



Teachers' Resilience in Managing Learners in Diverse Classrooms: A Qualitative Case Study in the Outjo Circuit of the Kunene Region of Namibia

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Abstract

This qualitative study explored teachers' resilience in managing diverse classes in the Kunene region of Namibia, specifically the Outjo circuit. Through interviews and questionnaires with 25 teachers from both junior primary, senior primary, and secondary phases, the research examines how resilience influences teachers' capacity to handle classroom challenges. Findings indicate that teachers view resilience as crucial for effectively navigating diverse classroom environments, supported by factors such as cultural awareness, language support, inclusive teaching practices, and communication skills. However, they faced obstacles like absenteeism, discipline issues, low self-esteem, language barriers, and tribal tensions. Additionally, teachers reported inadequate preparation due to limited training and resources, constraining their ability to implement inclusive practices. To address these issues, teachers recommended strategies like fostering self-awareness, individualised support, and incorporating learners' first languages into instruction. These insights inform potential policy and intervention developments aimed at strengthening teacher resilience and fostering inclusive, effective learning environments in remote areas like the Outjo circuit.

Keywords: Diverse classrooms; inclusive education; Kunene region; Outjo circuit; qualitative case study; teacher resilience.



Introduction

Namibia's transition from segregated to inclusive classrooms represents a significant shift in the country's approach to providing education for every learner, including those with special needs. In addition to being mandated under the sector policy on inclusive education (Republic of Namibia: Ministry of Education [MoE], 2013), the commitment to implementing inclusive education encompasses greater social justice, equity, and inclusion objectives. The government has proved its commitment to inclusive education by buying into the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 1994), which highlights the significance of this approach in ensuring that all learners have access to high-quality education. Indeed, implementing an inclusive education policy requires teachers to accommodate and support all students in the same classroom, regardless of colour, ethnicity, or degree of learning ability. This method exemplifies the fundamental concepts of equality, diversity, and inclusion, intending to ensure that every learner has access to high-quality education and opportunities for success. Furthermore, inclusive education recognises that each learner has unique strengths, challenges, and learning styles (MoE, 2013). As a result, teachers and other stakeholders in education such as school principals, heads of department, and education officers are responsible for providing learning environments that meet the different needs of all learners, such as social, emotional, psychological, and physical. Through collective efforts, they should ensure that each learner may fully participate, interact, and advance academically and socially.

The Kunene region, in Northwestern Namibia, has a population of 90 000 people, the majority of whom are Himba (Education Management Information System [EMIS], 2022). The Himba people are a captivating ethnic group residing primarily in the Kunene region of Northern Namibia, with a smaller population across the Kunene River in Southern Angola. The Himba people of Namibia are a semi-nomadic pastoralist group deeply rooted in their traditional lifestyle. Known for their distinctive appearance, characterised by reddish-brown skin and elaborate hairstyles, the Himba have successfully preserved many of their ancestral customs and beliefs. However, their nomadic existence, coupled with geographic isolation and economic challenges, has significantly hindered educational opportunities for Himba children (EMIS, 2022). Despite these challenges, efforts are being made by the MoE (2013) to address these challenges through initiatives such as mobile schools, community-based education

programmes, and scholarships Their unique cultural practices and traditional lifestyle have fascinated outsiders for decades.

As Namibia's youngest and most underdeveloped region, people encounter human rights issues, including a scarcity of educational resources. The Kunene region has 77 schools, of which 72 are public schools and five private schools (EMIS, 2022). There are 50 primary schools, 20 combined schools and seven secondary schools in the Kunene region. The region supports approximately 22 393 primary learners and 7 503 secondary learners. In addition, the region employs 1200 primary and 983 secondary teachers. Of the 1200 primary teachers, 65 had no teacher training qualification, compared to six (6) secondary teachers. Given the Kunene region's fluctuating conditions, teachers might associate resilience with the ability to adapt to changing circumstances, such as drought, resource scarcity, and educational challenges. The region itself faces significant barriers to quality education, such as isolation, poor infrastructure, and teacher shortages (EMIS, 2022).

Nonetheless, the government has put in place a variety of initiatives and regulations to raise the quality and accessibility of education. Some of these initiatives include expanding classrooms and residences, recruiting additional teachers, offering government subsidies and free education, and increasing teacher capacity through ongoing training and the creation of a school nutrition programme. Such development to improve educational resources has the potential to attract teachers from other parts of Namibia. Namibia, like many developing countries, faces challenges in teacher recruitment and retention. The process typically involves a centralised system managed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, (MoLSW) and the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM). This centralised approach ensures consistency in standards and procedures across the country. Based on the Namibian National Employment Policy (Republic of Namibia: Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare [MoLSW], 2013) and Human Resources Development Policy Framework (Office of the Prime Minister [OPM], 2012) the teacher recruitment process in Namibia likely involves the following steps:

- **Identification of teacher shortages:** The Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture (MoEAC) identifies subject areas and regions with teacher shortages through regular assessments of the education system.
- **Advertising vacancies:** Vacancies are typically advertised through national newspapers, online platforms, and possibly local media outlets.



- **Application and screening:** Prospective teachers submit applications, which are screened based on qualifications, experience, and other relevant criteria.
- **Written examinations:** Qualified applicants may be required to write examinations to assess their subject knowledge and pedagogical skills.
- **Interviews:** Shortlisted candidates are typically interviewed by a panel of education experts to evaluate their suitability for teaching.
- **Background checks:** Successful candidates may undergo background checks to verify qualifications and conduct.
- **Appointment and deployment:** Appointed teachers are assigned to schools based on the needs of the education system.

