



Teacher diversity in the doldrums: A call for transformative staffing in former Model C schools

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ABSTRACT

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This qualitative paper employed the theory of representative bureaucracy (TRB) to contextualize the effects of subverting racial transformation in South Africa's Former Model C schools. It covered a sample of seven principals and three district officials (altogether ten research participants) from three education districts in the Eastern Cape Province. The paper employed a case study design, utilizing semi-structured interviews and document analysis as data collection instruments. Thematic analysis of the findings indicated that the sampled schools did not commit to a solid recruitment diversity plan. This lack of commitment was due to the district officials overseeing school operations not holding principals accountable for failing to guide their respective School Governing Bodies (SGBs) in complying with applicable labor laws during teacher recruitment and selection processes. The findings further showed that Black parents' inadequate participation in SGBs weakened their power to veto unjust teacher recruitment practices. Also, the Language of Teaching and Learning policy was found to be a convenient safety net to insulate the institutionalization of White racial hegemony and the longstanding institutional ethos of the studied schools. In view of these findings, the paper aimed to level the playing field by tabling context-specific suggestions to diminish the legacy of apartheid in Former Model C schools' staffing processes and demonstrate the importance of embracing racial diversity in public service organizations.

Contribution/Originality: The role of principals in managing teacher diversity in schools is rarely addressed in research. This paper is among the few that contextualize the effects of principals' actions in influencing racial transformation within schools that serve multiracial learners. It offers context-specific strategies for enhancing teacher diversity and improving overall race relations in these educational settings.

1. INTRODUCTION

In his 1994 inaugural speech, former South African President Nelson Mandela (cited in Soupen (2017)) inferred that "diversity may be the hardest thing for a society to live with, and perhaps the most dangerous thing for a society to be without." Hence, the world over, governments deploy legislation to promote and manage diversity in all spheres of people's coexistence, including workplaces. Similarly, after the dissipation of the apartheid system, it was incumbent upon the South African democratic government to draft and promulgate legislation that would facilitate the integration of the previously disfranchised races into formal employment and carve pathways towards workforce diversity. The Employment Equity Act of 1996 and the Affirmative Action Act of 2014 were enacted with that vision in mind.

As it were, every registered organization ought to vet the profile of its workforce and determine how to address the aspect of racial equity. Maroof and Kapate (2023) argue that forward-thinking organizations are identifiable by their steadfastness in promoting diversity, equality, and social cohesion throughout their ecologies of operation. Not only does workforce diversity spur innovation, adaptability, and cross-cultural understanding, but it also cultivates a symbiotic sense of community, belonging, and shared purpose among workers (Maroof & Kapate, 2023). Joubert (2017) adds that effective diversity management eradicates “cultural differences, stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, misunderstandings, communication gaps, and conflict due to organizational hierarchical levels”. Schools constitute such workplaces where the footprints of diversity must be mirrored in the demographics of learners and teachers. In post-apartheid South Africa, the ideals of diversity were meant to idealize the existence of people under the banner of “a Rainbow Nation” (i.e., multiracial society) unified by a common purpose and appreciation for one another’s inherent traits and abilities to fulfill the constitutional obligation of changing “the society for the better” (Cawe, 2014). However, this idealism is not always cast in stone, especially given the notion that society has not shown complete consistency in insulating its multicultural and multiracial ecosystem from its imbued stereotypes, prejudices, and paradigms of viewing race relations in the context of “new South Africa.”

In relation to the post-apartheid education system, the above statement has two connotations, the first of which acknowledges the hard work put in by some previously Whites-only schools (hereafter referred to as former Model C schools) to create a conducive space for black and white learners and teachers to co-exist (as highlighted by) (Mpisi & Alexander, 2022; Slabbert & Naudé, 2022). The second connotation serves to lament the fact that in most of the former Model C schools, this ideal has yet to be fully realized (Christie & McKinney, 2017; De Wet, 2020; Grobler, Moloji, & Ayres, 2017; Hemson, 2006; Prins, 2019; Radebe, 2015; Sibanda & Majola, 2023). The latter studies allude to the prevalence of racial hegemony among teachers in former Model C schools, implying that 30 years since the dawn of democracy, despite having widened access to significant proportions of learners of diverse racial orientations, not much has been achieved by these schools to incorporate racially diverse teachers. Thus, existing national/local research primarily focuses on learners’ learning outcomes and acculturation in former Model C schooling ecologies (see Canham, 2018; Erasmus, 2011; Hiss & Peck, 2020; Kanyopa & Hlalele, 2021; Kanyopa & Hlalele, 2023; Lemmer, Meier, & van Wyk, 2006; Machaisa, 2004; Mpisi, 2010; Mpisi & Alexander, 2026; Radebe, 2015)), and less on illuminating current understandings around teacher diversity or lack thereof (Ryan, Pollock, & Antonelli, 2009).

