Sustaining Perseverance and Commitment to Teach: Stories from Long-Serving Primary School Teachers

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Abstract:- This study investigates factors that contribute to the perseverance, job satisfaction, and commitment of long-serving teachers in the teaching profession. It found that teachers who have endured numerous education changes in South Africa are more satisfied. Mentorship, socio-cultural and contextual factors like socioeconomic status, race, gender, education, and parental background, and different roles in schools, were also found to be the best predictors of perseverance, job satisfaction, and commitment. Teachers with education beyond initial teacher education diploma or degree, teaching licenses, full-time employment and many years of practice were found to be more satisfied and committed. The findings could help education leaders, school leaders, and teachers understand what keeps teachers going despite challenges in the teaching profession.

I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Considerable international research findings show that teachers are experience a considerable amount of attrition (Ingersoll R. , 2001; Fleisch, 2002; 2008; George, Louw, & Badehorst, 2008; Booyse & Le Roux, 2010; Hall, Altman, Nkomo, Peltzer, & Zuma, 2005; Quan-Baffour & Arko-Achemfuor, 2013). Research indicate that variables contributing to teacher attrition includes intensified workload, poor learner achievement, lack of administrative support, learner indiscipline, lack of advancement and more (Pitsoe, 2013). Under apartheid, educational provision was racially and ethnically organized with inadequate financing of Bantu Education as compared to other racial groups. This approach by previous government led to a huge backlogs. Since 1994 after the first general elections, South Africa has undergone numerous changes as a consequence of political struggles to redress challenges of the past (Christie, 1992; 2008; Booyse & Le Roux, 2010). Even though the antiquity of education change is extensive, education systems continue to wrestle with how to efficaciously effect education transformations. Both experienced and early career teachers (ECTs) have been struggling to deal with countless of education changes (Taylor, Fleisch, & Schindler, 2008). While much scholarly writings have been published with regarding what policy makers and scientists want ECTs and practising teachers to know and to do, not much research has been published on what long-serving primary school teachers know and do in order to sustain their teaching careers. In the same way, much has been documented on factors that leads to teacher attrition and teacher turnover from the distance (Ingersoll R. , 2001; Fullan, 2007; Fleisch, 2008; Motseke,

2013). Traditionally, scholarships on teachers have little evidence on teachers themselves. About few decades ago, researchers put emphasis on the need to view teachers' careers and work regarding to and in the context of their personal and professional lives as a whole (Hargreaves, 2001; 2005). The last twenty years have seen a growing impetus on the revitalization of attention in teachers' lives (Hargreaves, 2005; Mansfield, Beltman, Price, & McConney, 2012; Beltman, 2020). A large volume of international literature focused on teachers' work have abounded, providing discernments into the lives of teachers, complexities and demands of teaching (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991; Fleisch, 2002; Fullan, 2007). Studies on teachers' lives have lightened the previously mysterious eccentricity of teachers and acknowledged the rich and multifaceted information that each teacher brings to the professional lives through their personal experiences (Hargreaves, 2001; 2005; Fullan, 2007; Mansfield, Beltman, Price, & McConney, 2012; Beltman, 2020). Professionally, teachers have to manage classroom behaviours of learners, promote prosocial relations, carry out their curriculum responsibilities and report to authorities. In relation to learner behaviour, scholarship on learner behaviour challenges is also well documented (George, Louw, & Badehorst, 2008; Pitsoe, 2013). These behavioural challenges have been identified by narratives of lack of discipline. Like teachers, learners brings with them into the classroom different personality and different challenges from their backgrounds. For example, different socio-cultural backgrounds, socio-economic challenges and emotional and psychological uncertainties, which means they find it challenging to conduct themselves in a conventional manner as instructed by the teachers or school policies (Segalo, 2021). These challenges of disruptiveness behaviours continues unrelenting and this in turn distresses the routine in which teacher respond to them and carry out their teaching responsibilities. Teachers are held accountable for their actions in relations to the classroom management. Thus, teachers must apply different strategies in order to understand how each learner conduct himself/herself. Research has indicated that recruitment is not the prime challenge in staffing staffrooms with quality teachers but it is more a matter of teacher satisfaction and retention (Chiong, Menzies, & Parameshwaran, 2017; Beltman, 2020). Research on teacher satisfaction is extensive and expansive. International literature on teacher satisfaction has linked job satisfaction to job-related behaviours such sustaining perseverance, less rates of leaving the profession, attitudes towards the profession and commitment to their teaching careers. Teacher perseverance is an international issues which refers to the ability to keep going even when one encounter challenges or adversity. It is the ability of choice, and the decision to stay or leave in a given undertaking and that has drawn a great attention of many education thinkers (Ingersoll R. , 2001; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003;