Nevertheless, teachers in the Kunene region face numerous challenges. These include a dearth of trained teachers and resources in the area, as well as the community's different requirements due to the region's multi-ethnic population and diverse linguistic and cultural origins. Gu and Day (2007) identified several factors contributing to teachers' professional challenges. These included: negative interactions with parents, the pressures of performance-oriented policies, work-life imbalance, student behaviour issues, inadequate administrative support, and a lack of collegiality among staff. Aligning with Mokaleng and Möwes (2020), the lack of qualified teachers in remote regions like Kunene has a profound and detrimental impact on learners in the classroom. In their study, Mokaleng and Möwes (2020) found that teachers without proper training may lack the pedagogical skills to deliver engaging and effective lessons, inadequate subject expertise can hinder learners' understanding of complex concepts, and teachers may struggle to modify teaching materials to suit the specific needs and contexts of their students. Therefore, the lack of qualified teachers in Kunene has far-reaching consequences for learners, affecting their academic achievement, future prospects, and the overall development of the region. To address this issue, Mokaleng and Möwes (2020) suggest a comprehensive approach, including investing in teacher training, providing incentives for teachers to work in remote areas, and improving school infrastructure. Furthermore, as the population grows year after year and the number of learners in each classroom multiplies, this intensifies the teachers' challenges of teaching diverse classrooms. As a result, it is extremely important to investigate teachers' resilience in dealing with these challenges.

Extensive empirical evidence demonstrates that, in most parts of the world, teachers face a large work demands and adverse conditions which impair their resilience and

quality of life and may even compel them to slump in their job (Gu & Li, 2014; Naeimi, 2016; Platsidou & Daniilidou, 2021). Resilience is defined as the ability to adapt and overcome challenges, bouncing back from adversity (Yeo, 2011). It is about mental, emotional, and behavioural flexibility that allows individuals to navigate through tough times and emerge stronger (Naeimi, 2016). This aligns with Platsidou and Daniilidou's (2021) characterisation of resilience as the capacity to endure stress, process emotional pain, and progress, despite setbacks. Resilient teachers, as described by Fernandes et al. (2021), effectively employ coping strategies to navigate adversity.

This study specifically focused on teacher resilience. In the context of the teaching profession, resilience can be conceptualised as a capacity, a process, and an outcome (Mansfield et al., 2012). It involves the capacity of an individual teacher to utilise personal and contextual resources to overcome challenges (Beltman & Mansfield, 2018). Resilience is also a dynamic process where individual teacher characteristics and their personal and professional environments interact over time as teachers employ specific strategies. Ultimately, resilience leads to the outcome of a teacher experiencing professional growth, commitment, enthusiasm, satisfaction, and well-being (Beltman & Mansfield, 2018). To further establish a foundational understanding of this construct, it was essential to provide preliminary definitions. Brunetti (2006) characterises teacher resilience as a factor that sustains teachers' commitment to teaching amidst challenges. Gu and Day (2007) offer a similar perspective, conceptualising it as a teacher's capacity to navigate adversity, uphold their dedication to the profession, and concurrently engage in professional growth. Yonezawa et al. (2011) further contribute to this understanding by defining teacher resilience as the ability to confront and manage challenges to ensure student success. Moreover, Wuest and Subramaniam (2024) defined teachers' resilience as the ability to navigate personal and environmental challenges while maintaining their commitment to teaching. Marzoghpour (2024) conceptualises teachers' resilience as a dynamic interplay between personal attributes (e.g., self-esteem, anxiety, cognitive abilities) and contextual factors (e.g., support networks, workload) that influence responses to stress. Furthermore, Fernandes et al. (2021) offer a comparable definition of teacher resilience as the capacity of a teacher to adapt, learn, and grow in response to challenging or stressful conditions within the educational environment. It is the ability to maintain a positive outlook, commitment to teaching, and effectiveness in the face of adversity. In essence, teacher resilience is the ability to 'bounce back' from setbacks and continue to thrive as an educator.



Teachers in the Kunene region of Namibia require exceptional resilience due to the numerous challenges posed by the environment. These challenges include harsh weather, poor infrastructure, poverty, limited resources, cultural diversity, and isolation (EMIS, 2022). Given these factors, teachers in the Kunene region must be adaptable, resourceful, and committed to their profession to overcome these challenges and provide quality education. These factors create a demanding environment that requires teachers to be exceptionally resilient.

According to Hue and Kennedy (2014, p.112), a “diverse classroom” refers to a learning environment that encompasses learners from a wide variety of racial, ethnic, economic, linguistic, and religious backgrounds. It also refers to the presence of learners’ learning styles, interests, and abilities. Such a classroom environment requires the teachers’ resilience in response to instructional and behavioural challenges that may occur. Moreover, Clara (2017) added that resilient teachers have been defined as those who demonstrate the ability to adapt and persevere in the face of challenges and adversity, possess effective behaviour management strategies, and demonstrate empathy and understanding towards learners who may exhibit challenging behaviours or face personal difficulties. This aligns with the perspective of Howard and Johnson (2004) (as cited in Mansfield et al., 2016), that resilient teachers cultivate a mindset that emphasises the positive aspects of their work and experiences, celebrate successes, no matter how small, and maintain optimism. Furthermore, Yuan (2018) presents a similar viewpoint that resilient teachers derive a sense of pride and fulfilment from their work and demonstrate a strong commitment to their school community and the teaching profession (Yuan, 2018). Gu and Day (2007) discussed two approaches to define resilience. In the first approach, the authors define resilience as a psychological construct that examines personal qualities like self-esteem, self-efficacy, motivation, resourcefulness, and health. In the second approach, they defined resilience as a multifaceted concept shaped by social interactions. Gu and Day (2007) believe that while psychology primarily focuses on individual traits and characteristics associated with resilience, social work offers a broader perspective. Psychology views resilience as a complex interplay of factors within social systems, rather than solely as an individual attribute. These qualities are thought to help individuals cope with adversity and remain resilient. This approach aims to uncover the characteristics of a resilient individual. In the second approach, they view resilience as a complex and multidimensional process that exists within a social system of interrelationships.

