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Professional Preparedness of Newly Qualified (NQTs) Teachers in South Africa: A Scoping Literature Review of Postgraduate Certificate in Education Programme (PGCE)

Nyarayi Chinyama *  and Antony Mpisi 
 Department of Education Studies,
 Sol Plaatje University

Abstract. This scoping literature review contends that the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (MRTEQ) policy framework, while crucial for setting standards in South African teacher education, is insufficient in ensuring the professional preparedness of Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) newly qualified teachers (NQTs). The study employs a multi-dimensional framework incorporating Lave and Wenger's situated learning theory (SLT) (1991), and Bandura's social learning theory (1977) which subsequently evolved into social cognitive theory (SCT) (1986) to assess (PGCE) programmes comprehensively. The review highlights significant concerns related to inadequate time, support, resources, and training in initial teacher education (ITE) and therefore also in the PGCE programmes. Findings indicate that NQTs face persistent challenges, including deficient content and conceptual knowledge, suggesting a misalignment between policy intentions and the practical outcomes of teacher preparedness. Conclusions drawn from the study emphasise the need to enhance PGCE programmes by increasing practical training and mentorship time, integrating hands-on teaching experiences, and adapting new curricula to prepare teachers better for diverse environments. The paper recommends comprehensive training in technology, the provision of resources for teaching in multicultural settings, and structured induction programmes alongside continuous professional development for NQTs. Lastly, this study proposes a conceptual comprehensive framework to guide PGCE programmes in better equipping NQTs, ultimately enhancing their professional preparedness and efficacy.

Keywords: Teacher training; professional preparedness; postgraduate certificate; newly qualified teachers; situated learning theory

*Corresponding author: Nyarayi Chinyama; chinyama.n1@gmail.com

1. Introduction

Globally, the professional preparedness of NQTs has garnered considerable attention (Holloway, 2023). In response to this, and to address the country's unique educational challenges, Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes must be aligned with national educational needs (Sayed et al., 2018). Furthermore, evaluating PGCE programmes is essential to ensure compliance with the standards set by the Council on Higher Education (CHE) and the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) (Somerville, 2024).

However, despite existing research, a gap remains in understanding how specific components of the PGCE programme impact prospective teachers' preparedness and career satisfaction. Therefore, this scoping review aims to examine recent literature to examine how effectively the current PGCE structure bridges the theory-practice gap and prepares graduates for the teaching profession. Moreover, teaching is widely recognised as a profession associated with high levels of stress (Travers & Cooper, 1996). In this context, skills training for teachers becomes critically important, as it can strengthen the teacher-learner relationship and simultaneously enhance broader educational processes (Giovazolias et al., 2019).

According to Cochran-Smith et al. (2017), NQTs require ongoing support, as they must continuously adapt to evolving classroom challenges. One of the most effective ways to provide this support is through Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programmes, which are designed to enhance teachers' professional knowledge and skills. In order to be effective, CPD should be grounded in principles of responsible and reflective teaching. It must foster teacher accountability for student learning, promote democratic practices, and place a strong emphasis on equity. Moreover, CPD should encourage meaningful collaboration with key stakeholders, including fellow teachers, parents, and the wider community, thereby strengthening the overall support system for teachers (Ndebele & Legg-Jack, 2023).

Consequently, these CPD programmes may significantly improve teachers' ability to manage difficult classroom behaviours (Giovazolias et al., 2019). In addition, CPD programmes provide strategies for coping with job-related stress by equipping NQTs with practical skills for addressing challenges more effectively. Nevertheless, while learners are expected to thrive cognitively through supportive and meaningful teacher relationships, many teachers are not adequately prepared to fulfil this role (Pianta et al., 2012). Furthermore, as Merritt et al. (2012) observe, NQTs are often not provided with sufficient training to handle socio-emotional and behavioural difficulties, highlighting a critical gap in existing ITE programmes.

Given the crucial role of a teachers in shaping learner motivation and achievement, evaluating and enhancing PGCE programmes in South Africa should be treated as a matter of urgency. Milne and Mhlolo (2021) highlight the persistent under performance of South African learners in international assessments since 1999, raising concerns about teaching quality. In contrast,

countries like Singapore perform well, emphasising the need to assess whether South African PGCE programmes effectively prepare teachers for modern classroom demands (Zhai & Pellegrino, 2023). This comparison sets a central concern: the extent to which PGCE programmes equip NQTs for real classroom teaching (Tiba & Condry, 2021).