The absence of sufficient empirical evidence on race relations in the South African schooling system exposes the need for context-specific research that shares insights into the factors contributing to racial inequity in staffing processes and tables concrete suggestions to mitigate the phenomenon (Demie & Huat See, 2023). By “naming and problematizing [racial inequity as an] injustice” that cripples diversity in the education sector, the authors hope to open a dialogue that can serve as the basis for organizational “transformation” (Souto-Manning & Winn, 2019). The following objective headlined the paper:

- *To understand factors contributing to slow-paced transformative staffing of racially diverse teachers in former Model C schools.*

Consequently, the following research question was adopted to respond to the objective of the paper:

- *What factors contribute to the slow-paced transformative staffing of racially diverse teachers in former Model C schools?*

The above-cited research question initiated a discussion about race relations in historically segregated schools, which, according to Metcalfe (2007) and Roets (2016), is a complex but necessary issue that many South African organizations often avoid confronting. In that sense, the paper’s findings are derived from participants’ responses to the above-cited research question. The paper's practical implication is that it provides pathways for education districts, school leaders/principals, and school governing bodies (SGBs) to implement transformative staffing practices in their schools.

1.1. Operational Terms

This section of the paper describes the concepts related to racial diversity in global schooling systems. The key concepts that support this discussion are defined as follows.

1.1.1. Diversity

Hemson (2006) defines diversity as a complex concept encompassing people's differences in race, religion, social status, gender, language, physical attributes, and many other characteristics. Addressing diversity in schools, as Ainscow (2015) pointed out, depends on the application of principles of equity and inclusion. In this paper, diversity is limited to teacher racial equity in Former Model C schools.

1.1.2. Apartheid

Apartheid was an electoral slogan legitimized by radical Afrikaner nationalist politicians in May 1948; it ended in April 1994 (Dubow, 2014) after 48 years. It was premised on implementing discriminatory policies that divide, rule and create parallel public service systems to prevent unity among Black and White South Africans (Dubow, 2014). This also happened in social housing and schooling arrangements, where each category of Black citizens, namely Africans, Coloreds, and Indians, were designated different areas in which to live and attend school, which were areas on the outskirts of cities and towns (Mampane & Bouwer, 2011).

1.1.3. Former Model C Schools

Former Model C schools can be described as adequately resourced schools that, during the apartheid years, catered to White learners under the tutelage of White educators only; but they were later transformed into diverse learning ecologies following a takeover by the post-apartheid (Democratic) government (Prins, 2019). The study examines whether these schools are dedicated to ensuring that racial transformation is reflected not only in learner demographics but also in the teaching staff.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. *The Effects of Apartheid Policies on Teacher Diversity in Former Model C Schools*

Famously known as "the Rainbow Nation," the embroidery of cultures, languages, races, and religions makes South Africa a melting pot of diversity. However, being a young democracy, South Africa still faces many hurdles to embracing diversity. Central to this issue is the damage caused by the 48-year-long apartheid political dispensation, which ravaged the state of social cohesion among different racial groupings by legitimizing the classification of South Africans into four racial groups, namely, African, Colored, Indian, and White, and enforced segregation in the provision of education as an essential service. The apartheid regime's politicization and weaponization of education (Souto-Manning & Winn, 2019) resulted in White learners enjoying the best form of education. Indians and Coloreds were deemed worthy of average teaching and learning in modest schools, while Africans were subjected to a rudimentary curriculum under the tutelage of poorly trained teachers in severely under-resourced and overcrowded classrooms (Khumalo, 2022; McKay, 2007).

An inspectorate was devoted to running the Departments of Colored Affairs, Indian Affairs and Bantu Affairs. According to Nkomo (2021), the inspectorate oversaw the design of parallel curricula grounded on the Christian National Education doctrine, and the provision of teacher education was modeled around Christian National Education. It was the same inspectorate that oversaw the closure of most missionary and night schools, which were considered a threat to the strategy of the apartheid project because they offered decent quality teaching to the oppressed races, especially Africans, who were synonymously referred to as the natives (Nkomo, 2021).

By the time it was decimated, the (apartheid) system had left the state of education in schools designated for black people in substandard conditions, characterized by neglect, poor maintenance, low staff morale, and unstable teaching

and learning (Lake, 2010). Therefore, when the first democratic administration took over in 1994, it consolidated the four-tier schooling system into a single schooling system (Christie & McKinney, 2017). This reformative process was informed by The South African Schools Act (1996), which, among other things, condemned any form of discriminatory admission requirements in any public school, either based on race or capacity to pay school fees (Metcalf, 2007).

The implication was that for the first time in 48 years, learners of all racial orientations would populate classrooms in schools that used to be exclusively for White learners, provided they could relocate to the vicinity of the schools or commute from outlying areas to the schools. Thirty years on, "these vast majority of black learners' classmates were also black, and that's not surprising given that black learners constitute a large majority of the school-aged population" (Gruijters cited in O'Regan (2022)) while their teachers were overwhelmingly White (Fatyela, 2022; Govender, 2015; Independent Online News, 2024; Northern Cape Department of Education, 2008; Prins, 2019).