Resilience has been studied in many disciplines, such as the social science, psychology, engineering, and medical field (Fredrickson, 2004; Henderson & Milstein, 2003; Luthar et al., 2000). While some studies have focused on teacher's resilience, very few have explored the resilience of teachers to thrive in the face of a diverse classroom (Mansfield et al., 2012). However, resilience in most educative research is often defined and viewed in the context of diverse learners. Resilience, when viewed through the lens of diverse learners, encompasses a complex interplay of factors influenced by various sociocultural, economic, and personal characteristics. Those with physical, sensory, cognitive, or emotional impairments often demonstrate exceptional resilience in overcoming challenges to achieve their educational goals (Day & Gu, 2013; Mansfield & Beltman, 2019).

For example, Castro et al. (2010) focuses on teacher resilience, specifically the dynamic process of managing challenges and the role of individual agency, while the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2018) defines resilience as the capacity to adapt to change and overcome adversity within a globalized context, and Stewart et al. (2021) describe resilience as the ability of teachers to keep faith in themselves and their efficacy when faced with challenging behaviour exhibited by learners with differing needs. Additionally, the literature tends to define resilience as the "individual's ability to properly adapt to stress and adversity" (Yuan, 2018, p.26). They Mansfield et al. (2016, p.80) define resilience as the capacity of an individual to harness personal and environmental resources to "bounce back" and continue to thrive in the face of challenges. These definitions are consistent with the American Psychological Association's definition that resilience is the ability to adjust effectively in the face of hardship, trauma, tragedy, threats, or major sources of stress, such as issues with one's family, relationships, career, or finances (OECD, 2010; UNESCO, 2019).

In the educational setting, resilience lessens the negative effects that difficult life situations, such as work pressure, family problems, relationship problems, school stress, health problems, and catastrophic life events (such as death or loss) may have on teachers. Mokaleng and Möwes (2020) discussed school resilience and how teachers who work in a diverse setting can adopt resilience to manage problems that stretch them to the limit. Studies have confirmed the significance of cultural competency, social-emotional learning, supportive school environments, and resource accessibility in promoting the resilience of teachers and reducing the negative effects of stress and



burnout (Allen et al., 2015; Cefai, 2007; Mansfield et al., 2016). In Uganda, Wabule (2020) found that higher workload, a lack of assistance, difficult learners' behaviour, satisfying the complex and varied needs of learners, and a negative public perception are some of the challenging situations for teachers.

However, as stated by Jennings et al. (2013), social recognition enhances a teacher's capacity to create and manage a well-organised learning environment that offers learners the best possible instructional support. In a similar vein, Fullan (2009) and Sahlberg (2011) emphasise the significance of wide public support and a strong agenda that improves the mental health and competency of teachers. It is asserted that teachers who receive more positive feedback from supervisors cultivate happy feelings at work, are better able to handle pressure at work, and can create and maintain supportive learning environments. Patterson et al. (2004) found seven essential components that support teachers' resilience: 1) Having a positive attitude in the face of hardship; 2) remaining committed to your priorities; 3) being adaptable in how you reach your objectives; 4) taking initiative; 5) fostering a supportive environment on a personal and professional level; 6) upholding high standards of performance for parents, teachers, and learners; and 7) fostering a sense of shared responsibility and participation (Wabule, 2020).

Regarding teaching in diverse classrooms, Forghani-Arani et al. (2019) and Doll and Song (2023) state that teachers face complex challenges. These challenges include tailoring instruction to individual learning styles and academic readiness, navigating cultural and language barriers, addressing unconscious biases, managing behavioural differences, and fostering meaningful parental participation from various backgrounds. However, by differentiating instruction based on learners' individual needs, learning styles, and abilities, teachers can ensure that all learners have access to appropriately challenging and engaging learning experiences. This might involve providing additional support for struggling learners, offering enrichment activities for advanced learners, and adjusting teaching methods to accommodate diverse learning styles. According to Ragoonaden et al. (2015) and Santoro and Forghani-Arani (2015), the strategies for facilitating and promoting resilience among teachers in diverse classrooms involve adopting proactive approaches to address challenges, fostering a supportive learning environment, and promoting the success of all learners. Finally, prioritising self-care and seeking support from colleagues, mentors, and mental health professionals is crucial for maintaining resilience and preventing burnout. Cornelissen (2016) and Schmidt

and Janusch (2016) assert that teachers must recognise their limitations, set boundaries, and practice self-care strategies such as mindfulness, exercise, and seeking emotional support when needed. The same authors agree that by implementing these resilient strategies, teachers can create inclusive learning environments where all learners feel supported, challenged, and empowered to succeed academically and personally.

Nonetheless, there are still gaps in our knowledge of the precise elements that support teachers' resilience in handling diverse classrooms and the processes by which these elements function in Namibia. According to Clark et al. (2014), to enhance teachers' individual and collective resilience, research calls for the need to understand how resilience operates in the dynamic and evolving field of education. With this background in mind, the study aims to investigate teachers' resilience in managing learners in diverse classrooms in the Kunene region of Namibia. The study was directed by the aims listed below:

- To determine the awareness of resilience in educational processes in teachers in the Kunene region.
- To investigate factors that contribute to teachers' resilience in managing learners in varied classrooms throughout the Kunene region.
- To explore how teachers in the Kunene region perceive the issues of cultural diversity, linguistic variety, and diverse learning requirements among learners.
- To identify the resilient techniques that teachers from the Kunene region use to promote inclusive practices, reduce inequities, and support all learners' academic and socio-emotional development.