The importance of addressing challenges within the PGCE programme is multifaceted, as it may ensure that NQTs are equipped to navigate diverse classroom contexts and implement modern pedagogical approaches effectively (Mkhasibe et al., 2021). This involves integrating evidence-based strategies, technological tools, and cultural competency into the curriculum. Effective training and support during the PGCE programme can significantly enhance NQTs' confidence and motivation, which in turn positively influences job satisfaction and retention both of which are critical in mitigating teacher burnout and turnover (Langsford & Rusznyak, 2024).

Furthermore, this review highlights the role of effective teacher mentoring as a key strategy in promoting professional preparedness of NQTs. As Ladner (2022) notes, mentoring programmes can reduce NQTs attrition, foster a stable school culture, and strengthen instructional practices, ultimately improving learner achievement. Additionally, by reducing attrition, funds typically used for recruitment and hiring replacement teachers may be reallocated to professional development and instructional resources (Ladner, 2022).

Therefore, in an effort to bridge the gap between South Africa's learner outcomes and those of top-performing countries, a thorough and critical evaluation of PGCE programmes is necessary. This should involve aligning curricula with international best practices, incorporating ongoing feedback mechanisms, and ensuring responsiveness to evolving educational demands (Zhai & Pellegrino, 2023). Consequently, such efforts may contribute to a more effective teacher preparation system that supports NQTs and aligns with global standards of educational excellence. This paper, thus, aims to examine the professional preparedness of NQTs in South Africa.

2. Current State of the PGCE Programme in South Africa

The complexities of professional preparedness and the effectiveness of PGCE programmes have a direct impact on teaching quality and learner outcomes (Natale, 2024). An examination of South Africa's PGCE programmes reveals gaps and inconsistencies that hinder the development of confident and capable NQTs. This section explores the key challenges and contextual factors affecting PGCE provision, including uneven access to resources, limited support, restricted time frames, and insufficient practical training. Lessons drawn from international ITE reforms also offer insights into potential improvements that could strengthen local programmes and better prepare NQTs for classroom realities.

In South Africa, the PGCE is a one-year qualification aimed at graduates seeking to become teachers (Wits, 2024). It shapes professional identity through coursework and teaching practice placements within schools and communities

(Wepener et al., 2024). All student teachers complete core Education courses, enrol in a Further Education and Training 1 Subject Methodology course, and may take one or two Senior Phase 2 Methodology Courses, depending on their undergraduate background. Strong subject knowledge, an understanding of education theory, computer literacy, and basic conversational skills in an indigenous South African language or sign language are key national requirements. The PGCE programme is currently the only route to professional registration with the South African Council for Educators (SACE) for degree holders outside the BEd stream (Wits, 2024).

However, studies raise concerns about structural and curricular challenges that directly affect the preparedness of NQTs, particularly within the limited time frame of the one-year programme. Mathabela (2021) argues that the current framework may reduce their effectiveness and job satisfaction. For instance, the strict prerequisites of the Senior Phase Methodology Course restrict specialisation choices (Verbeek, 2014), often forcing NQTs to select subjects that do not align with their interests or long-term career goals (Suryani & George, 2021). Within the short duration of the programme, this misalignment may hinder their engagement and confidence, leaving them underprepared for classroom realities.

Additionally, while language proficiency in indigenous or sign language is a key national requirement, the limited time and inadequate support to develop these skills leave most NQTs ill-prepared to teach in diverse classrooms, weakening their ability to promote inclusive and effective learning (Grant & Newton, 2019). The limited integration of educational theory with practical classroom experience poses a major challenge for NQTs. Unlike BEd students, who gain sustained exposure to teaching over several years, PGCE programme takes just one year to be completed. This short time frame often limits meaningful classroom engagement, particularly for those without prior teaching experience, thereby limiting their ability to manage learners and apply theory in practice (Batane & Butale, 2022; Ramrathan, 2024).

Research highlights three areas where these challenges are more acute for NQTs. First, inadequate practical training leaves them feeling unprepared for classroom and administrative duties, unlike BEd NQTs who benefit from extended school-based learning (Langsford & Rusznyak, 2024; Zoutendijk & Mpisi, 2022). Second, limited access to CPD and mentorship further hinders their transition into teaching roles, while BEd programmes often embed such support over time (Iqbal, 2024). Third, NQTs experience higher stress and burnout due to the compressed nature of the programme and insufficient emotional support (Diab & Green, 2024). To enhance NQTs' preparedness, there is a need to expand practical training, strengthen mentorship, and establish better emotional support systems (Mathabela, 2021).

