# TEACHER PERCEPTIONS, KNOWLEDGE AND INTERVENTION ON HOMOSEXUAL LEARNERS IN HIGH SCHOOLS AROUND THE GERT SIBANDE DISTRICT OF THE MPUMALANGA PROVINCE: TOWARDS A RESPONSIVE INTERVENTION

**by**

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**DECLARATION**

This is to declare that the research described in this thesis, excluding where otherwise specified, is my original research. No other person's work has been used without recognition in the main text of the thesis. This thesis has only been submitted for a degree at the University of Limpopo and nowhere else. All other procedures stated in the thesis were granted approval from the relevant Ethics/Faculty Higher Degrees Committee.

Signed:


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**NKOSI, C.D.**                          **DATE**

**DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis to my late father and mother, Johannes and Lisbeth. I will always remember your teachings, support, guidance and unconditional love. I also dedicate this thesis to my late brother, Mdutshwa, to whom I promised a PhD, and he always believed in me.  My husband Graham Phiri and children, Sindile, Lifa, Phila, Phumlani, I appreciate your IT skills, and little Siphelele; thank you guys, you were always there for me.

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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored teacher perceptions, knowledge and intervention of homosexual learners in high schools in the Gert Sibande District of Mpumalanga. Homophobic issues have proven to be rife in high schools in Mpumalanga. Therefore, it was commendable to understand how teachers perceive the homosexuality of these minority learners. That reason directed the purpose of this study, as teachers should teach, guide and protect all learners in the school. Hence, it was crucial to ascertain how they deal with homophobic attitudes or whether they are even aware of homophobic attitudes within schools.

This study adopted Gibson's Theory of Direct Perception, the top-down and constructivist theory, to understand teacher perceptions and knowledge of the homosexuality of high school learners. This study used a case study design and empirical studies were extensively reviewed to corroborate data gathered through individual interviews and document analysis.

Data generated from the semi-structured individual interviews were analysed through Thematic Content Analysis. Numerous findings emerged from this research. Firstly, it became evident that teacher perceptions of learners' homosexuality were hampered by their lack of knowledge about the phenomenon. It follows that there was no mention of homosexuality as a concept during their teacher education. Even in practice, the concept is not precisely included in the curriculum. Secondly, teachers appeared to have negative perceptions and a misunderstanding of the homosexuality of learners because they are obstructed by their own beliefs – namely, the Christian religion and their culture – in recognising homosexual learners in high schools. They still believe in stereotypes and myths which are encouraging homophobic behaviour. Thirdly, no homophobic incident was documented and as a result, no one was able to refer to previous or common incidents. The teachers confirmed that management resonated the same sentiments as everybody else at the expense of homosexual learners, who are rendered voiceless and vulnerable to discrimination, violence and isolation. This study recommends a speedy intervention from the Department of Basic Education to equip teachers with the necessary knowledge and accurate information on homosexuality as a concept for school communities.

This study offered sufficient evidence for the claim that secondary school teachers' perceptions, knowledge and intervention need to be challenged and homosexuality should be explicitly included in the curriculum to benefit the minority youth in high schools.

**LIST OF ACRONYMS**

| | |
|---|---|
| DBE | Department of Basic Education |
| DoE | Department of Education |
| DoJ | Department of Justice |
| LGBTI | Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organization |
| NPO | Non-Profit Organisation |
| SBST | School-Based Support Team |
| SGB | School Governing Body |
| SMT | School Management Team |

**LIST OF TABLES**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

# CHAPTER ONE: SETTING THE SCENE

## 1.1 BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

Homosexuality is on the rise and homosexuals either appear so or are identified by a society with different perceptions of homosexuality, which may result in intolerance or homophobia. People are judged based on suspicion or appearance (SMUG, 2014).

Most states in Europe, South-east Asia, Latin America, North America and Australia are of the view that homosexuality ought to be recognised by society (Khazan, 2013). In the United States of America, a recent survey conducted by Sarah Kate Ellis reflected an erosion of homosexual tolerance amongst societies. For example, a baker refused to bake a cake for a gay couple because of his own Christian faith.  As reported by Amnesty International, homosexuality is still illegal in 38 African countries and legal in only 16 African countries, including South Africa. Unfortunately, assaults on gays and lesbians have become familiar incidences. Currently, fierceness and aggression against this segment of the population have accelerated to shocking levels in virtually every part of the world (Allotey, 2015; Miller, 2018). Moreover, homophobia and discrimination against gay youth remain unchallenged in many South African schools (Lees, 2017; Davis, 2018).