Research has demonstrated how poor management of race and racialization not only shakes the stability of institutional structures but also dampens the attitudes and climates of educational and pedagogical proceedings (Vertelyte & Staunæs, 2021). Ahmed (2024) and Housee (2008) argue that colonization projected an impression that education is inherently a white space. Hence, to this day, Black learners in former Model C schools must sacrifice a lot to jostle their way into the social structures of these historically racially "homogeneous schools" (Radebe, 2015). Hiss and Peck (2020) observed that Black learners attending these schools often suppress their authentic cultural selves to negotiate their settlement into these learning environments. They adopt the assimilationist approach to blend into the superior culture of their school and that of their teachers (Slabbert, 2015; Vandeyar, 2010).

However, despite their efforts to blend with the ethos of these schools, Black learners continue to occupy a liminal space. The media constantly covers stories of learners in former Model C schools who face suspension from school for wearing natural hair and traditional African beads. This is supported by findings in which White teachers openly admitted to serious challenges in dealing with learners' cultural heterogeneity in classroom environments (Meier & Hartell, 2009; Slabbert, 2015). However, several studies show that this problem is also prevalent in several Western schooling systems, where teachers contended that they felt out of depth in managing multicultural classrooms (Barrett, 2018; European Commission, 2017; Fosse & Scheie, 2021; Lehman, 2017; Paine, Aydarova, & Syahril, 2017). Nordic countries are no exception (Staunæs & Vertelyte, 2024). Khajawa (2017) observed that in Danish educational institutions, where people of color are in the minority, the racialization of "whiteness and Otherness" frequently occurs in classrooms. Danbolt (2017), Gullestad (2005), and Palmberg (2009) prefer to call this phenomenon "Nordic or Danish racial exceptionalism." Like South Africa's former Model C schools' oblivion to the inadequacy of teacher diversity (Davids & Waghid, 2015; Jansen, 2004), the obstinacy of racial exceptionalism in Nordic countries typifies "a discourse where it is possible to position yourself as exempt from historical and social issues of racial discrimination and colonial exploitation" (Khawaja, 2022). The situation is further compounded by school management teams (SMTs) and school governing bodies (SGBs) struggling with managing racial diversity in these schools (Naidoo, Pillay, & Conley, 2018). Much of this goes against the core values enshrined in the constitutional expression, "unity in our diversity," which speaks against the perpetuation of "a single overriding culture through the uniform assimilation of cultures" (Smith & Oosthuizen, 2006).

Collectively, these findings expose the need for a balancing act in the staffing of racially diverse teachers to bolster these schools' multicultural responsiveness and competencies. Given the abolishment of a racially divided schooling system, it would have been ideal for the transformation to occur proportionally on both ends of learners and teachers in these schools. Much of this signifies that society reels from the "crisis of white hegemony" (Keskinen, 2018) caused by the current political dispensation's failure to completely obliterate the mentality of segregation, by rethinking "the role of culture in how children learn" and aligning the proportionality between educators and learners in these schools (Bloomberg, 2023).

"The educational approach to diversity and multiculturalism minimizes and conceals the impact of systematic racism and the way in which South African society still experiences it" (Bhoola, 2025). Metcalfe (2007) attributes the lack of transformation in former Model C schools to the crisis caused by the education fraternity's unwillingness to openly and robustly lay bare issues that constrain racial parity in their teaching and learning ecologies. This view is supported by Roets (2016), who states that race is a complex issue that not only causes discomfort to discuss among South Africans, but also among Britons and Americans, where similar challenges besiege schooling systems and societies. In the context of Nordic countries, Wekker (2016) argues that most institutions fail to transform into diverse ecosystems because they plead white innocence. White innocence refers to "a form of racial exceptionalism based on a denial of race, racism and the national colonial history, which ultimately reproduces discrimination and colorblind practices" (Khawaja, 2022). What is apparent, though, is that the only venues where issues of race are discussed robustly are the boardrooms of schools that do not ascribe to the ideals of diversity, such as some former Model C schools, where strategies are being hatched to preserve the hegemony of White teaching staff. Christie and McKinney (2017) note that school governing bodies (SGBs) in former Model C schools are committed to protecting the longstanding "traditional values and ethos" of their schools. Their actions engender "subtle and overt acts of prejudice, unjust disciplinary actions, and policies" that legitimize social exclusion (Mataboge & Mahlangu, 2024). Consequently, in these schools, principals collude with SGBs to erect parallel legislative bottlenecks (Arendse, 2020) to diminish the plausibility of the kicking in of the Employment Equity Act of 1998 and Affirmative Action Act of 2014, both of which bind organizations to end unfair discrimination against Blacks, females and persons with disabilities in South African workplaces (Radebe, 2015; Soupen, 2017).

Having closely observed the status quo, Fatyela (2022) inferred that "websites of South Africa's former model C schools reflect a non-transformed staff complement, with white people dominating the teaching, management, administrative, and school governing body positions, and Black people dominating the ground and other support staff levels". Fatyela's inference influenced the paper's "move away from the quintessential focus on the 'racial other' and examine instead the institutionalization of whiteness and the systematic factors that underscore its continued dominance" (Solomona, Portelli, Daniel, & Campbell, 2005). To that end, the next section of the paper reveals the consequential effect of the lack of teacher diversity in global multicultural and multiracial classroom contexts.