2.1 Exploring the Problem and Context

Globally, inconsistencies in ITE programmes raise equity concerns, with NQTs in less-resourced schools often receiving inferior training and support compared to those from more prestigious contexts (Stephens, 2024; Awung et al., 2024). In

South Africa, systemic inequalities linked to race, geography, and wealth further disadvantage NQTs, limiting their exposure to quality mentorship, practical experience, and technological innovation (Tarisayi, 2024; Ajanai, 2020).

Internationally, countries like New Zealand, Ireland, and Norway strive for school-university collaboration, yet still face challenges with inconsistent mentoring, limited theory-practice integration, and poor ethical training in digital contexts (Godsk & Nielsen, 2024; Mahato & Behera, 2018). Similarly, across the UK and other European countries, NQTs struggle due to variable quality in school-based training and overemphasis on theory at the expense of practice (Kennedy, 2018; Gravett & Kroon, 2023).

In South Africa, NQTs are particularly affected by insufficient classroom practice, a lack of structured support, and poor adaptation to modern teaching needs such as digital literacy and inclusive pedagogy (Olawale, 2024; Gordon, 2023). Recently, scholars argued discovered that PGCE programmes remain too theoretical, failing to develop professional competencies essential for effective teaching (Du Plessis & Dreyer, 2024; Van Niekerk, 2020). This results in high stress, burnout, and attrition among NQTs (Bantwini, 2018; Van der Merwe & Van der Westhuizen, 2020). This scoping literature review, therefore, sought to examine the professional preparedness of NQTs in South Africa, highlighting gaps in practical training, mentorship, and emotional support needed to meet contemporary classroom demands.

2.2 Key Concepts

Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) are teachers with less than four years' experience who have recently completed their teacher education, including work-integrated learning (Farrel, 2009). This early career stage is critical as NQTs shift from theory to real classroom practice, testing their preparedness to manage and engage diverse learners.

Building on this, professional preparedness becomes a key indicator of how effectively NQTs can navigate the demands of the classroom. Professional preparedness refers to the extent to which newly NQTs possess pedagogical knowledge, subject content expertise, and the resilience needed to navigate the demands of the teaching profession (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Langsford, 2024; Al Maktoum & Kaabi, 2024). Therefore, high levels of preparedness are essential for ensuring quality education and improving learner outcomes (Bland et al., 2023).

Inlight of this, ITE programmes, including PGCE pathways, are intended to build the professional competencies of future teachers by combining theoretical knowledge with practical teaching experience (Farrell, 2023; Gravett & Kroon, 2023). This gap between training and practice highlights the need for a closer examination of how ITE programmes support, or fail to support, NQTs' transition into professional teaching. The next section outlines the methodology, scope of the review, and the theoretical framework guiding this study.

3. Methodology

3.1 Description of the Literature Selection Process

This study adopted a scoping review methodology following the framework of Arksey and O'Malley (2005) and further guided by Khan et al.'s (2003) five-step process. The objective was to map the existing research landscape on the professional preparedness of Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs), particularly within Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) programmes. Given the fragmented nature of literature in this area, the scoping review approach allowed for the inclusion of both empirical and theoretical studies across a range of educational contexts.

3.2 Search Strategy and Identification Phase

The literature search focused on peer-reviewed articles published between 2019 and 2024. To ensure breadth and credibility, four databases were selected based on their relevance to education, teacher development, and social sciences: ERIC (n = 3), JSTOR (n = 2), Scopus (n = 64), and Google Scholar (n = 82). These platforms were purposefully chosen for their complementary strengths. For example, ERIC offered discipline-specific focus on education, Scopus provided access to high-impact international journals, JSTOR contributed both archival and current research, while Google Scholar expanded the search to include grey literature and non-indexed works relevant to the topic.

Boolean operators and keyword combinations such as "newly qualified teachers," "professional preparedness," "PGCE," "mentorship," "initial teacher education," and "continuous professional development" were used to ensure the search was comprehensive. A general search string tailored to each platform was applied to retrieve the most relevant and recent studies within the specified time frame.

