other country, South Africa is characterised by people of different races, religions, cultures, languages and even genders. Although diversity can be found not just in humans but also in all aspects of existence, however, it is only in human conferment that it transcends more than just physical appearance. It encompasses thoughts, actions, personalities, values, beliefs, interests, upbringing and worldviews. These are essential factors that shape every child and adult and set them apart from others, which means it is crucial to cater to them from an early age and in the classroom. As good as diversity and its management sound, it does not exist in isolation. That is, it needs a workable education policy to ensure its practices. This is why the place of democratic education cannot be separated from diversity management.⁸

Hobson⁹ defines democracy as government in which people are given fair power and are all liable to the law. Democracy is to ensure that all people are free of oppression and that not one person has the sole power to control others. Former American president Abraham Lincoln stated that democracy means government 'of the people, by the people, for the people'. Thus, when we bring up the concept of democratic education, we are left to believe that it is a form of education that caters to all without some holding more advantages than others. This is what Karlsson¹⁰ sees as an education that is tailored to meet the needs of those who require it with no form of discrimination. This suggests that where there is an unethical democratic education, such a society is unlikely to be liberated. To achieve this, Mncube² suggests that the school as a transformational process of society must be managed in line with democratic principles where all stakeholders are given the freedom to express and decide the knowledge that appeases them. The schools should be structured and tailored in a way that encourages a sense of justice and fairness towards one another. Such an opportunity, according to Starkey,¹¹ improves the quality of school participation, cooperation and innovation amongst students and other members of the organisation.

From the preceding discussion, one can say that in the educational sector, democracy is essential in the classroom to ensure proper management of diversities because it brings

democratic values to people of distinct differences, which include self-determination within a community of equals and values such as justice, respect and trust. This, according to Onder and Mehmet,¹² enables learners to navigate and integrate themselves into the wider world positively. Therefore, the place of democracy in the management of diversity in schools cannot be underrated because it creates an awareness about indiscriminate togetherness. As children are indeed the future of any society, they must be taught about democracy and the value of democracy in a democratic environment so that they will live their adult lives carrying democratic values and principles. My argument further aligns with Davies'¹³ conclusion that democratic education should be made in a way to encourage individuality and broaden students' interest in the things and concepts that make up their world.

The place of diversity and democracy as the problem of the study

Being a diverse country, it is understandable that South African classrooms will be highly diversified. The problem, however, is that although democracy has been a critical characteristic of South Africa for over two decades, it is still a vague concept to many. Several people whom I encounter associate democracy with freedom, without understanding that it goes farther than that. A teacher who truly understands democracy, understands that it is not just about freedom of self, rather it is the freedom of all, treating others humanely and with kindness. Making power a variable that is accessible by all is the only response to diversities. This goes to say that only a democratic education can cater for diversity in the classroom although it may not be easy to bridge the gap between understanding and the actual doing. Thus, it is safe to say it could be challenging for the teacher, but it is not an impossibility.

Observation and personal experiences during teaching practice show that there is discrimination in some high schools in South Africa. This kind of discrimination is not limited to diversity in learners' age. For example, there was a particular learner who was much older than his peers, – he ended up losing his self-confidence because of bullying and inability to make friends. This affected him academically because he absented himself from school and stayed at home to avoid being bullied by the other learners. Another issue in my observation is language differences. There was a girl who comes from a different province and communicates in isiZulu. She was admitted to a school where both learners and teachers speak Sesotho; it was a great challenge for her because she pronounced words with difficulty and also struggled to learn. These do not only affect students, teachers also struggle with isiZulu because they are Sesotho-speaking people. This further confirms the notion that a culturally diverse society influences educational systems and educational institutions. The above observations are close to the findings of Meier and Hartell¹⁴ that teachers in classrooms are inclined to treat learners based on their belonging to a minority 'white culture' differently and that there are racial and cultural background discriminations in South African schools.