This study contributes to the existing literature on inclusive education and teacher resilience by providing insights into the experiences of teachers in the Kunene region of Namibia. In addition, the study informs policymakers, teachers, and stakeholders about effective strategies for managing diverse classrooms and promoting teachers' resilience in challenging educational contexts. This research supports efforts to enhance inclusive education practices and support systems.



Method

Approach and design

The current study used a qualitative research approach and a case study design to explore teachers' resilience in managing learners in diverse classrooms. According to Creswell and Plano-Clark (2017), qualitative research is renowned for its capacity to comprehend phenomena from the participants' perspective. Creswell's (2012) assertion highlights a core strength of case study research as its capacity to delve deeply into a particular phenomenon. Unlike quantitative methods that often prioritise breadth and generalisability, case studies prioritise depth and context-specific understanding; hence, the choice. The study aims to capture the richness and complexity of the human experiences, perceptions, and behaviours of teachers teaching in the remote area of the Kunene region in Namibia.

Study setting

The Outjo circuit is an education circuit within the Kunene Region of Namibia. It encompasses schools in the Outjo, Khorixas, and Fransfontein areas. Approximately 7 969 learners are enrolled in the circuit's 20 schools (including one private school). A significant challenge is the lack of qualified teachers, with 33% of teachers deployed in the circuit being unqualified. This is due to various factors, including the region's remoteness and lack of housing for teachers. Some schools in the circuit face infrastructure challenges, particularly in terms of sanitation and classroom facilities. The circuit faces issues such as substance abuse among learners, lack of parental involvement, and limited access to educational resources.

Population and samples

The population of a study is the entire collection of individuals, objects, or events that a researcher draws conclusions on (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2017). In the current study, the population comprised 100 teachers in the Outjo circuit in the Kunene region of Namibia and a sample of 25 teachers were purposefully selected for the study. Purposive sampling, also referred to as judgmental or selective sampling, is a non-probability sampling technique used in research. The selection criteria were that the teacher must have four years of teaching experience and have lived in the Kunene region for three consecutive years. By strategically selecting teachers who face similar

remote teaching challenges, researchers are more likely to gather in-depth and relevant data. These teachers' experiences can provide richer insights than a random sample that might include teachers from non-remote areas. Additionally, a population of 20 schools in the Outjo circuit was included in this study. Nine junior primary, seven senior primary, and four secondary schools were purposefully selected based on their rural and remote locations. This selection criterion allowed researchers to gain deeper insights into the lived experiences of teachers in these challenging environments. Notably, most teachers work in the junior primary phase (13 teachers), followed by senior primary (9 teachers), and secondary (8 teachers).

Instruments for collecting data

A self-administered questionnaire with open-ended questions and structured interviews with all participants were used to collect data. According to Bertram and Christiansen (2014), structured in-depth interviews can be used to obtain in-depth, rich information about participants' thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, reasoning, motives, and feelings regarding a topic under inquiry. Furthermore, open-ended questions allow respondents to elaborate on their views, experiences, and opinions, resulting in more comprehensive data. They also reveal the emotional tone and sentiment that underpin responses, providing useful context for understanding attitudes and opinions.

Data collection procedures

According to Cohen et al. (2011), researchers must consider informed consent from the beginning of a study. This often entails obtaining permission to access the research site and from the individuals involved. In this study, permission was requested and obtained from the Kunene region directorate of education prior to data collection. The participants were also informed about the research purpose. It was further ensured that the data collection processes did not disrupt the participants work. The participants were interviewed in the comfort of their own offices and they selected the interview date and time that suited their schedules. The regional school counsellor administered the questionnaires to the participants, and they were given a day to complete and return them. The interviews, on the other hand, were conducted after school hours to avoid classroom interruptions and they lasted approximately 45 minutes.



Data analysis

The interview transcripts and questionnaire responses were transcribed verbatim. The data were analysed thematically, which refers to identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns or themes across the data (Creswell, 2012). The transcribed data were read repeatedly to gain a holistic view of the experiences of the participants on teachers' resilience in managing learners in diverse classrooms. The meaningful segments in the text were labelled with a code. To ensure the validity of the findings, the analysis process was discussed between the three researchers until the final set of categories and the predominant themes accurately representing the interviews had been established. To protect the identity of participants, pseudonyms were used (T1-25) in the reporting process. The T1-25 are used for this paper only.

Ethical considerations

Prior to collecting data, permission to conduct the study was granted by the Directorate of Education, Arts, and Culture of Kunene region and the principals of the participating schools. The Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture granted permission for the research to be conducted on 24 January 2024. Ethical considerations were observed as the researchers made telephonic appointments prior to visiting the schools and explained the scope and purpose of the study as well as the intended outcomes to both the school principals and teachers (participants). Participants' consent was sought and obtained, and they were assured that their responses would be kept confidential. Participation was voluntary and the participants were allowed to cease their participation without any fear of retribution. All potential participants agreed to take part in the study.

Findings

Data presentation

The thematic analysis of interview data and open-ended responses revealed key themes directly connected to the research aims of this study. Before the presentation of data and findings, it is important to reiterate the research objective of the study as follows:

- To determine the awareness of resilience in educational processes in teachers in the Kunene region.
- To investigate factors that contribute to teachers' resilience in managing learners in varied classrooms throughout the Kunene region.