3.3 Screening, Eligibility, and Appraisal Criteria

An initial total of 151 records was retrieved from four databases: Scopus, JSTOR, ERIC, and Google Scholar. The screening process began with the removal of 36 duplicate records, resulting in 115 unique records. These were screened by title and abstract, leading to the exclusion of 68 records that lacked relevant keywords and 29 records that did not focus on the South African context. This left 18 records for full-text eligibility assessment.

An additional 9 full-text articles were assessed but excluded for not meeting peer-review standards, such as commentaries, blog posts, or non-academic publications. Ultimately, 18 peer-reviewed studies, published between 2019 and 2024, were included in the final thematic analysis. These studies addressed key themes related to the professional preparedness of Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs), including teaching practicum, mentorship, curriculum content, and assessment strategies in PGCE contexts.

3.4 Inclusion and Data Extraction

Ultimately, 18 peer-reviewed studies met all inclusion criteria and were retained for in-depth analysis. These articles directly addressed the professional preparedness of NQTs and offered insights into practical and conceptual issues

within PGCE programmes. Data were extracted using a concept-centric matrix that focused on the study aim, and findings related to the preparedness of NQTs. This process prioritised quality and relevance over quantity, with a deliberate focus on peer-reviewed journal articles. Grey literature, conference proceedings, and non-peer-reviewed materials were excluded to enhance the academic rigour and credibility of the final collection. The full selection process is detailed in the PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1) and summarised in Table 1 below.