Stokking, Leenders, De Jong, & VanTartwijk, 2003; Hall, Altman, Nkomo, Peltzer, & Zuma, 2005; Mau, Ellsworth, & Hawley, 2008; Saks, Hunt, Leijen, & Lepp, 2021). Studies have highlighted largely on a variety of concepts/terms applied to refer to perseverance, as authors refer to "intention to remain" (Hargreaves, 2001; 2005; Chiong, Menzies, & Parameshwaran, 2017), "persistence" (Mau, Ellsworth, & Hawley, 2008), "resilience" (Mansfield, Beltman, Price, & McConney, 2012), "or "planned persistence" (Stokking, Leenders, De Jong, & VanTartwijk, 2003), "motivation to leave" (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017)(authors), "intention to quit" (Hall, Altman, Nkomo, Peltzer, & Zuma, 2005; George, Louw, & Badehorst, 2008), "teacher turnover intention" (Ingersoll R. , 2001; Marinell & Coca, 2013; Kim & Park, 2014; Cohen, Blake, & Goodman, 2016), "teacher attrition" (Pitsoe, 2013), teacher "dropout" (Saks, Hunt, Leijen, & Lepp, 2021). In the rest of this paper, the authors will refer to "perseverance" or "intention to persevere". Teacher satisfaction and perseverance and potentially linked with higher commitment are often of high concern for government, investors and other stakeholders as they grapple with which strategies to consider to help address a revolving door of turnover and attrition (Ingersoll R. , 2001). A large volume of international scholarly publications on teachers has shown that despite numerous challenges in the profession (Ingersoll R. , 2001; Olivier & Venter, 2003; Hall, Altman, Nkomo, Peltzer, & Zuma, 2005; Pitsoe, 2013), satisfied teachers are less likely to leave their teaching jobs and have shown higher levels of commitment job than dissatisfied teachers (Coetzee, 2013; Segalo, 2021). Notwithstanding the current body of literature on teachers' professional and personal lives, there is a gap in these scholarly writings. There is dearth of studies has focused on long-serving primary school teachers and on the circumstances necessary to cultivation of the quality of perseverance in the teaching profession in the South African context, more especially in Johannesburg. Because teaching is an emotional demanding career, it is the intention of this research to understand factors that help some teachers sustain their teaching careers in primary schools while other leave the profession. Thus article arose from the a larger PhD project undertaken by the author between 2018 and 2024 which investigated factors that build perseverance, professional identity and job Satisfaction on long-serving teachers in primary schools. Teachers who sustain their teaching career apply internal resources in order to acclimatize or apply plasticity in diverse circumstances in the school. Persistence has been studies and understood from different settings, especially from children, orphans, catastrophic conditions as well as in places of employment. Therefore, this paper report on empirical findings on what sustain the long-term capacity of teaching profession amongst long-serving primary school teachers.

➤ *Statement of the Problem*

Recent high volume of publications on teacher attrition (Hall, Altman, Nkomo, Peltzer, & Zuma, 2005; George, Louw, & Badehorst, 2008; Motseke, 2013) have raised concerns with regards to lack of empirical studies into the lives of teachers and into the reasons that help a small group of teachers sustain their perseverance, job satisfaction and commitment to the profession. The average age of teachers in South Africa is between 40 and 60 years old and disproportionate quantity of teachers are on the verge of retirement in the next decade (South African Council for Educators, 2010; Simkins, 2015). In South Africa, primary school teachers are female and many of them have

been in the field for more than fifteen years. In terms of experience, pedagogical content knowledge, confidence, engagement, energy and self-efficacy, most of them are working at their highest level (Huberman , 1993; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011; 2017). Therefore, over the next decade, these experience teachers will be on retirement and will be replaced by ECTs. Researchers (Hall, Altman, Nkomo, Peltzer, & Zuma, 2005) have indicated that early career teachers leave the profession within their first five years of employment due to high demands of the teaching job. This is likely to results in prolonged teacher shortages, lack of experience and expertise and a small quantity of long-serving teachers with knowledge, experience and sustaining commitment to the profession. Given this impeding challenge, the primary education in South Africa could be described as being "in crisis" (Fleisch, 2008) . While extensive studies have been undertaken on factors that inspires teachers to quit the profession (Ingersoll R. , 2001; 2003; Hall, Altman, Nkomo, Peltzer, & Zuma, 2005; Pitsoe, 2013; Quan-Baffour & Arko-Achemfuor, 2013; Motseke, 2013; Mabusela, 2021), this study is intended to focus and address an allied but a different subject, specifically: What factors that sustain perseverance and commitment of long-serving primary school teachers?

II.   A REVIEW OF PERTINENT LITERATURE

The prominence of this paper is on sustaining perseverance and commitment in the profession, rather than teacher burnout and recruitment. This segment of the paper offers a synopsis of a pertinent literature on why teachers enter and why they remain in the profession, together these explicate how inspiration develop over time. Job satisfaction is differs in terms of its definition (Jones & George, 2017), from simply feelings a teacher may have about his/her job (Riggio, 2013; Chiong, Menzies, & Parameshwaran, 2017) to the following understanding: "an effective response to a job, that results from teachers' comparison of tangible effects with those that are anticipated" (Locke, 1969, p. 317; Luthans, 2011, p. 141). The attitudes towards a job has an influence of the teachers' wellbeing and their general life satisfaction. Job satisfaction studies have previously indicated that satisfied employees maintain better relations with their coworkers, tend to be less absent from work, are less likely to quit their job than less satisfied workers (Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton, 2001; Mafini & Dlodlo, 2014; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017), and have been found to have greater commitment to their organisations. Teachers' work can also be defined and understood within the field of psychology where prosocial behaviour is broadly defined. This definition includes any positive psychology, helpful, constructive behaviour that intend to benefits society by promoting social acceptable behaviours among school learners (Miller-Perrin & Mancuso, 2015). Thus, this study use a broad understanding of prosocial behaviour to include not only helping behaviour but other social behaviours such as helping, sharing, liberality, morality, satisfaction and commitment and ethical behaviours. History is abounding with illustrations linked with Altruism (or humanity) or helping behaviours. Social psychologists broadly defines altruism as the natural desire to help others without expectations of rewards, recognition or reciprocation (Miller-Perrin & Mancuso, 2015). The theoretical hypothesis for most of the studies on job satisfaction can be traced back to Frederick Herzberg and Abraham Maslow theories. Their theories are often intertwined. Briefly,