2.2. A Global Perspective on Teacher Diversity in Multiracial and Multicultural Classrooms

In schools with multicultural learners, teacher diversity is sacrosanct. Around the world, there are movements advocating for racial equality in schools. Calls are intensifying for a proportional allocation of a diverse teaching workforce in New Zealand schools to address poor academic outcomes among Māori and Pasifika learners (Howard, 2010; Telford & Caygill, 2007). Australia also declared the need for training and absorbing teachers from racial minority backgrounds to catalyze transformative change in schools that have learners of diverse racial makeup, especially those from indigenous minority groups (Hartsuyker, 2007; Rice, Pollock, & Antonelli, 2023). Similar calls also reverberate in schooling systems across America (Bloomberg, 2023), Canada (Ballard, Kamarn, & Pope, 2020), South Africa (Hemson, 2006; Picas, 2022), and England (Demie & Huat See, 2023), where the lack of teacher diversity reportedly borders on learner performance.

To demonstrate their acknowledgment that teacher diversity is the ultimate solution to school effectiveness (Rice, Garner, & Graham, 2023), provincial and district arms of public education have developed policies that propel schools to recruit and absorb teachers in a manner that complements the demographics of learners in these schools (Ryan et al., 2009). Naturally, having a staff complement that represents diverse learners' social and cultural identities empowers learners to take pride in their diversity, feel represented, and develop a sense of belonging and self-worth, and have confidence in themselves (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2019). There is a held view that "Black teachers tend to have higher expectations than white teachers of Black students, and students respond to this with

greater effort” (Rice et al., 2023). Similarly, Latino teachers have proven to be an exemplary pillar of strength for learners of color in racially diverse schools in the U.S. (Carr, 2022).

Indications suggest that teacher diversity positively affects learners from ethnic minorities, as they tend to draw inspiration from teachers who look like them and often see them as role models (Ballard et al., 2020). Also, teachers from underrepresented racial groups will likely remain in schools with a large concentration of minority learners (Rice et al., 2023). In England, although still much lower than the corresponding threshold of 35% of ethnic minority learners, it is encouraging to note that the number of teachers of minority races has grown from 11.2% in 2011 to 15% in 2021 (Demie & Huat See, 2023). By contrast, in the 2017-18 academic year, it was established that approximately eight out of ten U.S. public school teachers (79%) self-identified as non-Hispanic White (Schaeffer, 2021). The study pointed to the dominance of White teachers even in schools that are situated in Hispanic, Black, or Asian neighborhoods (Schaeffer, 2021). In South Africa, the Sunday Times investigated the progress of teacher racial diversity since the early days of the post-apartheid government, precisely from 1994 to 2022. The results showed that more than 75% of the teachers at several former Model C schools are white (Govender, 2015). Conclusively, these studies present a tiny glimpse into schooling systems’ failures (or, as some would prefer to call it, “success rate”) in managing teacher diversity. Therefore, by concentrating on one South African province, this paper endeavors to generate more subjective perspectives on the wellbeing of race relations among teachers in the schooling system and the extent to which schools adhere to policy imperatives geared towards harmonizing race relations in the national basic education sector.

2.3. Theoretical Framework for the Paper

Theoretical framework refers to a theory or theories that lay a foundation for understanding what lies at the heart of the research problem and for analyzing and interpreting the research findings (Hassan, 2024). The paper adopts the Theory of Representative Bureaucracy (TRB) as a theoretical framework. The overarching hypothesis of the theory is that a diverse workforce presents concrete and abstract benefits that improve public organizations’ overall efficacy. Recognizing that most educational institutions tend to turn a blind eye to the effects of the colonial past on power relations and racial tolerance in educational spaces (Jensen, 2018), scholars ascribing to this framework reject notions of “colorblindness and racial ignorance and the belief that race is inconsequential in racialized white classrooms” (Khawaja, 2022).

The framework posits that racially diverse employees in such organizations can improve outcomes for clients who share demographic traits with them (Atkins, Fertig, & Wilkins, 2014). It spells out that the inclusion of a racially diverse teaching workforce improves learners’ academic outcomes and positively influences their non-academic outcomes, including attitude, self-confidence, and resilience (Atkins et al., 2014; Egalite, Kisida, & Winters, 2015). The theory further posits that to the eyes and minds of clients, the availability of a racially diverse workforce in public entities epitomizes “a public service for all” as opposed to “a public service for racially privileged few.” That cultivates clients’ faith in the ability of the organization to meet its obligations and responsiveness to all the nation’s citizens. In practicality, the theory provides an ideal approach to understanding the importance of enacting diversity in all strands of the education system and curating the narratives of the participants concerning the state of staffing practices of racially diverse teachers in former Model C schools within a context-specific theoretical footprint.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

According to Creswell and Clark (2007), research methodology contains a detailed description of the procedures followed by the researchers to gather, analyze, interpret and report research data. Farooq (2019) adds that research methodology depicts the nature of the research design, data collection procedures and instruments, and data analysis steps used by the researcher to reach the study’s findings. The interpretive paradigm underpins the paper, which is permanently embedded in qualitative research. Research scholars attribute the symbiosis between interpretivism and

qualitative research to the conception that they both connote the researchers' interpretation of texts (Agius, 2013), participants' observable actions and reactions (Smit & Onwuegbuzie, 2018), and the tonal voice of the documentary evidence.