There is presently a shortage of educational investigations around how educators perceive, comprehend and speak about homosexuality in South African high schools. This scenario necessitates investigation in this area by scholars (Bhana, 2012; Francis, 2012b; Davis, 2018). Homosexual learners in high schools endure and experience ill-treatment in the form of being judged, as well as experiencing segregation, violence, relegation and insults from both their teachers and peers. This means that homosexual learners are often exposed to homophobic school environments (Mostert, 2013; Msibi, 2014; Kruger, 2011; Akhtar, 2011). As emphasised by Mudrey-Camino (2002) and Kruger (2011), school surroundings are problematic spaces for lesbian and gay learners and may have negative effects on their learning and emotional state. Therefore, to advance conducive conditions of learning and teaching for homosexual learners in schools,

teaching and non-teaching staff and learners need to be mindful of the challenges faced by homosexual learners in their school environments. Unfortunately, teachers are also reported as being perpetrators of homophobia, either by choice or a lack of knowledge and understanding.

Schools and teachers do not have policies to refer to when teaching or dealing with student homosexuality as the Department of Basic Education (DBE) does not have policies on homosexual education (Francis, 2012b). However, it must be understood that teachers work without any intervention and support (Bhana, 2012). Therefore, teachers need to be heard and understood on how they perceive and deal with homosexuality in South African high schools. Several studies have been conducted on homophobic bullying in secondary schools, but such studies do not adequately examine teachers' perspectives and knowledge of homosexuality amongst learners, except for incidences where teachers need to intervene (Kruger, 2011; Davis, 2015; Zondi, 2017), which is always labelled as negative intervention or not intervening at all by homosexual learners.

Teachers are part of society and are influenced by society, their own beliefs, culture, religion and experiences, which they bring into the school environment, and which contribute to the way they perceive homosexuality. As argued by Démuth (2013), the environment and its contents determine whether something is perceived negatively or positively. Schools' social values and norms have the strongest influence on teachers' behaviour and perceptions of homosexuality (Mostert, 2013).

The goal of this study is to examine teachers' perceptions, knowledge and intervention with regard to the homosexuality of learners in high schools in order to facilitate the overall consideration of this phenomenon, as well as to develop an intervention strategy that will deal with issues of gay and lesbian learners in South African schools appropriately. The homosexuality or heterosexuality of an individual is identified from puberty, where youngsters identify themselves with a particular sexual attraction (Nkosi & Masson, 2017). In high schools, learners may group themselves and become more aware of their sexual attraction (Mostert, 2013). Emmanuel (2014) describes high school as the place where homosexuality is prevalent because that is where learners identify their sexual orientation.

## 1.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM

Lesbian and gay youth are present in every high school in South Africa. However, in many schools, their identities are not acknowledged (DBE, 2014). About 10% of young Black and White people in South Africa experience same-sex fascinations and most of them discover their fascinations during the adolescent stage whilst in high school (Mudrey-Camino, 2002; Francis, 2012a). Like all other youth, they should be treated with respect and there should be no discrimination or homophobic acts in the school environment. Their sexuality should be acknowledged, and they should be accepted and understood for who they are.

In the South African context, teachers seem to have negative perceptions and a misunderstanding of homosexuality. They display little or no knowledge of homosexuality, whilst they have homosexual learners to teach and protect against seclusion, marginalisation, violence and vulnerability to prejudice (Butler & Astbury, 2004; Bhana, 2012; Davis, 2018).

Homosexuality is a complex phenomenon which needs to be unpacked to be understood, but teachers do not have that deep knowledge because the curriculum is silent about it (Francis, 2012a; Chinangure, 2018). A review of literature on homosexuality in schools shows that the South African school curriculum is silent on the homosexuality of learners in high schools. Therefore, there is a need for legislative and educational interventions that can help teachers reflect on their perceptions of homosexuality and understand it more deeply (Bhana, 2012). Currently, teachers are facing a challenge in understanding, teaching and guiding homosexual learners because they are not well-equipped with knowledge and information on the phenomenon (Francis, 2017). There seems to be a huge gap in literature on teacher perceptions and knowledge of homosexuality in high schools as it is still a taboo subject in South Africa. Professor Deevia Bhana is the first scholar in South Africa to come up with an inclusive study which represents investigations of teachers, pupils, and school management teams, as well as parents' perceptions on high school learners' homosexuality (Davis, 2018). This study seeks to examine teachers' perceptions and knowledge of homosexuality, and to develop an intervention strategy to which teachers can refer when addressing homophobic issues in school environments.