Herzberg's theory, commonly knowns as Two-Factor theory suggests that there are motivation and hygiene factors that enhance job satisfaction. On the other hand, Maslow's hierarcky of needs theory suggests that there are lower-orders and higher-orders of satisfaction (Maslow, 1954). Therefore, motivation factors according to Herzberg are intrinsic and altruism factors that are in association with higher order needs, namely: recognition, achievement, responsibility and advancement, etc. (Herzberg, Mausner, Peterson, Richard , & Capwell, 1957; Hong & Waheed, 2011; Maslow, 1954). Several accounts on teacher satisfaction research associates intrinsic to altruism or altruistic motivation, especially because of the love for their subjects and the learners (or children) they teach which can lead to a desire for prospective teachers to develop academically and personally (altruistic motivation – the desire to serve) (Stanford, 2001; Nieto, 2003; 2009). Hygiene factors are extrinsic factors that are associated with Maslow's lower order of needs, namely: salary, working conditions, status, etc. Material benefits (such those hygiene factors) are relatively unimportant reason for choosing the teaching profession when compared with intrinsic and altruistic motivations (Ebersohn & Ferreira, 2012; Coetzee, 2013; Watts, 2017; Chiong, Menzies, & Parameshwaran, 2017; Letele & Massyn, 2020). Researchers have also found that committed and satisfied workers persevere and described the teaching profession as one of the most demanding jobs with low returns, yet felt that altruism and intrinsic factors were the reasons adequate enough for them to join the profession. Finally, yet importantly, intrinsic factors and job satisfaction have a strong influence on workers to maintain high job performance and sustain perseverance (Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton, 2001). Previous research evidence suggests that perseverance mitigates the incapacitating effects of exhaustion on job satisfaction (Nieto, 2003). Perseverant teachers can swiftly and effectively regulate their emotions when encounter challenging circumstances. Even though perseverant teachers experience negative emotions at the same levels as those of less perseverant teachers when encounter stressful events, they experience more positive emotions (Hargreaves, 2001). Studies have also indicated that satisfied teachers place more prominence on intrinsic factors than extrinsic factors. It has also been argued that satisfied teachers use extrinsic factors such as their education and training and use opportunity for advancement than extrinsic factors (Ferreira & Ebersohn, 2012; Beltman, 2020). Other factors that have been underscored in the research on teacher satisfaction and perseverance include demographic factors, school climate, school culture and resources and teacher psychological characteristics (Ferreira & Ebersohn, 2012; Chiong, Menzies, & Parameshwaran, 2017). The following section focuses mainly on ethical commitment during the study.

➢ *Ethical Considerations*

The authors adhered to ethical guidelines, viewing qualitative inquiry as a moral inquiry. Permission from the Gauteng Department of Education was granted, and teachers were informed of their rights, aims, purpose, and confidentiality, allowing for their withdrawal at any time (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018).

➢ *Data Collection and Analysis*

This qualitative study used a Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) Method, adopting a critical theoretical approach (Merriam, 2009; Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). The six steps were recursive, non-linear, and prioritized reflexivity over process. The study explored teachers' professional identity, adaptation, professional development, personal faith, and sense of purpose through in-depth interviews. Data analysis was ambiguous, time-consuming, and messy, highlighting the importance of reflexivity and interpretation in qualitative research.

➢ *Trustworthiness and Credibility*

Peer member check was used to verify the accuracy of the data transcribed, ensuring it aligns with the research question and study objectives, and the author provided a detailed description of the participants' voices in the analysis of the research data (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018).

➢ *Assumptions of the Study*

The researcher assumed participants were honest and open in responding to the survey, as their privacy was guaranteed, and that the research questions were understood before they answered, as per previous studies (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018).

➢ *Participants*

Participants for this research were selected for PhD project and were drawn from teachers who are teaching in primary schools with more than 10 years of teaching experience. All teachers who participated in this study render their teaching service under the Johannesburg East Education District in the Gauteng Province of South Africa. Altogether, 112 teachers were randomly sampled, 30 teachers indicated by their e-mails that they want to participate in the study. This study reports on findings evidence of thirteen conveniently and purposively selected teachers based on their experience and availability for interviews. Interviews were later conducted with participating teachers after their working hours in order to not interrupt their teaching responsibilities. Interviews had the benefits of being conducted while the participants were in their familiar environment of their own choosing and minimising the time required to participate which were both significant for teachers and the researcher. Interviews were held in real time which allows for conversations and clarifications on matter that clarity. During these interviews, teachers were asked to provide information on why they chose to become teachers and why they stay so long in the profession. They were asked to provide information on encouragement and discouragements they had encounter during their tenure in the profession. Teachers were asked to explain factors that help them sustain their perseverance and job satisfaction in the profession (see Appendix for a complete decorum). This study protocol was considered by the investigators as part of a larger doctoral study and encompassed interview questions constructed from the review of previous similar studies conducted with primary school teachers (Castro, Kelly, & Shih, 2010; Ebersohn & Ferreira, 2012; Coetzee, 2013; Chiong, Menzies, & Parameshwaran, 2017). These research interviews were tape-recorded and transliterated verbatim. All recordings were coded an initial time to warrant teacher obscurity was guaranteed. After coding, findings were triangulated to confirm

transferability and credibility of the codes (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018).