- To explore how teachers in the Kunene region perceive the issues of cultural diversity, linguistic variety, and diverse learning requirements among learners.
- To identify the resilient techniques that the teachers from the Kunene region use to promote inclusive practices, reduce inequities, and support all learners' academic and socio-emotional development.

First, the biographical information of participants (interviewed teachers) is displayed in Table 1 below, followed by a discussion of the emerging themes.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the participants

No	Demographic Characteristics	Total	%	
1	Gender	Male	10	40%
		Female	15	60%
2	Age range	20-25	0	0%
		26-30	2	8%
		31-35	4	16%
		36-40	7	28%
		41-45	2	8%
		46-50	3	12%
		51-55	2	8%
		56-60	1	4%
3	Qualifications	Bachelor of Education [B.Ed. Hons]	15	60%
		Basic Education Teacher Diploma	8	32%
		Advanced Diploma in Education	1	4%
		Master's degree in Education	1	4%
		PhD in Education	0	0%
4	Years of experience	1-5	2	8%
		6-10	3	12%
		11-15	7	28%
		16-20	6	24%
		21-25	2	8%
		26-30	2	8%
		31+	3	12%
5	Phase of teaching	Junior Primary	13	52%
		Senior Primary	9	36%
		Secondary	6	24%

N=25



Table 1 shows an overview of the biographical information of the participants. The analysis of 25 teachers reveals a predominantly female participation (15 females and 10 males), with the majority having experience clustered between 11–15 years (7 teachers) and 16–20 years (6 teachers) of service. Notably, most teachers work in the junior primary phase (13 teachers), followed by senior primary (9 teachers), and secondary (6 teachers). In addition, Table 1 shows a considerable disparity in teachers' qualifications. Most of the teachers have a Bachelor of Education (Hons) (15 teachers) or a Basic Education Teacher Diploma (BETD) (8 teachers), while two teachers possess an Advanced Diploma or a Master's Degree in Education.

Theme I: Understanding resilience in education

When asked about their understanding of resilience, the participants offered a variety of perspectives. Resilience, as described by teachers, encompasses intentional strategies, approaches, and interventions to develop resilience in diverse learners. It means being able to recover quickly, despite facing various challenges in a diverse classroom, ensuring that teaching and learning continue uninterrupted. To further emphasise the authentic voices of the participants, verbatim excerpts from their responses were included. This approach allows their perspectives to be directly heard and understood. The following are extracts from participants:

“Mhmm... resilience is the ability to cope and bounce back from a difficult experience. A teacher needs to manage a class with learners from different backgrounds. (T4)

Resilience, essential for teachers..., aah... involves the capacity to handle and rebound from challenging situations. This skill is vital for effectively managing classrooms with learners from diverse backgrounds. (T3)

This trait is crucial for teachers, as it impacts their performance in the classroom, including their ability to handle and manage behaviours and diverse attitudes from learners of different grades and backgrounds. In addition, the participants' responses further suggest that resilience involves the capacity to cope and bounce back from difficult experiences, allowing teachers to effectively manage classrooms with learners from diverse backgrounds. One participant indicated that:

To me... mmmh... resilience is the process through which many protective factors-things that will help you to cope, and cope, and risk factors things that make it harder for you to cope-interact. It can help protect you from mental health conditions, such as depression and anxiety. (T5)

The participants further mentioned that resilience refers to protective variables, which facilitate coping and protect teachers from mental health conditions including anxiety and depression. For instance, another participant stated that:

“resilience is the capacity to navigate and rebound from challenges, proves indispensable for educators overseeing classrooms populated by learners from varied backgrounds” (T9).

The teachers further alluded that resilience is the ability of teachers to endure and maintain their effectiveness in the face of adversity, which is essential for teachers to successfully traverse diverse classrooms and guarantee the success of every learner. In this case, one participant defined resilience:

“as the ability to handle and manage various behaviours and attitudes from different learners in different grades and find your footing to cope well” (T19).

Theme 2: Factors contributing to teacher resilience

In response to the question about the factors that contribute to teacher resilience in managing diverse classrooms, the participants highlighted the significance of fostering resilience through cultural sensitivity and inclusive practices in diverse classrooms. They explained that the factors affecting their resilience include cultural awareness, language support, inclusive teaching practices, careful communication, and fostering a positive classroom environment. Below are some examples of data extracts:

I am committed to employing a variety of teaching methods and strategies that cater to diverse learning styles and abilities, ensuring all learners have an equal opportunity to succeed. (T5)

...mmmm... yeah... I strive to create opportunities for learners to share their cultures and learn from each other, fostering a richer learning experience for everyone. (T4)

The participants emphasised that, to promote diversity, it is essential to incorporate cultural understanding, encourage interchange and appreciation, and offer linguistic support. For example, one participant stated that:

recognising the importance of language acquisition, I will provide necessary support and accommodations to ensure all learners can fully participate and reach their full potential” (T6).

Another participant shared that:

I actively promote respect for cultural and tribal differences in my classroom. I encourage learners to embrace these differences and value each other as individuals. This message resonates well with them because I share real-life examples of how our school staff members value and respect one another despite their own backgrounds. Seeing this positive role modelling helps learners understand the importance of celebrating diversity. (T6)



The participants further indicated that it is crucial to choose words and use examples carefully to maintain objectivity and promote a positive outlook, especially for learners whose mother tongues are not the same as the language spoken in the area. One participant (T1) emphasised the importance of clear and unbiased communication in teaching, emphasising the importance of carefully selecting words and examples to ensure all learners feel included and respected. They also emphasised the importance of active listening and observation to better understand each learner's needs and perspectives.

mmm.....communicating effectively with learners who spoke different languages or dialects challenged me to improve my communication skills. (T3)

I learned to use simplified language gestures and non-verbal cues to convey information clearly. I developed listening skills to better understand learners needs and foster a more supportive environment. (T11)

This suggests that the participants feel that strictly using English in the classroom encourages homogeneity and valuing ethnic and tribal distinctions fosters a friendly atmosphere. participants suggested that demonstrating a commitment to diversity, active listening, customised learning methodologies, and individual needs support are beneficial for all learners.