## 1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The objective of this study is to explore the perception, knowledge and intervention of teachers on the homosexuality of learners in high schools. According to the literature reviewed, teachers are considered partakers or bystanders of homophobic attitudes in high schools. There is ample literature on homophobic bullying in high schools, with teachers either ignoring or perpetrating the acts.

This study needed to derive a clear understanding of how teachers perceive and intervene when homophobia is displayed by teachers, learners, non-teaching staff, management and school governing bodies (SGB) at school. The level of teacher knowledge on homosexuality presented in the study can benefit curriculum designers when including homosexuality topics in the curriculum, thus promoting the development and implementation of LGBTI policies in schools. The adequate distribution of LGBTI resources developed by the DoE and other departments, government entities, non-governmental organisations (NGO) and non-profit organisations (NPO) needs to be encouraged in schools.

The study further develops a set of South African contextualised intervention strategies to help combat homophobic attitudes and make schools safe environments for every learner, regardless of sexual orientation. These intervention strategies can contribute immensely to educating communities about homophobic behaviour and creating safer environments for LGBTI persons through schools.

## 1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perception, knowledge and intervention of teachers on the homosexuality of learners in high schools, and to come up with a clear understanding of their intervention strategies.

This study will be directed by the following key investigating question:

- What are teachers' perceptions and knowledge of homosexuality amongst learners in high school?

To answer the primary research question, the following secondary research questions were formulated:

- How do teachers define homosexuality?
- What are teachers' experiences in teaching homosexual learners?
- What strategies do they use to support homosexual learners?
- Why do teachers regard homosexuality as a problem or part of life?

According to Stake (1995), a case study is an investigation conducted for a specific audience to benefit and gain more understanding. This is in line with the purpose of this study, which is to understand how teachers view homosexual learners, as well as their knowledge and intervention thereof. The case study design was chosen because of the manageability of scale and in-depth data generated to address the researched phenomenon in its natural setting (Leonard, 2019). The following section elaborates on the significance of this study.

## 1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study will assist in theory building by identifying the gaps in teachers' perceptions, knowledge and understanding of homosexuality as aspects that are missing in extant literature. It also recommends the inclusion of homosexual education in the Basic Education curriculum. Teachers with much knowledge about homosexuality will be able to teach sexual diversity with confidence in class as they would have contributed and made their needs known to the Department of Basic Education (DBE). Consequently, the DBE will equip teachers with the much-needed knowledge, skills and strategies to be able to handle homosexual issues without struggling, and also empower them with the ability to guide homosexual learners towards adulthood. Moreover, the inclusion of homosexuality in the curriculum would benefit the voices of teachers themselves. This

study will enhance the need for professional teacher development, since homosexuality is still taboo in South African schools (Francis, 2017).

Policymakers will benefit from a chance to include homosexuality when developing school policies, as this study explores teacher perceptions, understanding and the challenges when dealing with homosexual learners in high schools. This study has developed a South African contextualised intervention model that aims to assist teachers, learners and the school community when dealing with issues of LGBTI learners in high schools.

## 1.6 ROLE OF THEORY IN THE STUDY

To understand teacher perceptions and knowledge on the homosexuality of high school learners, this study adopted Gibson's Theory of Direct Perception, a top-down and constructivist theory (Démuth, 2013).

The great benefit of Gibson's theory is that it can explain the exactness and the speed of perception processes. In Gibson's view, a spectator is an inactive space into which the information coming from the environment is being imprinted, which means that one's environment is the stimulus of one's perception.

Teachers bring their own experiences, community influences and knowledge to school. Their perceptions of homosexual students are affected or influenced by their personal experiences within their societies. According to Gibson's Direct Perception theory, one's environment and its content determine the way one perceives, negatively or positively. Hence, the perception of learner homosexuality by teachers can be either negative or positive. Emmanuel (2014) agrees with Gibson that the social history of one's upbringing and one's personal history are important factors in the way an individual perceives things.

Gibson's Theory of Constructivism explains that perception is the result of the contact amongst stimuli and inner assumptions, anticipations and understanding of the spectator, whereas inspiration and reactions play a significant part in this process. This means that teacher perceptions of learner homosexuality influence how the teacher will conduct him-

or herself when faced with homosexual learners' crises, such as harassment and discrimination.