III. RESULTS

This research article uses direct quotations to support its findings. The researcher applied discourse analysis to uncover implicit responses, as participants and the researcher were familiar. Cohen and associates support this approach, stating that researchers need to use prior assumptions and existing knowledge about participants and the political context of education in the province (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). The politics refers to the general perceptions among participants about stress due to poor working conditions and lack of promotions. The findings focus on themes such as professional commitment to teaching, adaptation, hope, and a sense of purpose. These findings will be discussed in the next section.

IV. FINDINGS

After the data was analysed, it was clear that the research participants who were thought to positively influence learner accomplishment by their senior school leaders possessed a variety of unique character qualities. Every participant exhibited a child-centered attitude, a love of learning, a preference for routines and order, optimism about life, and concern for others. The most notable trait was the desire to interact with kids and give them a sense of accomplishment.

A. Finding 1: Perseverant Teachers have Passion for Working with Children both on Personal and Professional Level

According to the interviews, teachers chose to work in urban areas for a number of reasons, such as the opportunities for professional growth, the chance to work with kids from different cultures and backgrounds, and the availability of job opportunities. Teachers most frequently cite their upbringing in rural areas, where schools lacked proper facilities, as their reason. Conversely, the individuals who had fewer than 17 years of teaching experience started out in metropolitan environments. These teachers most frequently cited their attendance in Gauteng institutions as the reason, which allowed them to work in a setting that was comfortable for them.

- Lisa: "*I was born and reared in this province, even though I studied abroad; this is the atmosphere I am more familiar with.*"

- James: "*I have lived and attended college/university in this province for over 25 years and have no plans or desires to move or work elsewhere.*"

In general, teachers were not required to choose where to teach, and they most certainly did not weigh the advantages and disadvantages of teaching in a multicultural environment. Most teachers chose to instruct in a setting they were familiar with. The majority of teachers surveyed concurred that their main driving force for entering the teaching profession was a desire to foster the development of society's members, especially young children. They frequently stated "the love of learners," "passion for working with

young children," or just "it's the learners" as their main motivations for wishing to become teachers in order to corroborate the survey results.

- James*: "I've always been certain that I wanted to become a teacher. I had no doubts whatsoever. I used to be a teacher or a principal, and we used to play school when I was younger. I have always been a very rigorous learner.*"

Amanda disclosed that she had an easy time becoming a teacher.

- Amanda: "*I suppose I've always wanted to teach since I was a learner, and I've always sat down with all the instructors. I suppose I had some excellent professors in school. I don't regret choosing teaching as my first major in college in the early 1990s since the professors of the day influenced my decisions. Because rural areas lack infrastructure and other facilities, the move from rural to urban schools was significant.*"

According to several teachers, their ambition to educate others and their desire to engage with children are inextricably intertwined. Newly graduated individuals seeking certification to work with young children or in primary schools are frequently these learner teachers.

- Keitumetse: "*I adore and respect children. Keep in mind that working with young instructors requires patience. Their behaviour may try your patience, therefore you must exercise patience with them. I am a very patient teacher. But they also need to be able to tell when you take your work seriously.*"

Many of the individuals in this scenario have worked with children in the past, whether via their youth organizations, churches, sports teams, or families. For some instructors, a family heritage of teaching seems to have had a big impact on their desire to teach.

- Mutshidzwa: "*My only goal was to become a teacher. I enjoyed helping him mark reading materials for learners. At school, we visited him a lot, and I became friends with other teaching families. Our appreciation for teachers led to their being our natural role models. On the other hand, I learned a lot from my mother as well, including how to help people. Thus, I found that being a teacher was beneficial. As I matured, I grew more patient.*"

Before becoming a teacher, Mutshidzwa mentioned a number of roles with children. According to Mutshidzwa (ASHA), she was employed as a preschool instructor for an African Self Help Association. Before being employed as a full-time teacher, Mutshidzwa started out as an after-care aide. After that, she pursued her teaching degree while working part-time. After finishing her education, she had the option to move to another institution.

- Mutshidzwa: "*My interaction with the school's principal was cordial. We had a great conversation about my future, and the principle expressed her desire for me to finish my degree and how much she appreciated education. It was breath-taking, she was quite demanding, and I was glad to have her as my boss. After*

graduating from college with a degree that did not involve teaching, she began working."

However, Fiona's working hours weren't ideal. She longed to change her career for the better because she was generally unhappy and thought she couldn't keep doing it. She explained that she wanted to switch occupations because "*I adored working with youngsters.*" She finished a traditional teacher preparation course. Prior to being able to shift to her current institution, Fiona spent more than 20 years working as an Afrikaans teacher at her first school after receiving her doctorate degree in education. Fiona said that while she loved spending time with her two boys, she felt that working outside the home would be more advantageous. In her statement, she noted, "*I am not a homemaker by nature. Even though I was young at the time, I don't think I could have been a better mother to my boys. Since I consider myself to be spiritual, I thought that working with a lot of children would benefit my physical and spiritual well-being. Teaching has been my best option thus far.*" Kedebone had similar views, saying: *"The idea of working with young children came to me since I had always been involved in children's ministry, even at a church."*