Theme 3: Challenges of teachers in diverse classrooms

The analysis of data revealed that teachers in diverse classrooms face a complex set of challenges that impede the teaching and learning process. The participants narrated that they struggle with classroom management issues like indiscipline, absenteeism, late coming, and low self-esteem among learners. Below are the extracts from the interview to substantiate these inferences:

In my case ... mhhh ... the challenges are learners with low self-esteem and those coming from impoverished families. (T7)

Absenteeism, low self-esteem, and poor cleanliness are the most challenging issues in this location. (T9)

Disciplined learners, absenteeism, and tardiness. I personally respond to each infringement as soon as possible to prevent the problem from worsening. I also informed the learners that if they misbehaved, I would call their parents; they are terrified of that. (T22)

Furthermore, the participants reported that they deal with issues beyond their immediate control, such as learners' backgrounds (cultural, tribal, and socioeconomic), limited time and resources, and their personal biases. One participant shared that:

“... here ... teachers are getting learners from diverse backgrounds example culturally, tribally and living conditions, which is not easy at all” (T15).

In addition, language barriers due to learners not knowing Afrikaans or preferring their mother tongue, learning difficulties, and resistance to participate in assessments, further complicate the teaching experience. The participants in diverse classrooms often handle a high workload with insufficient support from school management. For example, one participant narrated that:

“When I had learners from different backgrounds who did not know Afrikaans before, it gave me headaches” (T12).

The participants indicated that they face a lack of parental involvement and the additional responsibility of implementing learning support for learners who are behind (repeating grades) or transferred to the next grade without mastering the basic competencies of the current grade. Moreover, large class sizes and a decreasing level of overall support can make it even harder for teachers to manage everything effectively.

That is, one participant stated that:

“learners with learning difficulties tend to distract others and usually speak in their mother tongues and this made it harder to maintain classroom management as intended” (T18).

Another participant added that:

“In my class, a learner refused to complete an exam. I confronted the learners and warned her of the consequences of not writing. I imposed punishment, and the learner cooperated afterwards” (T20).

Another participant alluded that:

As a teacher, I need to get to know my learners, maintain consistent communication, and practice. Time constraints, insufficient resources, personal beliefs and biases, and inadequate guidance are some of the major challenges that teachers face. On the other hand, teachers will demonstrate teacher equality, enthusiasm, and commitment, as well as positive outcomes for learners. (6)

mmm... learners from diverse cultural backgrounds face problems such as misconceptions, language barriers, cultural variances, and socioeconomic inequities. (T13)

Theme 4: Resilient strategies used by teachers

When asked about their resilient strategies for managing diverse learners, the participants shared several approaches that they regard as effective. One participant



shared that resilience includes cultivating a positive classroom culture, fostering independence, and instilling a sense of responsibility among learners. The following extracts from the interview responses resilient strategies for managing diverse learners:

Teachers who emphasise self-care are better prepared to instil confidence in their learners. Teachers inspire learners to believe in themselves and their talents by demonstrating self-compassion and a love of learning. (T9)

I always make it clear to the learners to embrace cultural and tribal differences and for them to value each other and everyone regardless of their differences. learners tend to understand this concept very well because I gave them examples of how staff members also value one another regardless of differences. (T10)

The responses above suggest that the teachers emphasised the importance of engaging with individual learners to understand the underlying reasons for their behaviour and providing appropriate consequences for misconduct. In addition, another participant responded that:

“Encouraging learners to use their first languages and incorporating multicultural materials into the classroom creates a welcoming environment where all learners feel accepted and valued. This sense of belonging ultimately fosters a more positive learning experience for everyone” (15).

A further strategy emerging from the teachers’ responses is related to the significance of self-awareness and clarity regarding the primary duties of a teacher and enabling them to anticipate and promptly address any challenges that may arise. The participants also stressed the importance of identifying learners facing difficulties and offering extra classes, remedial teaching, and personalised attention to support their learning. One participant shared that *“I keep myself physically and mentally fit at any cost”* (T3). Another participant added that:

Fostering an inclusive classroom requires teachers to be attentive to all learners. This means actively listening to their needs and concerns. It is also important to provide a scaffolded approach to learning, where instruction adapts to different learning styles and paces. By being aware of each learner’s strengths and challenges, teachers can provide targeted support that benefits everyone. Celebrating diversity is another key element. (T11)

The findings further suggest that the participants advocated for acknowledging and processing one’s own emotions, drawing inspiration from colleagues, practising active listening and empathy, maintaining a calm and composed demeanour, and developing cultural competence to effectively navigate diverse classroom environments. The

participants suggested that:

Learn what is shaping learners. Create a safe space to learn about team member's backgrounds and what has been vital in shaping their lives. Find out how learners feel, confront stereotypes head-on, walk in someone else's shoes, enforce consistent classroom rules, use supportive language and be positive all the time. (T1)

Peer assistance and mentorship programs promote teamwork and a sense of community. Building trust and rapport with learners facilitates open communication and creates a safe learning environment. Finally, structure and routine establish a predictable and secure atmosphere in which learners can thrive. (T18)

I promote positive reinforcement and recognition to recognise learners' accomplishments and boost confidence. To me... aaah... promoting cultural exchange and appreciation, language support and accommodation, inclusive teaching practices, and community building activities is vital. (T8)

Overall, the findings suggest that resilient teachers in diverse classes tend to use a variety of strategies to effectively address problems. These may include fostering an inclusive culture, using culturally responsive teaching practices, developing strong relationships with learners and their families, implementing flexible and differentiated instruction, encouraging empathy and understanding among learners, and seeking ongoing professional development to improve their skills in addressing diverse needs.