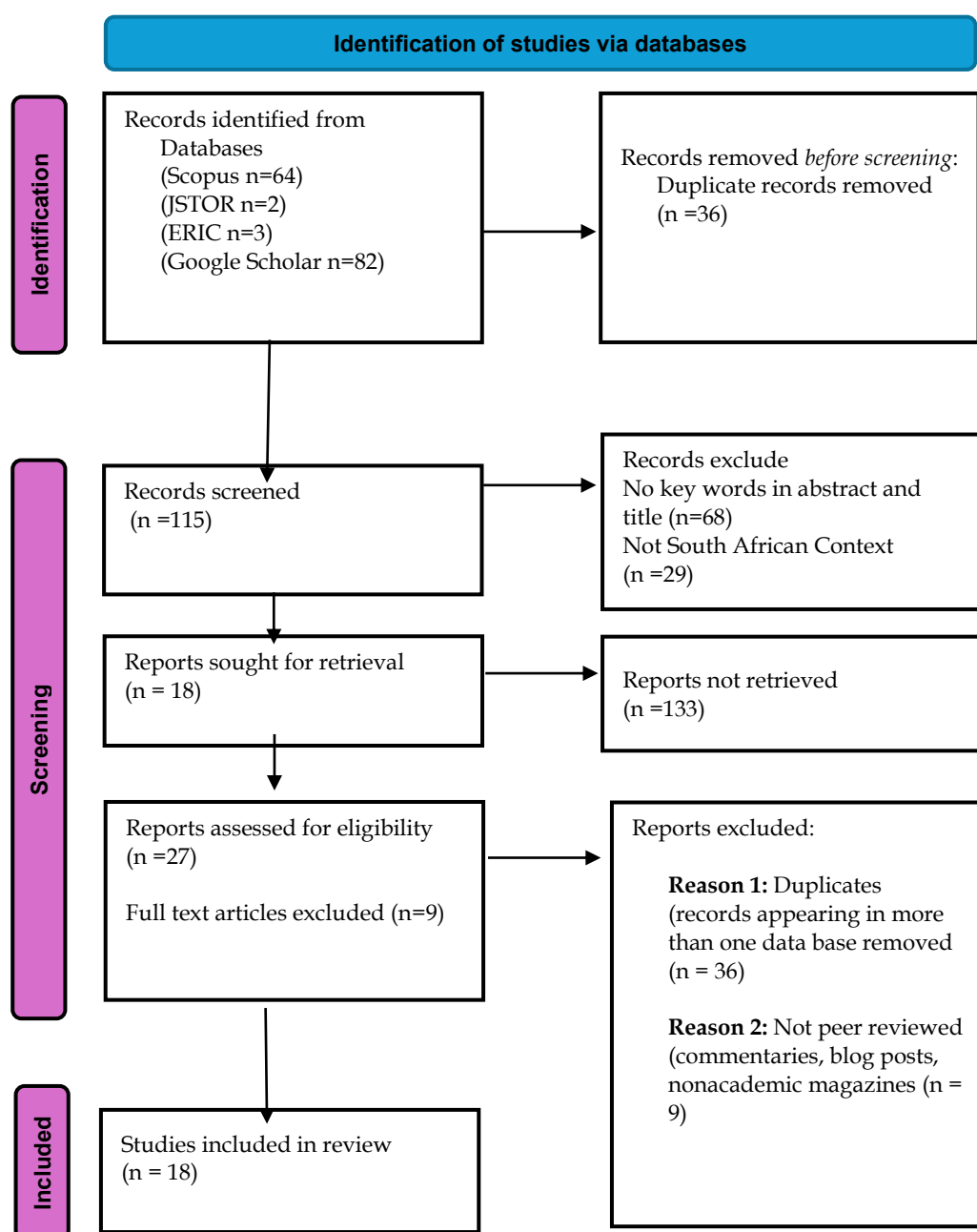


Figure 1 : PRISMA Flow Diagram

Table 1: Description of the Literature Selection Process

PRISMA Phase	Description
Identification	A total of 151 records were identified from four databases: ERIC (n = 3), JSTOR (n = 2), Scopus (n = 64), and Google Scholar (n = 82). These databases were purposefully selected for their breadth and relevance to education, teacher training, and PGCE-related research.
Screening	After removal of 36 duplicate records, 115 records remained for screening. A total of 68 records were excluded for lacking key terms in the abstract or title, and 29 were excluded for not focusing on the South African context. This resulted in 18 records proceeding to the eligibility stage.
Eligibility	An additional 9 full-text articles were assessed but excluded for not being peer-reviewed (e.g., commentaries, blog posts, or non-academic publications).
Inclusion	A total of 18 peer-reviewed studies, published between 2019 and 2024, met the inclusion criteria and were included in the final thematic analysis. These studies addressed key elements of the professional preparedness of Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs).

4. Theoretical grounding

The paper incorporates Lave and Wenger's TSL and Bandura's SLT to provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the research topic. Theoretical frameworks offered valuable structure for interpreting diverse findings. Bandura's Social Learning Theory (SLT) (1986) provides insight into how observational learning and mentorship shape teacher development. This framework assisted the researchers to integrate disconnected evidence, offering a coherent lens through which to examine how mentorship and policy alignment can enhance teacher preparedness (Bandura, 1986; Hattie, 2009). By applying these frameworks, this study navigates the complexities of teacher education policy and practice to support evidence-based improvements in PGCE programmes (Snelson, 2019). A detailed explanation of these theories with relevant sources is as follows:

4.1 Lave and Wenger's Theory of Situated Learning

Lave and Wenger's Theory of Situated Learning (TSL) asserts that learning is fundamentally a social process embedded within the context in which it occurs. According to this theory, learning extends beyond the mere acquisition of abstract knowledge; it involves active participation in authentic activities within a community of practice. This concept is referred to as "legitimate peripheral participation," which describes how newcomers gradually become integral members of a community by engaging in real-life tasks and social interactions (Lave & Wenger, 1991:33).

In the context of PGCE programmes, Lave and Wenger's theory highlights the importance of embedding meaningful practical experiences such as work-integrated learning and internships into teacher preparation. These components immerse student teachers in authentic school environments, allowing them to

interact with experienced practitioners and apply theoretical concepts in real-world settings. However, for legitimate peripheral participation to occur meaningfully, a more extended timeframe is essential. The current structure of many PGCE programmes often limited to one academic year, may not provide sufficient time for sustained engagement, reflection, and gradual integration into the teaching profession. Therefore, increasing the duration of practical training would better align with the principles of situated learning, ultimately enhancing NQTs' preparedness, confidence, and long-term effectiveness in the classroom (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998).

4.2 Bandura's Social Learning Theory

Bandura's Social Learning Theory (SLT) highlights the importance of learning through observation, imitation, and modelling. According to Bandura (1986), individuals acquire new behaviours by watching others, especially when these behaviours are positively reinforced. Learning occurs through the dynamic interaction of cognitive, behavioural, and environmental factors.

In PGCE programmes, Bandura's theory is relevant for evaluating mentorship and induction. These structures allow NQTs to observe experienced teachers, model effective practices, and receive feedback. Such observational learning helps NQTs develop classroom management, teaching strategies, and professional conduct. This therefore means that effective mentorship structures that facilitate observational learning and timely feedback are essential components of PGCE programmes. Role modelling and guided experiences over time are also vital for building NQTs' competence and confidence.