Qualitative researchers are predisposed to using purposive sampling, which requires them to select participants intentionally to examine the research problem (Agius, 2013). Through purposive sampling, the researchers selected seven principals and three senior-ranking district officials (altogether 10 participants) who each shared their subjective perspectives on teacher diversity in former Model C schools. The purpose of purposive sampling is to align the sample with the research aims and objectives, thereby enhancing the study's rigor and the trustworthiness of the data and results (Campbell et al., 2020). These participants were drawn from three education districts in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. They had to be principals in former Model C schools. It is also important to note that all of them were White because, at the time the study was conducted, there were no Black individuals (i.e., African, Indian, or Colored) among the principals in all three districts. Table 1 presents the profiles of the principal and district official participants in the selected schools and education districts in the Eastern Cape, South Africa.

Table 1. Research participants.

Occupation	Code	Gender	Type of school	Highest qualification	Race	Years in the position
Principal	P1	Male	High school	B.Ed. Hons	White	12
Principal	P2	Male	High school	Further diploma in education	White	02
Principal	P3	Female	High school	B.Ed. Hons	White	20
Principal	P4	Male	High school	BA and HED	White	02
Principal	P5	Male	High school	B.Ed. Hons	White	16
Principal	P6	Male	High school	Teachers' diploma	White	15
Principal	P7	Male	High school	B.Ed. Hons	White	02
District official	DO1	Male		B.Ed. Hons	Black	13
District official	DO2	Male		MEd	Black	22
District official	DO3	Female		B.Ed. Hons	Black	09

Interviews were used as the primary source of data collection. However, in addition, policy documents, most notably the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, The South African Schools Act (1996), Personnel Administration Measures (2016), and Republic of South Africa (1998) were studied to understand whether participants' actions (around recruiting teachers in former Model C schools) were within the constitutional or unconstitutional boundaries. Establishing measures of trustworthiness is a crucial aspect of qualitative research. One key measure of trustworthiness is credibility, which in this paper was attained through the process of data triangulation (Ahmed, 2024). This involved cross-verifying interview data with relevant documentary evidence to create a more robust understanding of the findings. Furthermore, enhancing this credibility involves crafting a thorough and detailed report that showcases the narratives collected, all while grounding these accounts in established scientific sources. This approach not only strengthens the validity of the research but also enriches the overall narrative by presenting a well-rounded perspective supported by multiple forms of evidence (Ahmed, 2024).

Essentially, the paper adopted Naem, Ozuem, Howell, and Ranfagni (2023) step-by-step process of thematic analysis, in which researchers 1) transcribed data, reading it to understand its overarching elements and selected quotations; 2) selected keywords (also known as recurring patterns); 3) assigned codes to data; 4) organized codes into expressive groups to identify their relatability to the research questions; 5) identified social patterns and refined them into definitions; and 6) developed a framework made of themes that embody the research objectives, which were subsequently used to curate the findings of the paper.

Recognizing that conducting research on race and culture issues can evoke strong emotions, the researchers were "actively engaged, thoughtful, and forthright" about the potential tensions that might arise during their interactions

with participants (Milner, 2007). To embed ethics in the study, several steps were taken, including: 1) obtaining ethical clearance to conduct the research from the university where one of the authors was enrolled, as well as from the relevant provincial education department, 2) keeping the names of the participants anonymous by referring to them as P1–P7 (for principals) and DO1, DO2, and DO3 (for district officials), instead of using their real names, and 3) giving the participants the option of withdrawing from the study if they felt that its nature conflicted with their emotional state and their right to reserve and express their opinions.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The thematic analysis outcome produced two primary and two subsidiary themes, as highlighted in the following thematic discussion, which “names and problematizes issues of injustice” (Souto-Manning & Winn, 2019) in the staffing of racially diverse teachers in seven schools drawn from three education districts in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa.

4.1. Theme 1: Lack of Concrete Diversity Management Plan

Young, Madsen, and Young (2010) argue that due to schools increasingly becoming heterogeneous in terms of learner and teacher demographics, they ought to have a concrete diversity plan. The diversity management plan is a strategy that determines the target that the organization wants to achieve over a specified period to balance certain disparities, including racial equity. The investigation revolved around understanding the extent to which schools and districts consulted their diversity management plans when hiring teachers. P4 commented:

“There is no straightforward directive coming from the district telling us exactly whether to employ candidates x, y, and z in order to comply with the targeted racial equity. The district does not require us to produce our workplace equity plan. This makes me think that they also do not have a clue about what needs to be done. It is strange that only the former Model C school is expected to have it.”