Depending on their perception, teachers construct their own knowledge and understanding of homosexuality to impart knowledge to learners. Unfortunately, their knowledge may include negative or positive perceptions. Démuth (2013: 13) noted that "Perception is thus influenced by a wide range of individual factors that can lead to an inadequate interpretation". Teachers therefore perceive homosexuality in different ways, influenced by an inadequate interpretation of the phenomenon.

According to constructivist theory, truth is socially constructed by the individual who constructs and reconstructs knowledge (Kruger, 2011). Hence, the constructivist theory recommends that multiple realities occur because every individual creates their own truth. Everyone has a different interpretation and construction of the knowledge process (Démuth, 2013; Davis, 2015). Thus, teachers have different perceptions of learner homosexuality, based on their interpretation and knowledge construction. Blumer (1962) postulates that the mind is actively involved in the process, and that personal perspectives, perceptions and experiences play an important role in creating one's reality. In elaborating constructive ideas, McLeod (2019) confirms that constructivism believes in the personal construction of meaning and experiences by the teacher as a learner, and that meaning is subjective to the interaction of prior knowledge and new events. As homosexuality is said to be new in high schools, teachers use their prior knowledge influence to construct and perceive the homosexuality of learners.

## 1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach. According to Maree (2012), a qualitative study aims to collect rich descriptive data about a specific phenomenon or setting in order to grow an understanding of what is being studied. A qualitative research study is more concerned with understanding why people behave as they do and how they make sense of their experiences – in this instance, teacher perceptions, knowledge and intervention on the homosexuality of learners in high schools. Using their knowledge, attitudes and beliefs, a qualitative approach for this study can be used to collect expressive data on

teachers' knowledge and perceptions of learner homosexuality. The qualitative approach allows the participants to provide detailed data to respond to the research questions and allows the researcher to learn more about teachers' attitudes and necessities in teaching and guiding homosexual learners, whilst considering the teachers' environmental influences.

### 1.7.1 Research Paradigm

An empirical research study is directed by a specific paradigm. There are two fundamental research paradigms guiding empirical research: positivism and interpretivism. Positivism is commonly used in quantitative research because of its empirical nature to study proofs. Positivism studies can be predicted and generalised into a different setting and environment (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). An interpretivism approach is a qualitative paradigm which investigates human behaviour and experiences that are due to environmental influences and interaction (Cohen et al., 2007; Starman, 2014). Interpretivism will guide this study to explore teacher perceptions and knowledge that are influenced by the environment and the society in which they live. Gibson's theory highlighted that the environment is a direct stimulus on how a person perceives, and therefore indicates the behaviour that teachers will display towards the phenomenon of homosexuality in learners.

### 1.7.2 Research Approach

This study proposes the use of a qualitative approach, which will assist the investigator to collect rich descriptive data regarding teachers' perceptions and knowledge of gay and lesbian learners in high schools (Maree, 2012). It will also help the researcher to understand why people behave as they do and how they make meaning of their experiences – in this instance, the teachers' perceptions of homosexual students and their knowledge, attitudes and beliefs. Therefore, a qualitative approach for this study to gather descriptive data on teachers' knowledge, attitudes and beliefs on the homosexuality of some learners they are teaching has been chosen as being appropriate. The qualitative approach allows the partakers to offer detailed data when responding to

the investigative questions and will enable the investigator to learn more about teacher perceptions of homosexuality.

### 1.7.3 Research Design

The research style used is a case study. Rule and John (2011) define a case study as the methodical and in-depth investigation of a case in a normal setting with the aim of generating knowledge in a constrained and focused setting. According to Cohen et al. (2007), a case study can identify cause and effect in its real context. A case study is an investigation conducted to benefit a specific audience and gain greater understanding (Maree, 2012). The focus of the study is to ascertain how teachers perceive and understand homosexuality amongst learners in high schools.

The case study method was chosen because of the manageability of scale and the in-depth data generated to address the research phenomenon, namely teacher perceptions, knowledge and intervention on the homosexuality of high school learners. According to Rule and John (2011) and Baxter and Jack (2008), a case study investigates a problem or matter within a boundary-focused location with a small number of participants. Therefore, five teachers from three schools were selected as participants in this study.