Integrating Bandura's SLT with Lave and Wenger's Theory of Situated Learning (TSL) offers a robust framework for evaluating PGCE effectiveness. It highlights the importance of time-rich, socially embedded learning in preparing NQTs for real classroom challenges (Bandura, 1986; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998).

4.3 Thematic Summary of Key Findings in Post Graduate Certificate in Education Programmes (2019-2024)

This section displays and discusses the findings from the scoping review of literature on approaches to improve NQTs' professional preparedness. The findings, summarised in Table 1 below, highlight key approaches that are currently lacking or underdeveloped in the preparation of NQTs. These findings are derived from peer-reviewed articles published between 2019 and 2024. These sources were carefully selected based on whether they discuss approaches to improve NQTs' professional preparedness.

Table 2: Approaches to improve NQTs' professional preparedness

Approaches for teacher growth	Authors Years	& Key Findings	Implications for NQTs' Preparedness	Impact on Learner Outcomes
Continuous Professional Development	Modise (2020).	Lack of new teaching methodologies due to lack of adequate preparation.	Updates NQTs with new methodologies.	Improved learner engagement and achievement.
Participatory Action Learning	Ntshangase & Nkosi (2022); Ramorola (2024).	Lack of collaborative teaching strategies.	Improves teaching strategies through collaboration.	More interactive and effective teaching.
Inclusive Education and Diversity	Kwatubana & Bosch (2019).	Lack of comprehensive Training for diverse classrooms needs.	Prepares NQTs to handle diverse needs.	Better academic and social outcomes
Mentorship and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)	Sithole (2023); Iwu (2021).	Lack of ongoing professional support.	Provides guidance and support.	Increased confidence and competence.
Training on Classroom Management	Langsford & Rusznyak (2024).	Lack of intensive training on behaviour management due to short period of time in teaching practice.	Equips NQTs with management strategies.	More conducive learning environments.
Technology Integration	Buma & Sibanda (2022)	NQTs lack technological resources in their classrooms.	Prepares NQTs to use technology effectively.	Enhanced learner engagement.
Language of Instruction	Zondo & Adu (2024)	NQTs not well prepared to teach multilingual classrooms.	Equips NQTs for effective multilingual teaching.	Improved comprehension and engagement.
Skills of handling learners with special education needs	Tabe (2020)	NQTs not adequately prepared to teach learners with special education needs.	Analyses how PGCE programmes prepare NQTs to teach learners not only with special education needs.	Improved support for learners with special needs enhances their educational outcomes.

Collaboration between Schools	Olawale (2024).	NQTs lack collaboration with teachers in other schools.	Examines the collaboration between schools and PGCE programmes and its impact on teacher education.	Strengthens the relationship between schools and teacher training programmes, enhancing practical training.
Digital Literacy in PGCE Programmes	Sithole (2023).	NQTs have inadequate training on digital literacy.	Discusses the development of digital literacy skills in PGCE programmes.	NQTs integrate digital tools and this improves.
Inclusive Education and Diversity	Kwatubana & Bosch (2019).	NQTs not well prepared to teach diverse groups of learners.	Prepares NQTs to handle diverse needs.	Better academic and social outcomes.
Reflective Practice	Segalo & Dube (2022).	NQTs need more time to do reflective practices essential for self-evaluation.	Encourages continuous improvement.	More adaptive teaching methods.
Cultural Competence	Lawrence et al. (2024).	NQTs lack cultural awareness for diverse competence.	Prepares NQTs for diverse classrooms.	Inclusive learning environments.
Assessment Literacy	Ntshangase & Mabusela (2023).	NQTs lack assessment literacy due to short period of teaching practice.	Enhances ability to design effective assessments.	Better tracking of learner progress.
Addressing Gender Issues in PGCE Training	Iwu et al., (2024).	NQTs lack training on gender issues.	Examines how PGCE programmes help NQTs to address gender issues and promote gender equality.	Prepares NQTs to handle gender issues sensitively and promote equality in the classroom.
Environmental Education in PGCE Programmes	Nkomo & Dube (2022).	NQTs lack training on environmental awareness due to short training time.	Discusses the inclusion of environmental education in PGCE curricula.	Equips NQTs with knowledge and skills to teach environmental education effectively.