Since Zakhele believes that his background forced him to choose a profession in teaching, his perspective is different from others'. Even if the environment used to seem unfriendly to them, he still finds enjoyment in his work, thus he believes he made the correct choice in becoming a teacher. He stated:

- *"There were not many alternatives available to us back then. We were only introduced to the professions of teaching, law enforcement, nursing, and enlistment in the military. I chose to pursue a career in teaching."*

As stated by Munga:

- *"You can stay in the classroom for as long as you can if you have a strong bond with the instructors you work with and the learners you instruct on several levels."*

A common topic among the teachers I interviewed was connection. According to outstanding teachers like Ahmed and James, collaboration is the only way to feel connected to other teachers. James went on, "especially when all teachers interact":

- *"As we share more ideas and experience the support of other teachers, I am happy and satisfied with my job. This greatly simplifies and makes my work more pleasurable. Being a part of a successful team makes me less stressed about other administrative issues. Everyone benefits greatly from it, even the novice instructors who feel more accepted and at home and can readily pick up tips from more seasoned teachers,"* Ahmed remarked.

Being patient was mentioned by several individuals. Experience and years of practice are the keys to patience. When many instructors (ECTs in particular) struggle, this is a crucial component of instruction.

B. Finding 2: Teachers' Perceptions of Perseverance are Primarily based on Person-Centered Factors and School-based Environmental Factors.

In a research, participants spoke about how they thought about instructors' endurance. Two teachers disagreed with the idea because they found it hard to express. All interviewees did, however, agree that their long careers are proof of their tenacity, especially considering the significant early teacher turnover rates. Teachers' resilience was primarily seen as a combination of school-related and person-centered elements. Individual-centered persistence and the importance of the school environment in encouraging teacher perseverance were the two other major topics that emerged from the study. In order to aggregate comparable viewpoints, themes were developed based on the associated research topics.

➤ *The Importance of Person-Centred Perseverance*

Perceptions of teacher perseverance were influenced by person-centered elements, such as attitudes, methods, and personality traits, according to the participants. Participant remarks from Kedebone, who thought she required minimal encouragement to keep going despite not being a generous person, demonstrate the intricacy of these subthemes.

- Kedebone: "*I think a big part of it comes from my mindset and upbringing; I was taught to stick with things after you've committed to them. I still feel that way because I think my parents encouraged me to never give up. Thus, my personality plays a part in it. And I think that part of the reason is that I can get by with very little. For instance, I don't need to do anything significant to improve my mood; someone just needs to say or do anything basic to make me say, "Ah, ok, that's why I do it," when I'm feeling depressed or upset.*"

Ahmed explains that endurance is partly about adapting to the task, unlike some participants who have discussed qualities they thought they had from the start.

- Ahmed: "*I've adapted to the work rather than the position adapting to me, however I'm not sure if this is a contributing factor. When some trees bend with the wind while others shatter during a storm, isn't it a sign of perseverance?*"

➤ *Staying the Course and Not Giving Up*

Someone who perseveres in the face of difficulties is known as a perseverant teacher, and this persistence is sometimes ascribed to innate qualities or life experiences. Strength, tenacity, and perseverance are frequently used to describe this perseverance. Some teachers blame this on factors like a sense of purpose, a fear of failing, or the necessity to support their families. Some teachers also credit their personal experiences and upbringing for their tenacity. All things considered, persistence is an essential quality that teachers should have.

- James: "*It may be something I don't know about myself. I've kind of persevered or soldiered on; I haven't really given up on anything in my life. Therefore, it may be a part of who I am.*"

- Hamilton: "*To be able to tackle challenging activities, you need to have an innate ability that originates from inside, Meneer. You know, it's not that simple? However, where did that strength come from? It represents the pinnacle of all you have experienced.*"

➢ *A Blend of Optimism and Acceptance*

Perseverance in teaching is a subtheme that includes admitting that there will be difficulties, looking for the positive aspects of the work, and expecting difficult times. Teachers often express acceptance—a realistic understanding that challenges must be overcome—without displaying hopelessness or defeat. A lot of work is also placed into looking for the positive aspects of life and hoping for brighter times. Positive characteristics like achievement, a keen interest in the subject, and intellectual stimulation—rather than hope or optimism—are frequently used to characterize this acceptance. Positive relationships with learners, for instance, allow instructors to feel content and see the value in small triumphs each day, which motivates them to persevere through challenging times.

- Munga: "*I feel that your tenacity derives from the fact that you and the learners get along well, which helps you to notice and enjoy the minor triumphs that each day brings with it. From there, you may keep going and weather the inevitable setbacks.*"

The participants emphasized the need of establishing balance between good and bad times, valuing small triumphs, and recognizing life's positive aspects.

- Keitumetse: "*You see, after 25 years of teaching, errors are inevitable. Sometimes you feel a little worn out. On the other hand, persistence necessitates striking a balance between the advantages and disadvantages of your line of work. The pleasure element has a greater influence than perseverance, which is the ability to recognize and hold onto the positive traits in order to progress. This tactic helps maintain tenacity and motivation in the face of setbacks and disappointments.*"

- James: "*Being able to navigate through both good and terrible times is a sign of perseverance. To persevere is to "hang in there" or "hold on." Perseverance entails enduring difficult circumstances, often with nothing that can be done to improve them, whereas steering entails avoiding them. In general, persistence is acknowledging that there are both good and terrible times and accepting both of them. That's my viewpoint, but I'm not positive. It is to persevere.*"

➢ *Managing Teaching Role Effectively and Actively*

The idea of persistence in the teaching profession was explored by research participants. They felt that a practical approach was essential for their performance, learners, and expectations. Setting clear boundaries, managing one's speed, and adapting to the demands of the job were all components of perseverance in the classroom. Some teachers also stressed how crucial it is to determine what is sufficient when working under time pressure, especially when working under duress. Overall, several teachers' definitions of persistence were given by the participants.