The aim of this study is to explore the perceptions, knowledge and interventions of teachers on the homosexuality of learners in high schools, and an exploratory case study was conducted to achieve this.

According to Cohen et al. (2007), a case study can be carried out by an investigator without requiring an investigation group. This investigation was conducted by one researcher.

### 1.7.4 Sampling

Sampling is the strategy of selecting a smaller homogenous sample with the purpose of deeply defining some specific sub-group (Patton, 2002). Cohen et al. (2007) argue that the merit of a study stands or falls due to the appropriateness of the sampling tactics adopted by the researcher. As this study is qualitative, participants are fewer in number.

The study used non-probability purposive sampling (Maree, 2012). Participants were selected based on their potential to help generate valuable data for the study (Patton & Cochran, 2002).

In line with the research question, this study specifically samples those individuals who are 'information rich'. Five teachers from three different schools participated in the study. To encompass a diversity of views, this study sampled one participant from a semi-rural school, two participants from a rural school and two from a deep-rural high school around the Gert Sibande District.

Qualitative research is grounded on non-probability and purposive sampling and the researcher did not try to generalise the findings (Maree, 2012). Additionally, purposive sampling was used to find the appropriate participants through specific criteria.

### 1.7.5 Data Collection

*1.7.5.1 Interviews*

This study used semi-structured individual in-depth interviews as the main technique for data generation. Cohen et al. (2007) argue that interviews allow the respondents to reveal their distinctive ways of looking at the world and to give their descriptions of situations. Teachers revealed their perceptions and knowledge of learner homosexuality individually. The open-ended questions allowed for significant but unexpected issues to be raised, as the interviewer probed thought-provoking issues that arose from contributors' interests or distresses.

An audio tape was used to capture the participants' responses accurately (Patton & Cochran, 2002). This was explained to the participants before commencing the interviews. All participants agreed to being recorded, so there was no need for the researcher to take notes of the interviews.

A telephonic data collection method was to be used when the participant could not be interviewed face-to-face. Cohen et al. (2007) comment that telephone interviews deprive the interviewer and the interviewee of the opportunity to establish a positive relationship, as compared to a face-to-face interview. Fortunately, all participants were available for

face-to-face interviews and the researcher established a rapport with the participants, which made it easy for follow-up questions.

Coughlan et al. (2007) confirm that investigators can design their own tools for the study or choose to utilise a pre-designed tool. In this study, the researcher designed the research schedule to gather data from face-to-face interviews with the five participants. The research schedule is attached as Appendix A.

Interviews were conducted individually in different venues. All five participants chose to be interviewed in the afternoon. Two participants were interviewed at a restaurant, one at his home and two at their respective schools.

*1.7.5.2 Document analysis*

For triangulation purposes, this study used document analysis as another data gathering method. as described by Bowen (2009: 33), "Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents – both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) material". Documents such as school record books, school policies (safety and code of conduct policies), minutes and logbooks, and government policies were examined to gather more data on homosexual incidences and interventions in high schools. Data generated from the semi-structured individual interviews were analysed through Thematic Content Analysis. Thematic analysis is sufficient for this study (Patton & Cochran, 2002; Braun & Clarke, 2006). By examining the data gathered in varied approaches, the investigator validated conclusions through data clusters, thus reducing the effect of possible partiality that can transpire in an investigation (Bowen, 2009) and ensuring the trustworthiness of the study.


**1.8 GLOSSARY OF RESEARCH TERMS**

**Culture:** Culture describes the entireness of the arrangement of conduct of a cluster of persons and their relationship to the environment as a stimulus to their perceptions. Riggs and Fell (2010) and Idang (2015) identified that culture entails the language of the people, dress, music, work, arts, religion, dancing and their social norms, values and taboos.

Therefore, culture influences personal behaviour and attitudes towards issues. This study adopted the explanation by Riggs and Fell (2010) to identify cultural influences on homosexuality and their impact on teacher perceptions of the homosexuality of learners in high schools.

**Gender:** Gender refers to socially constructed characteristics of women, men, girls and boys. This includes the norms, behaviors and rules related to being a woman, man, girl or boy and their relationships with each other. As a social construct, gender varies across societies and changes over time (WHO, ud). Hence, in this research gender is used to construct the perceptions of teachers regarding how learners should conform to being a girl or a boy.