To address these maladies, the importance of democracy and diversity must not be jettisoned because they work hand-in-hand. This understanding helps to promote the constitutional principles that South Africa should avoid creating a single overriding culture through the uniform assimilation of cultures.¹⁵ That is, both teachers and students must be aware of how to avoid oppression by creating one classroom culture that will provide for the different needs of learners. Teachers need to learn how to manage culturally diverse learners. It is also essential as learners learn about their own culture and how it may affect and or treat other learners. This may be why Ingram-Willis¹⁶ recommends that both teachers and learners must learn and understand people's cultures and differences by using multicultural books and materials to foster cross-cultural understanding. This recommendation as a proposition to mend diversities in South African classrooms may not be achievable if there is no love, unity and oneness. That is why the place of ubuntu is sacrosanct in ameliorating the endemic of diversities.

Ubuntu as a theoretical approach to diversity management

Ubuntu as an approach is synonymous with humanness, humanity, harmony and togetherness. This concept emanated from the African way of life in the past and could be linked to the Xhosa language, which means 'being humane'.¹⁷ According to Tworeck et al.,¹⁸ it is the quality of being human. This concept defines human beings with the connectivity that exists amongst people.¹⁹ That is to say individuals do not exist in isolation. This could mean the spirit of oneness that regards people to mean a people, work together as people and achieve as a people. In the general perspective, ubuntu also means 'I am because we are', that is, 'a person is a person because of others'.²⁰ Simply put, human beings need one another to exist, no one exists in isolation, and the interconnectivity in the life of people becomes unquestionable. This is what Etieyibo²¹ refers to as an interwoven humanity that is opening attention to Africanism and holistic communitarianism. This ontological relation of ubuntu has been conceptualised by Ijiomah²² to mean 'harmonious monism', which means the inevitability of unity in diversity, bondness and unavoidable interconnectivity of harmony. From these, one could say that ubuntu is the sermon that is preaching humanness, humanity and togetherness, amongst the people not minding their social class, position and status.

As the foundation of ubuntu is based on the aphorism that people are interdependent,¹⁹ the place of ubuntu in the classroom then is significant for the navigation and management of diversity as well. This is why Mwambazambi and Banza²³ recommended that teachers need to know what ubuntu is and how it becomes the instrument of classroom transformation. They argued that every educational classroom deserves to be at peace at all times, and the only way in which peace and harmony can co-exist is when students and other classroom stakeholders are treated with value and respect. Also, when there is love and oneness, caring and respect for people within the school and classroom

is called ubuntuism, which is tantamount to unity in diversity. This is so because this inclusive feeling from individuals will make them feel a sense of belonging and perform and achieve as members of society. The need for ubuntu becomes fundamental to the management of diversity in schools because it seems this spirit is fading away in our schools. This was my observation as a teaching practice assessor. This exists not only in my observation, but also Mbhele²⁴ confirms that no agency is tasked with ensuring that schools operate in the ubuntu spirit despite that teachers are expected to practise ubuntu by sharing, listening and respecting one another.²⁵

Managing students in the school community involves a strategy that could enhance unity and oneness amongst teachers, students and other stakeholders in order to uninterruptedly achieve school goals and objectives, amongst which is the management of diversity in the system. By doing so, classroom survival then depends on the smooth relationship between students and teachers. The only philosophy that is best to respond to this is the ubuntu practice of togetherness.^{26,27,28} Simply put, when there are good relationships and communication, there will be understanding; when there is understanding, there will be recognition of people's differences and respect for one another becomes a way of life. Furthermore, the principles of compassion, love and respect for one another encompassed in ubuntu make this theory more disposed to rationalise diversities in the classroom. The importance of this characteristic has been tested and it perfectly responds and is significant to classroom unity and students' performance.^{19,29} Therefore, when ubuntu is unconditionally practised in South African schools, it will enhance the management of diversities, increase respect for human rights and also promote democratic education. In order to respond to the problem of the study, the following question is posed, 'how can diversities in South African secondary schools be managed effectively?'

Objectives of this study

To provide an empirical answer to the above question, it is pertinent to state the piloting objectives that will guide the research process to the solution stage. This study, therefore:

- examines the challenges associated with the management of diversities in South African high schools
- Investigates possible solutions to the challenges, using democratic and ubuntu principles.