- Maurine: "*Teachers, in my opinion, put a lot of effort into helping each child each day, but they also realize that this is the most they can do in the time given. They believe that they will improve as teachers by working less. They also schedule downtime to unwind and talk with friends and coworkers in order to sustain their tenacity. They offer their utmost for as many children as they can, viewing their profession as just a job. However, they take a step back and consider what they ought to be doing to become the best teacher.*"

Participants spoke about a variety of role management techniques, such as defending oneself against unjustifiable workloads or disagreeable teachers. Some teachers also talked about opposing unjustifiable workloads.

➢ *The School Environment Contribution on Teachers' Grit*

The conversation was on the educational setting and how it may support teachers' perseverance. School leadership, culture, and interpersonal relationships were the three categories into which this was divided. However, none of the participants brought up the environment when talking about how persistent they believed teachers to be. Keeping them going during specific career periods emerged as the main subject. Environmental factors mostly related to how the school atmosphere encouraged the teachers' individual tenacity. The endurance of a single teacher is seen as being at the school-wide level, and a culture of mutual support encourages collective tenacity.

- James: "*By creating a culture that encourages a rubbery network of understanding and support, the school may encourage tenacity among its employees. This program is about creating a safe area where people can seek help and space when they need it, not about educating teachers. This adaptable strategy promotes a more transparent and cooperative work atmosphere, which makes all employees more resilient and encouraging.*"

➢ *Interpersonal Relationships*

According to one teacher, teachers inherently display this support, and their connections with other staff members—which include support, working with like-minded people, and the capacity to ask for help—are responsible for their tenacity.

- Mutshidzwa: "*It's critical that teachers approach one another with empathy and understanding as fellow humans. One good thing about the workplace is that it emphasizes the open, human, and collegiate style of working with coworkers. Because of my extended stay here, I have developed close connections, and I think that my perseverance stems from my understanding of my own challenges as well as my need to support my coworkers. I advise the team to see these difficulties as assets rather than flaws in order to build support and a sense of unity. In general, I think it's critical to show teachers compassion and respect, especially in trying circumstances.*"

➤ *School Culture and Leadership*

The school atmosphere is essential for teachers because it promotes stability and tenacity. Leadership plays a major role in fostering this by providing teachers with a sense of worth and support. Staff members who support one another and seek out practical solutions are part of the school's culture, which helps to foster tenacity. Positive relationships and engagement are fostered via the creation of social opportunities. In general, a positive school atmosphere is essential for fostering positive connections and promoting learning.

- Fiona: "*A diverse group of workers can engage outside of the classroom in a fun and interesting setting at school charity fundraisers. Without having anything to do with their jobs, these social events provide teachers the opportunity to feel good about doing good things. Such projects are supported by an interdisciplinary team of staff members. These events—such as camping on the streets or competing in charity triathlons—provide a legitimate excuse to spend time away from family.*"

C. Finding 3: Teachers Viewed "Thriving" as a Combination of their Personal Growth and Contribution to their Role

Even if they recognize thriving as a goal, the majority of participants in a study on teachers claimed that it was impossible to achieve in their current educational setting. Three themes came to light: the advantages that teachers gained from their jobs, the methods by which they carried out their obligations, and the maintenance of a positive work/life balance. The last theme, which accompanied the first two, was deemed unachievable. Throughout the program, examples of these subjects and their implications are given.

➤ *What Teachers Benefit From Their Roles*

Regarding the benefits of the position, it was believed that teachers would find it enjoyable and that it would be stimulating, allowing them to feel passionate about their profession. In order to thrive, several of the teachers also incorporated new hobbies and challenges into their work.

- Kedebone: "*Instead of merely reciting the same techniques and curriculum year after year, I think a teacher should be continuously pushed by fresh difficulties. This, I believe, is what keeps me inspired and prevents me from quitting teaching. I also believe that a lot of teachers quit because of the continual change, but I feel that teaching presents me with fresh challenges that keep me inspired and persistent. Furthermore, I think that the secret to teaching effectiveness is to always be changing and adjusting to new situations.*"

- Robbin: "*I believe that you may continue to have some enthusiasm and a sense of pride in your work if you were doing well. That seems like it might be what a prosperous life looks like, though, if you can push it further and do more interesting things, and if you truly focus on the things that fascinate you — if we could accomplish things like that, and if we were excited to present an idea instead of just wondering if I was able to put together what I was supposed to do so.*"

➤ *Teacher's Best Strategies to Succeed in Their Roles*

According to this study, teachers also think that teachers who adopt a particular mindset toward their work—such as taking chances, learning from others, reading more, enrolling in college, staying up to date on latest advancements in their field, pushing themselves, and performing well—are sometimes referred to as flourishing teachers.