Moreover, the findings suggest that teachers can promote a healthy learning environment by establishing boundaries between work and personal life, managing stress, and engaging in self-care. Some participants believe that strategic planning is essential for being an effective resilient teacher, which includes setting clear goals, using approaches like peer tutoring and teamwork, and practising effective time management.

Discussion

The current study investigated teacher resilience in managing classrooms with diverse learners in Namibia's Kunene region. The findings shed light on a variety of aspects related to resilience, cultural diversity, and effective teaching strategies in the Kunene region. The key findings, based on the research objectives, are discussed below.



Teachers' understanding of resilience in education

The first theme highlights teachers' diverse perspectives on resilience. It emerged that teachers view resilience as more than just bouncing back from difficulties, but intentional strategies to overcome challenges and ensure continuous teaching and learning in diverse classrooms. The ability to manage the behaviours and attitudes of learners of different backgrounds is seen as essential for maintaining classroom effectiveness. Teachers view resilience as a multi-faceted concept involving strategies to support learner resilience and personal ability to bounce back from challenges in diverse classrooms. It allows them to maintain effective teaching despite various learner backgrounds and behaviours. Resilience protects them from mental health issues like anxiety and depression. The findings of the current study are consistent with those of Mansfield et al. (2016, p.80), who defined resilience as an "individual's ability to properly adapt to stress and adversity". This is also consistent with the American Psychological Association's (2012) definition, which states that resilience is the ability to adjust effectively in the face of hardship, trauma, tragedy, threats, or major sources of stress, such as issues with one's family, relationships, career, or finances. This study produced results that corroborated the findings of a previous work in this field. For example, Gu and Day (2007) described resilience as a psychological concept that focuses on personal characteristics such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, motivation, resourcefulness, and overall health. These qualities are believed to equip individuals to cope with challenges and maintain resilience.

Factors contributing to teacher resilience

The second theme emphasises the importance of cultural sensitivity and inclusive practices in fostering teacher resilience. Teachers stress the significance of cultural awareness, language support, and fostering a positive classroom environment to promote diversity. By incorporating cultural understanding and offering linguistic support, teachers aim to create an inclusive learning environment where all learners feel valued and supported. Teachers must be sensitive to the cultural backgrounds of their learners. Understanding cultural norms, values, and practices can help teachers better connect with their learners and create a more inclusive learning environment. This includes recognising and valuing cultural diversity, incorporating culturally relevant content into lessons, and promoting respect for different cultural perspectives among learners. This finding collaborated with those of previous studies (Allen et al., 2015; Cefai, 2007; Mansfield et al., 2016) that confirmed the significance of cultural

competency, social-emotional learning, supportive school environments, and resource accessibility in promoting the resilience of teachers and reducing the negative effects of stress and burnout.

In addition, inclusive teaching practices involve creating learning experiences that meet the needs of all learners, regardless of their background or abilities. This includes differentiating instructions to accommodate diverse learning styles and abilities, providing additional support for learners who may need it, and fostering a sense of belonging for all learners in the classroom. Inclusive teaching practices help create an equitable learning environment where every student can succeed. The participants emphasised clear and unbiased communication, active listening, and respecting diverse perspectives as factors contributing to effective communication. Effective communication is essential in building positive relationships with learners and fostering a supportive classroom environment. Therefore, teachers must communicate clearly and respectfully with learners, using language that is inclusive and free from bias. They should also be attentive listeners, actively seeking to understand learners' perspectives and concerns. By promoting open and respectful communication, teachers can create a safe and welcoming space where learners feel valued and understood. The present findings are consistent with other research findings which confirmed the significance of cultural competency, social-emotional learning, supportive school environments, and resource accessibility in promoting the resilience of teachers and reducing the negative effects of stress and burnout (Allen et al., 2015; Cefai, 2007).

Similarly, teachers play a crucial role in creating a conducive environment by establishing clear expectations, promoting mutual respect among learners, and celebrating diversity. By fostering a sense of community and belonging in the classroom, teachers can help learners feel more engaged and resilient in the face of challenges. Creating a safe and inclusive space through celebrating differences and promoting mutual respect is crucial for learning. This finding concurs with those of Jennings et al. (2013), which suggest that social recognition enhances a teacher's capacity to create and manage a well-organised learning environment that offers learners the best possible instructional support.

Challenges for teachers in different classrooms

The third theme outlines the complex challenges faced by teachers when dealing with diverse classrooms. These include indiscipline, absenteeism, language barriers, and limited resources. These challenges not only affect classroom management, but



they also impact the overall teaching and learning process. Teachers often handle high workloads with insufficient support, facing issues beyond their control such as learners' diverse backgrounds and personal biases. These challenges arise due to cultural, tribal, socioeconomic, and linguistic differences. In addition, large class sizes, and a lack of time and support can create a strain on teachers, and teachers acknowledge the need to be aware of, and address their own biases. These results are consistent with those of other studies and suggest that teachers today grapple with a multitude of complex challenges (Allen et al., 2015; Mansfield et al., 2016 & Wabule, 2020). Cerna and Bannon (2019) and Doll and Song (2023) highlighted some of these challenges, such as tailoring instruction to individual needs, navigating cultural and linguistic diversity, mitigating unconscious bias, managing behavioural differences, and fostering meaningful parental involvement across various backgrounds.