Methodology

This study falls under the transformative paradigm because of its quest to transform and change existing classroom phenomenon. Transformative paradigm is a research framework that addresses social justice to change the status quo.³⁰ This paradigm, according to Romm,³¹ is emancipatory, participatory and all inclusive. This paradigm is relevant to the study as it aims to transform and emancipate the marginalised and the oppressed through indiscriminate participation and inclusive engagement. However, the

participatory aspect and the link from the ubuntu philosophy as a transformational movement inform the choice of this research design. Participatory research (PR) that is adopted as a research design for this study is considered appropriate to ensure that the researcher, the researched and their community are involved in the process of knowledge production.³² This design enables the participation of the people with the problem and the researchers to think, work and collaborate in order to provide a solution to a particular problem. In other words, the design shares the practices of collaboration, co-construction and inclusivity in the process of knowledge production.³³ Hence, implementing PR, according to this study, involved student-teachers of the University of the Free State (UFS), QwaQwa Campus, during their teaching practice. That is, the student-teachers who are the teachers in training forms the participants and they collaborate with the researcher to provide solution to the diversity problems observed in their place of teaching practices. The solutions, however, will assist teachers in the world of work.

An assignment was given to 29 students to observe the diversities at their places of teaching practice, where they would also assume the position of teacher and at the same time are regarded as university students. This task was part of their official assessment as a prerequisite to passing the life orientation module. It mandated them to investigate the current level of diversity at their places of teaching practice, the challenges of managing diversities and possible ways of responding to it. This was not limited only to their encounter and experience but also involved them to observe and interview any issue related to the diversities and their management in their respective schools. A simple random sampling technique was used to select 10 students out of 29 students who did their teaching practice in the Free State province to give their reflections on the task. This means that reflection was used to collect data for the study. Reflection, according to this study, is where the participants are asked to share their experiences, opinions, suggestions and criticism on a particular subject or event. Therefore, the participants were asked to reflect on the issues of diversities in their various teaching practices locations in the selected province. Their reflections, opinions, experiences and suggestions were tape recorded and transcribed. The selected students were assured of anonymity in order to protect their identity and were promised that none of their statements and voices will be made in a way that could expose their identity in the research process and output. This was made to ensure that they were ethically protected.³⁴ In response to the objectives of the study, for the sake of clarity, the collected data were analysed using the principles of Thomas and Harden³⁵ three steps of thematic analysis. These steps in the analysis of Mahoko, Omodan and Tsotetsi³⁶ are coding the data and development of the themes, making meaning out of the themes. This is then relevant because it allows the researcher to ensure that meaning is made based on the highlighted objectives piloting the study without breaching or committing any research misappropriation. In

the presentation data, the participants were coded using ST1, ST2, ST3, etc. to represent them. In this study, ST means student-teachers.

Results and presentation of data

Challenges associated with the management of diversities in South African high schools

To respond to objective number one of the study accordingly, data related to the challenges that inhibit the implementation of diversity management in South African secondary schools were coded, thematised and analysed under the following sub-headings: language, cultural and personal relativism and learning impairment and comprehensibility.

Language, cultural and personal relativism

As South Africa has been described constitutionally as a diverse nation, the issue of language and cultural differences along with differences in personality and appearance is inevitable. However, this is not limited to the society alone, schools also battle with the trajectory of diversities and its management has been posing many challenges to the education system. This, according to Mohanty,³⁷ is because South African schools are embedded with various cultural groups with different languages where there is a need to learn from each other's culture and language to work together. This challenge is not only available in literature and my observation, but my participants' statements also justify the view that language and cultural differentials are challenging to diversity management in the classrooms. See the following responses:

'One thing that I encountered was having learners from different backgrounds and cultures and the understanding that they are not taught the same way of doing things at their individual homes.' (Student-teacher, no. 3, UFS)

'Another thing is the differences in their languages, sometimes when a teacher explains something in English, some learners, most of whom are black, will not understand what the teacher was saying and that will lead to failure.' (Student-teacher, no. 2, UFS)

Participant ST3 confirmed that the major encounter that caught attention was having learners from different cultural backgrounds as they are not exposed to the same way of doing things. This means that the classrooms or the school make up many diverse learners. This diversity, according to my understanding, is linked to culture. Culture also at most times comes with a peculiar language. According to him, the classroom is multilingual. From the perspective of participant ST2, the classroom is composed of learners with different languages, but the most significant issue here is that some of the learners cannot cope with the use of the English language only by the teacher. With this, some learners feel uninclusive in the teaching-learning process. This is also not unrelated to their socio-economic background because the participant noted that most learners are black people and probably not exposed to the use of the English language at home, thereby putting them at a disadvantage in the classroom.