**Heterosexual:** Davis (2021:16) defines heterosexual as follows: "It is a term that refers to people who are sexually or romantically attracted to people of the opposite sex. Heterosexual men are sexually or romantically attracted to women and vice versa. The prefix 'hetero' comes from the Greek word 'heteros', which means 'the other' (of two), different or other than usual". Thus, heterosexual is one of the sexual orientations that is dominant and highly recognised in schools.

**Homosexual:** This refers to romantic attraction, sexual attraction or sexual behaviour between members of the same sex or gender. As a sexual orientation, homosexuality is an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic and/or sexual attractions to people of the same sex. It also refers to a person's sense of identity based on those attractions, related behaviours and membership in a community of others who share those attractions (Davis, 2021). This study seeks to understand teacher perceptions and knowledge on homosexuality as a concept.

**Homophobia:** According to Planned Parenthood (2021), homophobia is the fear, hatred, discomfort with or mistrust of people who are lesbian, gay or bisexual. Homophobia can take many different forms, including negative attitudes and beliefs about, aversion to or prejudice against lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Homophobia is rife in high schools

and must thus be identified and combatted, as suggested by this study and other literature.

**Religion:** Myhre (2018) defines religion as the term used to describe time-honoured actions and beliefs aimed at connecting people with what could be identified as most true, real, sacred or divine. Ever since religion was recognised across the world, Christianity has been the leading religion, followed by Muslim and Hindu, as identified by Juan (2006). The non-Western culture has adopted the Christian religion as the modern social construction, followed by Islam, African Traditional religion (ATR) and Hinduism. Religion influences teacher perceptions and behaviour on issues like homosexuality in schools.

**Sexual orientation:** Planned Parenthood (2021) describes sexual orientation as an inborn or irreversible enduring emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to other people. An individual's sexual orientation is dependent on their gender identity. Knowledge of different sexual orientations of learners in schools is highly important for teachers to be able to recognise homosexuality as one of those sexual orientations.

## 1.9 OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH

**Chapter One** orientates the reader about the study. It explains the problem and clarifies the background to the study regarding teacher perceptions, knowledge and intervention on homosexuality of learners in high schools in Mpumalanga.

**Chapter Two** reviews both local and international perceptions on homosexuality due to religion, culture and how the homosexuality of learners is constructed in the South African context.

**Chapter Three** elaborates on the qualitative research methodology adopted by this study to investigate teacher perceptions, knowledge and intervention strategies regarding learner homosexuality in high schools. The research strategy, including the methodology, study participants, procedures, analysis method, trustworthiness and ethical concerns are also principal constituents of this chapter.

**Chapter Four** presents and analyses data to highlight perceptions, knowledge and interventions when homophobia is displayed, in line with the literature reviewed.

**Chapter Five** presents the findings and discussions of this research study, which describe and analyse 'Teacher knowledge on homosexuality, teacher perceptions of homosexuality, teacher experiences and beliefs regarding homosexuality and teacher intervention'. Conclusions and recommendations are elaborated upon.

## 1.10 CONCLUSION

The focus of this chapter was to introduce the reader to the learning structure and outline the sequence of chapters to follow. The next chapter will lead the reader through the national and international literature reviewed to establish teacher perceptions, knowledge and intervention on the homosexuality of high school learners.

# CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

Literature on homosexuality is presented in this chapter by reviewing several literature sources on the homosexuality of high school learners and how teachers perceive learner homosexuality. Literature on the originality of homosexuality in Africa is also reviewed. The purpose of exploring what has already been researched is to contribute to current research within the extant body of knowledge. The chapter is organised through themes that have been developed from reviewed literature and includes teacher knowledge about homosexuality, teacher perceptions of homosexuality, homosexuality in the curriculum, cultural perspectives of homosexuality, homosexuality and the Christian religion and teacher intervention.

## 2.2 TEACHERS' KNOWLEDGE ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY

Shulman (1986) is one of the scholars who established the Seven Domains of Teacher Knowledge. He indicated that teachers should have knowledge of the different learners in the classes they teach and that it is the norm for teachers to have *propositional* knowledge. Learners are different in abilities and psychological and physical characteristics. Hence, sexual orientation is different for heterosexuals and homosexuals. Consequently, as Shulman (1986) indicates, teachers should have *factual* knowledge to be able to differentiate between facts and myths so that they are able to deal with homophobic attitudes within the school community. Therefore, teachers should have the much needed knowledge domains to be able to facilitate learner knowledge and learning. The seven domains include:

**2.2.1 Content Knowledge:** For teachers to be able to teach a specific subject, they should have knowledge of the subject, understanding of the structures of the subject and be able to present the content to learners. Teachers need content knowledge to evaluate and choose textbooks, teaching aids and computer software (Shulman, 1986).