- Mutshidzwa: "*A positive attitude toward work is a hallmark of successful teachers, who push themselves, learn from others, and contribute to the field. They are prepared to accept what is given, go on, and accept what cannot be changed. Some teachers can doubt why they do what they do and whether they can accomplish their objectives. Their dedication to their work is evident in their willingness to contribute to the field and learn from others.*"

- James: "*I think that's partly because I'm always learning new things from other teachers, which I find to be quite stimulating. Because of this, I constantly encourage teachers to observe others because it may truly help them flourish since they can go beyond their area of expertise, see something different, and think about how they could use it in their own teaching. That's quite exciting. For this reason, it is always eager to explore new things. Teaching is so intriguing because there's always something I can learn to do better or differently, which is why I tell teachers all the time that I'm not a great teacher.*"

- Zakhele: "*Through the addition of ideas, documentation, and enhancements, these teachers are enhancing their department. They are thinking about getting a promotion and assuming greater responsibility, but the idea does not scare them. They do have a sense of humor, and they get along well with learners, parents, and staff. In addition, they usually greet you with a grin.*"

➤ *Establishing a Good Work/Life Balance*

Teachers' ability to maintain a healthy work/life balance while upholding high standards in their roles was the major focus of this issue. However, the vast majority of teachers acknowledged that it was impossible to meet high performance and learning requirements that promote thriving while maintaining a healthy work/life balance. To them, flourishing was an unachievable ideal, whereby one may achieve certain parts but not fully thrive.

- Munga: "*I would define flourishing for me as having a manageable burden, like being able to work eight until five, for instance, and perhaps taking a day or two off during the holidays. In addition, I would state that I can efficiently manage my time so that I don't work from home on the weekends or on vacations, and that I can arrive at work at 6:00 and go at 15:30. I think that would be prospering. Additionally, I believe that doing well in my academics is still surviving.*"

- Lisa: "*According to what I understand, a successful teacher is someone who arrives at work with vigor and excitement, departs having positively impacted the lives of young teachers, spends their nights with family or engaging in hobbies, and has a pleasant day.*"

D. Finding 4: Teachers Emphasize Acknowledgement, and Comprehension of the Classroom Environment in their Suggestions to Government Policy Makers

In response to a question on how the government might support their long careers, teachers listed any policies or initiatives they thought would be beneficial. This study subject was inspired by the fact that all of the participants had experienced aspects of government policy that went against their assumptions about education. The two main issues raised by teachers were that policymakers should have more knowledge about the educational landscape and provide teachers respect and appreciation. The research's goal was to discuss these problems and provide recommendations for how teachers should continue their professions.

➢ *Respect and Recognition by Government Policymakers*

Participants discussed the importance of recognizing and honoring teachers' responsibilities and professional status. They wanted their status to rise and their efforts to be formally recognized. Some also wanted to transform recognition into policy by stabilizing school evaluations, postponing new initiatives, and decreasing accountability criteria. Two teachers raised the issue of pay differences between new teachers and graduates in other sectors, and a few teachers emphasized the importance of remuneration as a token of gratitude for the work that teachers do. James emphasized the need of respect and recognition in the workplace.

- James: *"Since we work in challenging environments and money is a big factor, I must tell you with confidence that I think recognition is a big problem in education. Since everyone in the nation has gone to school, they all believe they know a lot about education, and it might be difficult to dispel the misconception that teachers have about teachers and education. Furthermore, I think there are times when certain government ads seem a touch patronizing. I just want teachers to be recognized on a national level for their outstanding job. Unions themselves would confirm this."*

➢ *Become More Knowledgeable About Teaching In General*

Participants suggested that the government should better understand teaching challenges, including academic and home-related issues. They suggested funding for improved instruction quality, expanded pastoral care, and easier resource access. Physical environments and better work/life balance were also emphasized, with pastoral concerns being the primary focus.

- Kedebone: *"The funding for early intervention and prevention will focus on small group workshops to address major issues before they escalate. This would provide a breathing space for the system, reduce teacher workload, and allow them to focus on their teaching duties, ultimately enhancing the learning environment for learners."*

E. Finding 5: According to LSTs, inexperienced teachers (ECTs) might gain from assistance in organizing their workload and refining their teaching style

Teachers were asked about the importance of early career help and teacher training in a research to ensure that new teachers have a successful career. They gave inconsistent responses that focused more on the needs of newly recruited teachers than on distinct phases. The following two themes surfaced: elements that teachers felt were essential for future teachers at any stage of their employment, from initial training to later stage.

➢ *Increasing the Work's Manageability*

Teachers established a number of themes to help new teachers in their job. They felt that new teachers needed more support in order to build their skills in areas such as resource evaluation and behaviour control. They acknowledged that because of the wide range of situations seen in schools, different classroom and behaviour management techniques were required. Teachers felt that they needed good role models and excellent mentorship to help new teachers get used to their roles. They placed particular focus on skills that reduced workloads and increased job satisfaction. Classroom management has been demonstrated to be one element that may boost work satisfaction. Teachers generally believed that these elements will make it easier for new teachers to do their jobs.

- Ahmed: *"Building solid relationships with learners is a key component of being a teacher. A great teaching experience requires both effective communication and a genuine interest in the learners' learning. It is essential to keep your word and avoid making learners feel weak. Learners must be aware that their expectations have been fulfilled. Effective classroom management is also essential for building trusting connections with learners. Learners are more likely to adhere to any educational strategies once they are in charge. Thus, the secret to success in any educational setting is to contribute to the development of good connections with learners".*

Understanding that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to teaching and how to evaluate new projects or research could be beneficial for new teachers rather of relying solely on their perceived answers.