A similar view was echoed by DO1, who said:

“Ideally, as an equity employer, the Department of Education should be more assertive about what changes in terms of racial representativeness it wants in the schools. I must admit that we also do not have a clear diversity plan to present to the principals should they need it from us to assess what it is that we want from them in terms of transformation in their schools.”

DO2 said:

“The department of education also is not innocent either, because we have been blinded a lot over the years with our appointments and vacancies. So, it goes both ways. They are not the only ones to blame; the department of education as an employer must take some blame too.”

P3 admitted that:

“No, we don’t have a teacher diversity plan. I need teachers who are best at their job. I don’t care whether you’re white, colored, black, or whatever. I mean, there are black people in our staff. our girls [i.e., a derogatory term for female domestic workers or office cleaners] are totally ... black than anything else, ja.”

P5 concluded:

“Even if we had one [i.e., diversity management plan], if the SGB decides to take a certain stance, you can’t outnumber them or convince them otherwise. Their decision is final, and there’s nothing much you can do about it.”

The value of having a diversity management plan was evident in Sibanda and Majola (2023) study, which found that it enabled ten former Model C schools in one South African province to sustain unity among teachers of diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. By contrast, the current study’s participants’ narratives demonstrate that the sampled schools and education districts do not have a clear-cut diversity management plan. This implies that neither party shows any real commitment to uprooting slow-paced teacher diversity.

4.2. Theme 2: Unequal Power Relations in School Governing Bodies (SGBs)

Two sub-themes accompany Theme 2. “The word power is often associated with one’s ability to influence another less dominant individual’s opinion, behavior, and values” (Vlčková, Mareš, & Ježek, 2015). Similarly, in the sampled schools, unequal power relations imply that one dominant/majority faction of stakeholders (i.e., White SGB members) has a monopoly over decision-making, rendering the minority faction of stakeholders (i.e., Black SGB members) powerless and unable to challenge the status quo (Anonymous, 2023; Ladkin, 2017; Nelson, 2017; Sellman, 2009; Vlčková et al., 2015; Zulu, 2012). The following subthemes characterize the form and shape of unequal power relations in sampled schools.

4.2.1. Subtheme 1: Strong Influence Over Staffing of Teachers

The governance of every public school is vested in its Governing Body. SGBs are a vital part of the democratic governance envisioned by the Schools Act, which places the effective power to run schools in the hands of the parents and guardians of learners through the SGB (Eastern Cape Department of Education, 2013). Together with school management teams (SMTs), SGBs have a critical role in promoting workforce diversity in their schools (Sibanda & Majola, 2023). The South African Schools Act (SASA) has given SGBs decision-making power in the strategic affairs of their schools, including staffing of teachers. As such, some SGBs use their power to subvert compliance with the SASA, which, inter alia, advocates for racial and gender equity in the schools. Participants admitted that their respective SGBs tended to ignore the requirements of the equity legislation. P5 commented:

“We are supposed to use the Equity Act and the South African Schools Act (SASA). Of course, definitely ... Uhm ... we don't use it per se.”

This view was seconded by P2, who said.

“Our governing body is compelling. There are lawyers and HR professionals who deal with these documents every day and know them inside out. They have their way around these documents. So, they do what they think is best for the schools instead of following other legislations.”

Concerned about the way SGBs eroded employment equity legislation in the employment of teachers, DO1 commented.

“We have SGBs, which are becoming more and more prominent, and they even employ more people than the government at some of these schools. I want us to be very clear... They are being monitored and watched by the unions as observers and us [as district officials], but they would set their own [parallel] criteria.”

In the same breath, DO3 commented:

“SGBs would come out blazing, saying that they know what the curriculum needs are and what expertise the school lacks for extracurricular programs, and they know more than the district does about the vision of their school. They will also tell you that the government does not do much to help their schools, and therefore, you must look at the situation objectively and consider things from that background. Basically, because of the power given to the SGB to recommend... All I know is that SASA gives more powers to the SGB.”

SASA stipulates that the SGB of a public school ought to recommend to the [provincial] Head of Department the appointment of teachers at the school, subject to the Employment of Educators Act, 1998. Much of what was mentioned by the participants indicates that the SGBs in the sampled schools disregarded their mandate of embedding the principles of equity and redress, which are the critical pillars of the SASA and other labor laws of the Republic of South Africa (Prins, 2019).

Based on the participants’ views, SGBs in these schools boasted highly qualified and predominantly White professionals who used their experience in legislative professional environments to manipulate teacher staffing processes. The finding echoes Arendse's (2020) statement that some SGBs in former Model C schools erect parallel legislative bottlenecks to avoid implementing radical organizational transformation.