This challenge is not limited to language and culture; the culture of individual difference is also in light of classroom impediments towards the management of diversities. Although this was made possible through the passing of the law that allowed homosexuality and thus created acceptance for people belonging within the LGBTQIA spectrum: lesbians, gays, transsexuals, queer, intersex and asexual,³⁸ intolerance is still the case in schools. See below:

‘Two learners who are both females and identify themselves as males in the grade 10 class have received bullying and mistreatment from other learners in class because of their preferred gender, they are shunned from when they have to form groups in debates or when it comes to cleaning the classroom.’ (Student-teacher, no. 5, UFS)

‘Those who are gender estranged at some point also feel misplaced as to which group they ought to identify with.’ (Student-teacher, no. 7, UFS)

‘Some of my students don’t want to sit down close to a particular girl who loves to be called a boy.’ (Student-teacher, no. 9, UFS)

One could deduce from above statements that gay and lesbian learners are discriminated against by their fellow learners. This was made known by the amount of bullying they received as a result of their gender. According to the statement, it made it difficult for them to be accepted in the classroom especially when there are groups and other joint works are to be performed. Not only did these sets of students also feel internally displaced as they are unable to identify which group they belong to and where to be identified with, but also the personal accommodation and non-accommodation amongst learners attest to the fact that the spirit of ubuntu does not exist because ubuntu is an advocate of peace, unity in diversity and oneness. The issue of language and cultural differentials also confirms that classroom democracy in schools is not effectively used to respond to the problem of diversity management. This is in line with the findings of Meier and Hartell¹⁴ that teachers tend to treat learners who belong to the white minority differently and that there are racial and cultural background discriminations in South African schools. Therefore, language and cultural and personal relativism remain a challenge that is militating against the management of diversities in secondary schools.

Learning impairment and comprehensibility

From the data collected, it was discovered that there are various learning disabilities in South African secondary schools. According to the data, such learning impairment involves, but is not limited to the hearing, listening and assimilation problem in many students. These issues seem not to have been properly managed by the teachers who have failed to accommodate the learners with such impairments. This at most time spoils the learning process, leading to poor results in the class. Hence, learning differences may create stereotypical views in the minds of the teachers, which transform into prejudices over some time.³⁹ The following statements from participants also confirm the above:

‘Learners with hearing handicaps were not accommodated by the activities and provision of the necessary stationeries they need to use and how lessons are conducted in the classroom.’ (Student-teacher, no. 7, UFS)

‘One of the learners who used to study at the school in 2018 relied on the interpretation they got from peers about the lesson presented by the teacher, which made things difficult for her, as she did not get the direct lesson from the professional teacher but peers.’ (Student-teacher, no. 1, UFS)

‘In 2019, the school did not obtain a 100% pass rate as three learners failed, one of which was the girl with a hearing disability even though she displayed the capability of passing she could not because of a lack of support from the staff.’ (Student-teacher, no. 2, UFS)

‘The learners had different levels of comprehension, meaning others were fast while others were slow.’ (Student-teacher, no. 3, UFS)

The above participants’ statements show that there is learning differentials amongst learners and the way and manner the schools or teachers addresses it seems uninclusive. This reflects in the comments of ST7 that learners with learning impairments are not accommodated by providing the needed materials for them to learn concurrently with their counterparts. According to ST1, this has become worse, to the extent that learners have to intervene to help other impaired learners because of the inability of those learners to comprehend lessons in the actual learning process. According to ST2, this does not affect only the learners, but the productivity of the schools also suffer because schools lose their position of academic performance as it affects the pass rate of schools. These differentials in learning amongst learners according to ST3 also involve levels of assimilation as some learners can assimilate faster than others. Therefore, in order to manage diversities in schools, all these must be responded to holistically.