- Lisa: *"I worry that teaching is frequently seen as merely a technique of instruction, even while there is a lot of teaching craft that is addressed in the PGCE and your first year of study. It is the science of teaching, I might also emphasize. When you try to defend anything, it becomes into a process, and I have no idea how much of teaching is simply craft."*

- Maurine: *"Nonetheless, such material must to be presented in a manner that does not portray the facts as absolute. And if I had the ability, I think I would change it. I think it's useless to present something as reality when it won't be for five years, therefore you've recruited people to teach in a way that shouldn't be permitted. Certainly, I would adjust that approach for both of those sections, which are of the wide professional studies variety. I would*

also get rid of all those strange allusions to learning styles and other frivolous subjects."

Research participants were asked about appropriate workload management strategies for new teachers, emphasizing the value of work-life balance and tailored strategies. Others decided to stay at work until everything was finished, while others opted to take their job home for a more laid-back environment. The need of understanding the instructional rhythm, recognizing and managing stressful situations, and accepting that there will inevitably be ups and downs was also emphasized. Recognizing that some tasks may wait and focusing on the demands of the present rather than anticipating future challenges were suggestions made by several participants.

- Hamilton: *Move gently. Yes, take it slow and give it your best effort. As I previously stated, you should be able to persuade yourself that doing the best work you can for the largest number of learners is enough. As teachers are frequently under pressure to do well, I don't think it would fit in well with teacher training programs. However, there are instances when doing what has to be done is the best course of action. Once in a while, I need to be sure that it's acceptable to open a textbook and simply perform something simple. Simply said, what do the learners need today? They could need this, this, and this, yes, yes. Plan ahead, pace yourself, think optimistically, and make sure you've recognized the pinch spots, for instance. Recognize your learners' speed as well. Since you've already indicated that this week is likely to be quite busy, I may need to pace myself throughout the next days. Now consider this: what can sixth-graders do on their own? And not to constantly be a performing monkey, you know. It's OK for them to be doing this.*

➤ *Establishing a Strategy for Better Teaching*

The study suggests that new teachers should be aware of their psychological role, including high workloads and realistic expectations. They should also understand the importance of relationships, seek support, learn from experienced staff, and maintain perspective. They should enjoy their jobs, participate in interesting projects, and value small successes. Ultimately, they should embrace personal lives for a more fulfilling career.

- James: *I discuss concentrating on these small successes. If teaching a difficult learner is causing you problems, keep in mind that you're probably not the only one. Please just talk to someone about it, since we have several well-known high-needs learners in the area of what I'm presently briefing. Yes, and that, in my opinion, is the primary problem. You are proud of the small things you have accomplished. There will be obstacles on your path, but you should discuss them with professors as soon as you can since you could be saving someone else's life at the same time. After all, nobody is alone in that, are they? Furthermore, I do address additional functions they could play early on. If you are eager and want a bit more oversight and control, it doesn't have to be pastoral. It's not just leadership that can be pursued. I was just wondering if you would want to take command of the entire school for any ideas you have about improving learning at home.*

- Zakhele: *"Keep looking for and doing what you like in order to keep your teaching approach upbeat. If needed, modify your strategy, but don't give up. Try teaching interventions, ask for an A level, look into other approaches, or push oneself with different tasks if teaching isn't fun".*

- Fiona: *"I've advised fellow teachers that difficulties will always arise and that it's crucial to persevere through them. Experience allows you to conquer problems faster than you could in your youth. It's critical to take stock of your existing circumstances and pinpoint areas that require improvement. Even seasoned employees may find this difficult since they frequently continue using ineffective strategies. Finding a method to get beyond obstacles is crucial, and it's crucial to understand that they will ultimately get simpler with time".*

V. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to identify common characteristics that contributed to experienced teachers' persistence in urban school districts. The research focused on the university-school partnership and the relationships between experienced teachers, principals, mentors, and groups of experienced teachers. The study identified seven criteria that made long-serving teachers feel successful: access to significant adult relationships, ability to mentor others, problem-solving ability, hope, high expectations for self and learners, sociocultural awareness, and access to professional development opportunities. The teachers were identified as perseverant by remaining in urban classrooms and learned to navigate the bureaucracy in most urban school districts. The study also highlighted the importance of mentorship and the need for support from the administration. This study determined that ECTs need to be mentored, recognized for their successes, and their challenges acknowledged by the principal. They also need to form emotional ties with learners and colleagues, which can lead to positive stress and job satisfaction. The study suggests that sociocultural awareness should be included in undergraduate teacher education programs, allowing ECTs to become comfortable working within different cultures and maintain hope for positive impact on learner achievement.co

NOTES ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Javier Ndayeni is a Full-time Primary School Teacher with 20 years of teaching experience. He has taught in all Phases of primary education in South Africa. He obtained both his Bachelor of Education in Foundation Phase and Early Childhood Education and Master of Education in Education Leadership and Policy Skills degrees at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. He also obtained both his Honours Bachelor of Education in Education Management and leadership Skills degree and an Advance Course in School Management and Leadership at the University of South Africa, Pretoria. He is currently a PhD Student in Education Management and Leadership Studies at the College of Education, University of South Africa, Pretoria. His research interest includes Teacher Perseverance, Education Law, Human Resource in Education, School Management, School Improvement and School Effectiveness.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The Author notified the GDE Research Development Unit and editors that there is no financial/personal interest that could affect their objectivity.

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