4.2.2. Subtheme 2: Black SGB Members' Inadequate Representation and Social Capital

SGBs constitute networks where individual members (i.e., learners' parents) converge to share knowledge and discuss strategies to sustain the schools' productivity to secure their children's educational futures. From a strategic perspective, parents belonging to SGBs influence, *inter alia*, "the language policy and the appointment and promotion of teaching and administrative staff" (Van Wyk, 2007). By implication, their SGB membership gives them the social capital to communicate effectively and productively within a network of people (Wooll, 2022). However, the lack of racial diversity was found to be a problem in the SGBs of the researched schools. DO2 expressed this in stating that:

"The fact that there are fewer Black parents in the SGB tells you that they are not coming forward when they are being asked to do so. As a result, they are part of the problem by refusing to come out in numbers to join the SGBs to help transform the schools, where in the interviews, the whole SGB or panel is only White."

P7 validated this point by stating that:

"Unfortunately, the black parent has just withdrawn. He stated that he is too busy and could not continue to play an active role in the SGB. However, we also have two men of color who have come on board. Even so, our SGB does not have enough racial representation. Although it is not fully transformed, I am glad that the two non-white men have joined."

P4 added:

"We have challenges convincing [Black] parents to join our SGB. They simply aren't willing to take part. They think that being involved in the SGB is a very challenging task to perform."

DO1 concluded that:

"[Black parents] are proud to have their children learning in former Model C schools, but then [they do not have enough] self-esteem to be a governor in that particular school."

Naturally, becoming an elected member of the SGB is the most effective way to ensure one's voice is heard in decision-making events such as board meetings (Chen, 2023). In terms of SASA, a governing body must recommend to the provincial Head of Department the appointment of teachers, subject to ensuring procedural fairness as envisaged in the Employment of Educators Act 76 of 1998 (Eastern Cape Department of Education, 2013). However, the above-cited inferences illustrate that there was a participation disparity among Black parents who did not have an interest in joining the SGBs in the sampled former Model C schools. According to records, only 23 of the 117 SGB members across seven sampled schools were Black. Consequently, by not participating in school governance, Black parents diminished their agency to effect transformative changes (Singh, Mbokodi, & Msila, 2004) and their social capital in interpersonal interactions (Lewis & Naidoo, 2006; Nkambule, Ngubane, & Mashiane-Nkabinde, 2024), implying that they cannot overrule unjust decisions such as the avoidance of using equity-oriented legislations, particularly the SASA, EE, and AA, which, *inter alia*, aim to diversify the racial outlook of the teaching workforce in schools. Consequently, being in the minority implies that Black parents "tolerate, assimilate, or reproduce" the anti-transformation agenda within these SGBs (Picas, 2022).

4.3. Theme 3: Principals' Skepticism Over Prospective Black Teachers' Potential

Personnel Administrative Measures (Department of Basic Education (DBE), 2016) stipulates that principals provide strategic leadership and identify the workforce skills gaps in their schools. This effectively means that together with the SMT and SGB, the principal is better placed to spearhead efforts to diversify the school workforce (Sibanda & Majola, 2023). Participants indicated that prospective Black teachers encounter scrutiny when applying for teaching positions in their schools. Generally, they are perceived as less qualified, with only a few exceptions. Furthermore, their acceptance is often contingent upon meeting specific conditions (Miller, 2019). P7 said:

"You cannot afford to lower the required standards under your watch as a school leader. Being sure about the person you bring to the school is important. The principle we use is about securing the best-trained person to teach. Transformation only comes second; it's about the ability to teach."

P1 further elaborated:

“We look for many things other than qualifications. You may have an academic qualification or a professional qualification, but if you are not an all-rounder, you might find yourself out. So, we don’t focus squarely on the academic competencies but also on other elements that they can bring to the table.”

Furthermore, DO1 commented:

“I think it could also be the pressure they, as former Model C schools, are under to perform at the highest level, that they are afraid of taking risks by employing people outside the norm, because teachers in these schools have traditionally always been white.”

Research studies indicate that historically segregated schools in South Africa have not effectively addressed and managed diversity (Meier, 2005). Similarly, in this inquiry, participants expressed that when recruiting teachers, they look at more than just qualifications; they also consider an array of other competencies that can add value to their school, including candidates’ previous exposure to a similar context, either as learners or teachers. Consistent with what was found in Pawlewicz, Pittman, Castro, and Powell (2024) study, principal participants say they seek teachers who best fit their school culture way above achieving transformation targets of employing Black teachers, whom they know little about regarding their capability to perform at the level required by the school.

The lack of a proactive approach to addressing issues of diversity has, in fact, given rise to prejudice in the different operational processes of the schools (Meier & Hartell, 2009), including teacher recruitment processes. Refusal to recruit any other qualified Black teacher exposes a deep-seated racial belief about White competence and Black incompetence (Jansen, 2004), which is often justified as the “preservation of standards” (Soudien & Sayed, 2004). The approach taken by the principal participants perpetuates what this paper identifies as “black essentialism,” where only certain groups of prospective job applicants are regarded as better options due to their social status and alignment with the elite agenda.