This was supported by the suggestion of the participants as stated below:

‘It was also obvious that some students needed special attention as their style of learning was in contrast with the others, meaning they either learned better through hearing, sight, touch, etc.’ (Student-teacher, no. 9, UFS)

‘Several grade 10 students I worked with were very slow in learning and matters were not helped considering that some teachers lost their patience, most times screaming, “*Ha se nnaaitseng o kwalehe!*” meaning “It’s not my fault you are stupid!”’ (Student-teacher, 10, UFS)

From the above reflections, it is obvious that learners in the schools are not given adequate attention by their teachers towards improving their learning styles so as to meet up with their counterparts. These are practical examples that the spirit of ubuntu is lacking in the operations of the schools’ system in South Africa. ST10’s statement also buttresses this by saying that the problem of those with low learning style was not responded to by the teachers and thereby left with their inabilities. This statement also gives

room for objectivism in the sense that teachers are trying their best, but they also lose their temper at some point, which may leave an adverse effect on the learners. All these unequivocally show that learning impairment and learners' comprehensibility are challenges to the full implementation of diversity management in schools. This also confirms that various education departments should make efforts to ensure that democratic education and ubuntu exist within schools. The following aligns with the fact that ubuntu characteristics, along with democratic education, will correctly respond to classroom unity and students' performance.²⁹

Possible solutions to challenges using democratic and ubuntu principles

In response to the second objective of this study, data related to the solutions that could enhance diversity management in South African secondary schools are coded, thematised and analysed under the following sub-themes: inculcation of classroom relationships and sense of belonging and training and retraining of teachers and students in diversity management.

Inculcation of classroom relationships and sense of belonging

Relationships and interactions amongst students and teachers have been found to be crucial to the success of classroom activities and have also been linked to the student and staff productivity.⁴⁰ So the place of ubuntuism towards the management of diversities is as critical as the schooling itself. Ubuntuism and democracy in the classroom according to the empirical data collected are sacrosanct and this is rooted on the prospect that when there are mutual and smooth relationships within and amongst the classroom stakeholders such as students and teachers, this will bring a sense of belonging where all learners and students will have no hidden feelings against one another or against teachers, as the case may be. This solution does not only exist in abstract thinking and literature but also supported by the participants' statements. See below responses:

'I refer to it as a good thing because we must foster a classroom that makes everyone feel like he or she belongs to it and feels respected.' (Student-teacher, 10, UFS)

'Everyone must be involved and given equal opportunity as every learner in the classroom.' (Student-teacher, 6, UFS)

'Since diversity is something that needs to be fostered in the classroom, a learner needs to first understand his classmates, cooperate with the different teaching styles, give learners equal opportunities, celebrate diversities, encourage different perspectives and involve diverse learning materials.' (Student-teacher, 4, UFS)

'Democratic education will also ensure that we treat homosexual learners with dignity as human beings.' (Student-teacher, 7, UFS)

The above conversations reiterate the fact that classroom lessons must be conducted in such a way that every member feels included with a sense of belonging. According to ST10, this could be achieved when there is respect in the conduct

of individuals, groups of people and amongst the people (student and teachers). This agrees with the assumption of ubuntu that respect and reciprocity make people feel good about one another. No wonder the Department of Education recommends that teachers are expected to practise the principle of sharing, listening and respecting one another's rights.²⁵ In addition, Onder and Mehmet¹² state that it enables learners to navigate and integrate themselves into the wider world positively and democratically. To foster effective diversity management in schools, the involvement of everyone according to ST6 is not negotiable, which is supported by the statement of ST4 that there is a need for cooperative classroom activities. 'Cooperate with the different teaching styles, give learners equal opportunities, celebrate diversities, encourage different perspectives and involve diverse learning materials'. This idea is in no doubt what ST7 refers to as democratic education, which, according to him, could also help to respond to discrimination against homosexual learners and to make them think and look like human beings. This finding is in tandem with Karlsson¹⁰ and Mncube² that education, most especially classroom activities, must be tailored to meet the needs of the learners and to be managed in line with democratic principles so as to transform the society.