Compiled by Chinyama and Mpsi 2024

The following section discusses the thematic gaps in NQTs' professional preparedness, as identified in Table 1. These themes represent approaches that remain underdeveloped or inconsistently implemented within Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes, particularly those serving PGCE candidates. By analysing these themes, the discussion provides insights into the specific competencies that NQTs lack and the implications for both their professional development and learner outcomes. Each theme is analysed in relation to relevant empirical studies and theoretical frameworks such as Bandura's Social Learning Theory (SLT) and Lave and Wenger's Theory of Situated Learning (TSL), with a view to informing policy and practice in teacher education.

5. Foundational Development and Continuous Growth

5.1 Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

Modise (2020) and Mlambo et al. (2024) highlight the lack of structured CPD in PGCE programmes, which limits NQTs' ability to engage in lifelong learning and keep up with innovative pedagogies. Iwu (2021) emphasises how PLCs can support confidence and collaboration. According to Bandura's SLT, CPD and PLCs offer opportunities for observation, modelling, and feedback. Without these structures, NQTs may stagnate, increasing the risk of burnout and attrition, while negatively impacting learner achievement.

5.2 Participatory Action Learning (PAL) and Reflective Practice (RP)

Grounded in Lave and Wenger's TSL, PAL and RP are identified by Ntshangase & Nkosi (2022) and Ramorola (2024) as essential for embedding theory into authentic teaching contexts. RP, in particular, helps teachers adapt and refine their practices based on lived classroom experience (Segalo & Dube, 2022). These strategies cultivate adaptive expertise and build professional resilience, contributing to improved learner outcomes.

5.3 Mentorship

Sithole (2023) and Glazzard & Coverdale (2018) argue that effective mentorship provides experiential learning through observation and guided practice. Mentorship supports emotional well-being and skill acquisition, but its impact is dependent on quality and duration. According to SLT, learning is optimised when novices observe and receive feedback from more experienced colleagues. Weak or inconsistent mentorship leads to gaps in classroom readiness.

6. Inclusive and Equitable Teaching

6.1 Inclusive Education and Diversity

Kwatubana & Bosch (2019) and Lawrence et al. (2024) stress that NQTs are not adequately prepared to handle diverse learner needs. The inclusion of learners from different backgrounds requires more than policy modules; it requires practical, embedded strategies. Tabe (2020) expands the understanding of inclusion to all forms of diversity, including socioeconomic and linguistic.

6.2 Cultural Competence

Lawrence et al. (2024) note that cultural awareness alone is insufficient. Cultural competence involves applying respectful and inclusive teaching practices. The

absence of cultural competence can marginalise learners and reduce engagement. Reflective practice is essential in developing this competence.

6.3 Addressing Gender Issues

Iwu et al. (2024) found that PGCE programmes often overlook gender sensitivity training. Without it, NQTs may unintentionally perpetuate classroom biases. Teaching gender equality requires critical engagement and policy literacy, which must be explicitly taught and reinforced through mentorship.

6.4 Skills for Teaching Learners with Special Needs

Tabé (2020) reveals that many PGCE programmes do not prepare NQTs to teach learners with special educational needs (SEN). This leads to exclusionary practices. Integration of SEN strategies in practicum and coursework is crucial for inclusive education and improved learner support.

7. Instructional and Pedagogical Strategies

7.1 Classroom Management

Langsford & Rusznyak (2024) highlight that short practicum periods limit training in behavioural management. Without adequate strategies, NQTs may struggle to create conducive learning environments, affecting discipline and learning. Extended practicum and mentorship could mitigate these gaps.

7.2 Language of Instruction

Zondo & Adu (2024) argue that multilingual classroom teaching is often neglected in PGCE preparation. Language barriers hinder learner comprehension and participation. Training in code-switching, translanguaging, and language-sensitive pedagogy is needed.

7.3 Assessment Literacy

Ntshangase & Mabusela (2023) show that assessment strategies are often poorly covered in PGCEs. Without these skills, NQTs cannot effectively monitor learner progress. Developing strong assessment literacy ensures that instruction is responsive and targeted.

7.4 Technology and Innovation

7.4.1 Technology Integration

Buma & Sibanda (2022) observe that NQTs are underprepared to integrate educational technology into teaching. This limits their ability to design interactive lessons and differentiate learning. Bandura's SLT supports the need for modelling and practice using digital tools during teacher education.