4.4. Theme 4: Use of Language Policy to Preserve Longstanding Culture and Traditions of the School

Two of the selected schools used Afrikaans as the medium of instruction. Therefore, participants were asked to express how they balance racial equity in schools that pride themselves on teaching Afrikaans. P6 stated:

“The applicant must speak fluent Afrikaans and write it properly because they are expected to teach that language. However, generally speaking, we found that African teachers have difficulties pronouncing the language very well.”

P3 said:

“Since Afrikaans-speaking teachers tend to perform better than those who do not speak it, the school prefers to have fluent Afrikaans-speaking teachers. Therefore, if they come for job interviews and struggle to communicate in Afrikaans, they do not stand a chance here. We are very sensitive about the language competency issue.”

P1 added:

“The latest appointments that we have made, both of them come from former Model C schools. They are black South Africans, and they come from former Model C schools. They understand the systems that we have, and I think they have adapted remarkably well.”

The principal participants were unequivocal in their intention to protect their schools’ language and traditions. The cited comments underscore their unwillingness to confront their white privilege and admit their struggle to address issues of racial inequality (Rodriguez, 2009) in teacher recruitment processes; therefore, they used the language policy to rubber-stamp the schools’ traditions and create a stumbling block for teacher racial diversity. Hence, their insistence on employing a Black person who can fluently speak and teach in Afrikaans, using an accent that closely resembles that of White Afrikaans-speaking people. This shows that even if prospective Black teachers can speak Afrikaans reasonably well, their accent and pronunciation may still be used as a proxy to deny them a teaching position in those schools. This finding supports that of Arendse (2020); Christie and McKinney (2017);

Metcalf (2007), and Prins (2019), which underscored that some of the former Model C schools would pull all the stops to protect their longstanding traditional ethos.

5. CONCLUSION

This qualitative paper focused on a sample of seven principals and three district officials (altogether ten research participants) in three education districts in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. It investigated factors inhibiting the staffing of racially diverse teachers in seven former Model C schools. The theory of representative bureaucracy was used as a theoretical framework to contextualize the effects of subverting racial transformation in public schools. Thematic analysis of the findings indicated that the sampled schools and district offices did not commit to a solid recruitment diversity plan. This lack of commitment was due to the district officials overseeing school operations not holding principals accountable for failing to guide their respective School Governing Bodies (SGBs) in complying with applicable labor laws during teacher recruitment and selection processes. Consequently, SGBs chose to ignore the Employment Equity Act and South African Schools Act, which, among other things, mandate schools to commit to racial redress in teacher employment.

Black parents' lack of interest in joining the SGBs resulted in them lacking social capital to veto unjust teacher staffing practices. Principals showed a preference for Black teachers schooled in former Model C schools based on the notion that they could quickly acclimatize to the expected work ethic, teaching standards, and institutional culture, thereby sidelining those who were not schooled in former Model C schools.

Lastly, the Language of Teaching and Learning policy was found to be a convenient safety net to insulate the institutionalization of White racial hegemony and the longstanding institutional ethos of the studied schools. In the bigger scheme of things, the paper advocates for collaborative and constructive dialogue among education stakeholders, particularly teacher unions, school governing body associations, labor inspectorate, civic organizations, as well as district, provincial, and national education officials, to identify proactive strategies for overcoming obstacles to transformative staffing practices in former Model C schools.

5.1. Recommendations

“To undo the overtly racist, oppressive, and unjust policies that determined the mandate and scope of education for the different racial groups in the country for more than 100 years [of colonialism]” (Moloi, 2014), the following recommendations are proposed.

- Schools and districts must commit to a diversity management plan that outlines transformation targets, timelines, and legal recourse in case of failure to comply with the plan.
- Districts must fervently conduct oversight over unorthodox tactics that SGBs use to undermine the EEA. This would require that districts and teacher unions send representatives who are clued up with the labor laws of the republic, rather than randomly selecting officials and members to observe the selection and interview proceedings passively.
- The district must work hand in hand with the Department of Labor to enforce schools' compliance with racial transformation.
- The Department of Education ought to assert itself more by deploying Black teachers who fit the vacancy profile if the school appears to be veering off from the dictates of the diversity plan.

5.2. Study Limitations

Conducting the study enabled researchers to unlearn the misinformation and understand the stereotypes and racialized knowledge internalized not only about others but also about themselves (Tatum, 2001). In the same breath, the journey traveled by the researchers in a quest to understand factors contributing to slow-paced transformative staffing of racially diverse teachers in former Model C schools made them realize that the confinement of the findings

to seven schools across three education districts in one South African province (Eastern Cape) implies that it would be improper to generalize its conclusion as a true reflection of all the former Model C public schools across the Eastern Cape Province and the country at large.

The paper also acknowledges that excluding the SGB members (as participants) limited the richness of descriptive interview data. Hence, it is recommended that prospective researchers consider conducting in-depth studies to ascertain the progress of teacher diversity in other provinces of South Africa, using wide-reaching research methodologies such as mixed methods to capture bigger and more diverse stakeholder samples, especially principals, teachers, parents, district officials, teacher union representatives, and SGBs in former Model C schools.

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