Training and retraining of teachers and students in diversity management

Responding to the challenges of learning with regard to learning impairment, the place of training and retraining of both the learners and the teachers cannot be underrated. On-the-job training has been found by many researchers to be important to staff and students' development. This is not to say that teachers are not professional or knowledgeable enough to teach in schools and manage their learners, but the vacuum is that no knowledge is a waste and the dynamics of the society warrants that every teaching and non-teaching staff must adapt to the changes in dynamism for development sake. No doubt Chu et al.⁴¹ proposed the need for all-round professional development programmes to enable teachers to possess skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, communication and collaborative knowledge construction. They further argue that this will enable the teacher to lead students towards the fourth industrial revolution agenda. The importance of this solution was derived from the participants' following statements:

'As a teacher, it is best to learn more about your learners. Learn their culture, values, and beliefs; this enables you to understand what could influence their worldviews.' (Student-teacher, 9, UFS)

'Learn about their homes and where they come from; you will be in a better position to understand if a child is lacking because of neglect or poverty, or if they are being abused.' (Student-teacher, 5, UFS)

'Learn the weaknesses of your learners, especially those that have impaired learning; once you know whether they have any impairments, then you can better respond to them well.' (Student-teacher, 9, UFS)

'Teaching your learners about diversity can help create a more harmonious classroom environment, as the learners will know how to cooperate without discrimination or prejudice.' (Student-teacher, 3, UFS)

From the above submissions, one can see that the place of continuous learning needs to navigate the dynamic of diversities in schools. This means that on-the-job training is needed to be able to respond to the needs of learners, as indicated in their statements. It was reflected in the statement of ST9 that teachers need to be adequately exposed to the culture, values and beliefs of their learners to be able to respond to their needs, thereby making it easy to manage diversities amongst them. In the opinion of ST5, the teacher is also expected to know the background politics of their students, which, according to him, involves the identification of family economic status. In the same vein, the ability to learn and understand learners according to ST9, most notably those with impairment, will enable the teachers to respond to this. This agrees with the postulation of ubuntu philosophy and democratic principles, where everyone obtains what belongs to them without discrimination. To make the solution encompassing, ST3 also joins the solution with the need to teach learners on diversities and how it can help them live a harmonious life both in school and society. This, according to the participant, will enable them to know how to engage collaboratively and shun unfair discriminations in schools. It goes to say that all these propositions can only be navigated when both students and teachers are on a continuous learning space for personal development. This aligns with the findings of Mugizi et al.⁴² that teachers' development training has a significant influence on teachers' performance. In the same perspective, Pandita and Ray⁴³ report that when people are provided with consistent development programmes such as learning initiatives, mentoring and coaching strategies, they gain performance not only in the school but anywhere they find themselves.

Conclusion and recommendations

From the above analysis, it is not out of place to conclude that despite various mechanisms introduced by the government of South Africa to improve the problem of diversities in the education system, the potential of the practitioners, such as students and teachers, is still not enough to manage the diversities in the system. Therefore, this study concludes that language and cultural and personal relativism along with learning impairment and comprehensibility are predominant challenges militating against proper management of diversities in schools. This study also concludes that we need the inculcation of classroom relationships and a sense of belonging and training and retraining of teachers and students to respond to these challenges. However, the value of teachers' and students' development to the success and development towards diversity management must, therefore, be addressed by the Department of Education. This speaks to the fact that when efforts are put in place by the school management team to ensure that teachers are equipped with the needed skill to discharge their duties effectively, this will positively enhance their managerial skills because they will learn and understand people's cultures and differences by using multicultural materials that foster cross-cultural

understanding.¹⁶ This, in no measure, will also contribute to national and societal development and ensure social and national unity in return.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

B.I.O. is a postdoctoral student of the O.A.I. The research was produced in the lab and under the supervision of the second author. B.I.O. was responsible for the identification of the problem, data analysis and the write up of the article. O.A.I. assessed the validity and credibility of the research, including the selection of appropriate methodology and a theoretical framework.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research.

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Data availability

The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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