7.4.2 Digital Literacy

Sithole (2023) highlights gaps in digital competence among NQTs. Integrating digital tools improves engagement and prepares learners for the knowledge economy. PGCE programmes must include hands-on digital training to bridge this gap.

7.5 Cross-Institutional Collaboration and Socio-Environmental Awareness

7.5.1 Collaboration Between Schools

Olawale (2024) notes that weak links between teacher education institutions and schools reduce opportunities for collaborative learning and knowledge exchange. Strengthening school-university partnerships enriches NQTs' practicum experiences.

7.5.2 Environmental Education

Nkomo & Dube (2022) report that environmental education is often overlooked in PGCE curricula. Teaching sustainability requires environmental literacy, which can only be developed through curriculum integration and hands-on activities.

8. Summary Of Thematic Findings

The reviewed literature reveals a persistent gap between PGCE training, and the real-world demands placed on newly qualified teachers. Key areas of underdevelopment include digital literacy, inclusive pedagogy, reflective practice, and structured mentorship. These gaps reflect the limited integration of practice-based and contextually grounded training within ITE programmes. Bridging these gaps will require a comprehensive reform of PGCE curricula, prioritising experiential learning, cultural responsiveness, and policy-practice alignment. Ultimately, strengthening these dimensions is essential for building a confident, competent, and adaptable teaching workforce capable of improving learner outcomes across diverse educational settings.

9. New Knowledge Contribution

Table 2 below contributes new knowledge by moving beyond thematic analysis to propose a strategic framework for intervention. While existing literature identifies individual gaps in NQT preparedness, this matrix integrates those findings into a structured model for curriculum redesign and policy development. The model demonstrates how theory-informed interventions can translate into measurable learner outcomes, thereby bridging the research-to-practice divide in initial teacher education.

Table 3: Identified shortcomings of NQTs, proposed interventions, and expected outcomes

Identified Shortcomings	Proposed Interventions	Expected Outcomes
Teaching methodologies	PGCE Curriculum Enhancement; Mentorship & PLCs	Confident, pedagogically sound instructional delivery
Environmental education	Environmental Education Modules; Participatory Action Learning	NQTs able to integrate environmental themes in cross-curricular teaching
Diverse and multilingual classrooms	Multilingual & Cultural Competence Training; Inclusive Education Training	Inclusive classrooms that cater to linguistic and cultural diversity
Collaborative strategies	Professional Collaboration Training; Mentorship & PLCs	Strengthened teamwork, planning, and co-teaching practices
Classroom management	Extended Teaching Practicum; Mentorship	Improved discipline strategies and learner engagement
Special education needs	Inclusive Education Training; CPD	Enhanced ability to differentiate instruction and support learners with barriers in learning
Digital literacy and technology use	Digital Tools & Resource Integration; CPD	Technology-enhanced teaching and improved learner digital skills
Reflective practice and self-evaluation	Participatory Action Learning; Mentorship	Ongoing professional growth and self-directed improvement
Cultural and gender awareness	Training on Assessment and Gender Issues; Multicultural Competency Training	Gender-sensitive, non-discriminatory, and equitable practices
Assessment literacy	Training on Assessment and Gender Issues; PGCE Curriculum Enhancement	Fair, varied, and effective assessment and feedback methods
Professional collaboration	Mentorship & PLCs; CPD	Strengthened school-based professional learning communities

Compiled by Chinyama and Mpisi (2024)

As shown in Table 3 above, the proposed interventions align with key principles from Bandura's Social Learning Theory and Lave and Wenger's Theory of Situated Learning, ensuring that strategies for NQT support are theoretically grounded and practice oriented.

This paper identified critical gaps in the professional preparedness of NQTs, highlighting areas such as digital literacy, inclusive education, reflective practice, and classroom management. Through the application of Bandura's Social Learning Theory and Lave and Wenger's Theory of Situated Learning, the analysis underscored the importance of practice-based, collaborative, and context-responsive training models.

The thematic findings, supported by Table 2, present actionable strategies that link theoretical insight with practical reform. Interventions such as strengthened mentorship, curriculum alignment, and participatory learning have the potential to significantly enhance NQT preparedness and learner outcomes. By aligning PGCE programme design with the realities of contemporary classrooms, this study contributes to both scholarly discourse and policy development aimed at building a confident, adaptive, and inclusive teaching workforce.

10. Acknowledgements

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