Differentiation, for example, is a key strategy to address these challenges. By tailoring instruction to the learners' individual needs, learning styles, and abilities, teachers can ensure that all learners have access to appropriately challenging and engaging experiences. This may include providing additional support for struggling learners, offering enrichment activities for advanced learners, and adjusting teaching methods to accommodate diverse learning styles. This finding concurs with Ragoonaden et al. (2015) and Santoro and Forghani-Arani (2015) who found that the strategies for facilitating and promoting resilience among teachers in diverse classrooms involves adopting proactive approaches to address challenges, fostering a supportive learning environment, and promoting the success of all learners.

Resilient strategies used by teachers

Finally, the fourth theme explores resilient strategies employed by teachers to manage diverse learners effectively. These strategies include fostering a positive classroom culture, providing personalised support, and practising self-care. The results showed that the participants emphasised the importance of engaging with individual learners, maintaining clear communication, and promoting cultural competence to navigate diverse classroom environments successfully. From the current study, it is understood that a positive classroom environment thrives on learner independence, responsibility, and mutual respect. To achieve this, teachers should cater to the individual needs of learners through targeted interventions and personalised attention. Additionally, prioritising self-care, collaborating with colleagues, and continuous learning are essential for teacher well-being and professional growth. Finally, culturally responsive teaching methods that celebrate diversity and promote empathy are key to fostering

a successful learning environment for all learners. It is worth noting that other studies have also reported on some strategies in this regard (Ragoonaden et al., 2015; Santoro & Forghani-Arani, 2015). Ragoonaden et al. (2015) reported on strategies such as adopting proactive approaches to address challenges, fostering a supportive learning environment, and promoting the success of all learners. The authors also found that prioritising self-care and seeking support from colleagues, mentors, and mental health professionals is crucial for maintaining resilience and preventing burnout. Accordingly, Cornelissen (2016) and Schmidt and Janusch (2016) emphasised the importance of teachers' ability to recognise their limitations and set boundaries. Cornelissen (2016) recommend self-care strategies like mindfulness, exercise, and seeking emotional support when needed. These studies further suggest that by implementing these resilience-building strategies, teachers can create inclusive learning environments where all learners feel supported, challenged, and empowered to succeed academically and personally (Cornelissen, 2016; Schmidt & Janusch, 2016).

Conclusion and practical implications

The current study revealed critical issues faced by teachers in diverse classrooms, including indiscipline, absenteeism, language barriers, and insufficient resources. The findings have substantial consequences for teachers, policymakers, school administration, and parents alike.

Practical implications

For teachers

- Addressing indiscipline and absenteeism: The current study highlights indiscipline and absenteeism as critical issues. Teachers can leverage the findings to:
 - Collaborate with school management to develop strategies for addressing these issues, including implementing the customised code of conduct mentioned in the separate study.
 - Develop engaging lesson plans that cater to diverse learning styles and needs to reduce boredom and potential disruptive behaviour.
 - Implement attendance incentives and support systems to address absenteeism and encourage regular participation.



- Overcoming language barriers: The current study identifies language barriers as a challenge. Teachers can:
 - Work with school administration to access resources for differentiated instructions that cater to diverse language abilities.
 - Develop culturally responsive teaching practices that value students' backgrounds and languages.
 - Explore collaborative learning strategies to promote peer support and language acquisition.
- Addressing insufficient resources: The lack of resources hinders effective instruction. Teachers can:
 - Advocate for increased funding by collaborating with school administrators and parents to present data on resource needs.
 - Get creative with available resources by utilising technology and low-cost learning materials.
 - Share resources and best practices with colleagues to maximise the use of available materials.

For policymakers

- Investment in education: The current study emphasises the need for increased educational funding. Policymakers can:
 - Allocate resources to address teacher workload, class sizes, and access to learning materials.
 - Develop programmes to support teachers in diverse classrooms through professional development and training for managing language barriers and other challenges.
 - Invest in research and development of effective teaching strategies for diverse classrooms.

For school administration

- Collaborative code of conduct: Partner with teachers and parents to develop a customised code of conduct as suggested in the separate study. This will establish clear expectations and consequences for student behaviour.
- Resource allocation and budgeting: Advocate for increased budgets for learning materials and allocate resources effectively based on teacher needs

identified in the study.

- Teacher training and support: Prioritise professional development programmes to equip teachers with strategies for managing diverse classrooms, addressing language barriers, and utilising technology effectively.

For Parents

- Active engagement: Attend school meetings and participate in discussions about the customised code of conduct.
- Home-school communication: Maintain regular communication with teachers to understand classroom expectations and challenges.
- Supporting language learning: Collaborate with teachers to understand their strategies for addressing language barriers and explore ways to support learning at home.
- Advocacy for resources: Join efforts with teachers and school administration to advocate for increased educational funding.

By implementing these practical implications based on the study's findings, each stakeholder group can contribute to improving the learning environment for students in diverse classrooms.

Future research

Further research is required to explore the perspectives of school administration and parents on navigating diverse classroom cultures using a mixed-methods approach. Understanding how cultural backgrounds influence learning environments can inform the development of even more effective strategies that promote mutual understanding and accommodation of cultural values and principles within the classroom, ultimately leading to a more inclusive and successful learning experience for all learners. It is, however, crucial to consider the possibility of bias in teachers' responses; thus, with a small sample size, caution must be exercised, as the findings may not apply to other circumstances.

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