**2.2.2 General Pedagogical Knowledge:** Shulman described general pedagogical knowledge as "those broad principles and strategies of classroom management and organisation that appear to transcend subject matter" (Shulman, 1987: 8).

**2.2.3 Pedagogical Content Knowledge:** Shulman described the concept as one that "identifies the distinctive bodies of knowledge for teaching. It represents the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems or issues are organized, represented and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners, and presented for instruction" (Shulman, 1987: 8).

**2.2.4 Curriculum Knowledge:** Cogill (2008: 5) understands curriculum knowledge as "the knowledge of what should be taught to a particular group of pupils. It requires understanding of children's learning potential, national syllabi, school planning documents and year group plans."

**2.2.5 Knowledge of Learners and their Characteristics:** Learners learn in different ways and teachers should understand how a child's mind works. Cogill (2008: 2) specified distinctly the four dominant models of a learner's mind that teachers need to understand; namely, children as imitative learners; children as learning from didactic exposure; children as thinkers, and children as managers of their own knowledge.

**2.2.6 Knowledge of Educational Contexts – for example, schools and the wider community:** Shulman (1986) acknowledges that knowledge of educational contexts extends "from the working of the group or classroom to the governance and financing of the school districts to the character of communities and cultures". Teachers should understand the particular context in which they practice and adapt their teaching to their school background, the type of learners and a specific community (Shulman, 1987).

**2.2.7 Knowledge of Educational Ends, Purposes and Value, and their Philosophical and Historical Grounds:** This area of knowledge is mentioned by the writer and listed as one of the seven areas of knowledge established by Shulman (1986) without any exact explanation of the meaning. Sufficient content knowledge (CK) and pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) build teacher confidence and help them to teach in a more dynamic and fun manner than a teacher with less content knowledge. As Cogill (2008) indicates,

teachers with sufficient content knowledge do not shy away from having to teach difficult aspects of the subject, such as homosexuality and the sexual diversity of learners.

Teachers frequently skip topics in the curriculum to side-step challenging sections – for example, sexuality education topics – because they do not have enough knowledge and personal perceptions, especially regarding homosexuality (Potgieter & Reygan, 2012). Teacher knowledge about learner homosexuality creates stability for learners and staff in both personal development and new knowledge acquisition (Lees, 2017). Hence teachers will be equipped with accurate knowledge to assist homosexual learners.

Msibi (2012) and Nkosi and Masson (2017) identified that teachers believe that homosexuality is a stage that learners will outgrow and should therefore be ignored or oppressed because homosexuality is displayed and practised by, for example, family members or teachers at school for learners to duplicate. Similarly, Morgan (2003) argues that childhood influences are ruled out by scientists and legal conclusions, and that homosexuality stems from observations at home or school; thus, no textbook or teaching can change or influence a child to become homosexual. Moreover, sexual orientation has been proven to be more biological than cultural (Nkosi & Masson, 2017) and cannot therefore be copied from anybody or any writings. This is contrary to Masase's (2009) assertion that homosexuality is influenced by the environment, background or heredity; hence the view that homosexuality is a learned conduct or congenital way of life.

Morgan (2003) and Nkosi and Masson (2017) identified that some homosexual persons feel same-sex attractions between the ages of 4 and 17 years, although they may not correctly place their feelings as homosexual until they get the correct information and a name to their feelings as they grow older. This notion proves that homosexuality is neither enacted nor consequential from anywhere, or that schools are there to make or break the sexual orientation of the child.

Male teachers are more homophobic than female teachers and believe that gays are weak, whilst teachers try to sell male qualities as being strong and being real men, as defined by culture. Therefore, male teachers are negative when learning about gays (Francis & Msibi, 2010; Muchera, Awino & McCoy, 2016; Lees, 2017) and are reluctant

to acquire new knowledge on homosexuality. Consequently, according to Msibi (2012), homophobic language is mostly uttered by male staff in schools.

Studies show that most teachers do not have enough knowledge about homosexuality, mentioning that homosexuality was not part of their education as pre-service teachers in colleges and universities (Bhana, 2012; Francis, 2012). As a result teachers do not have sufficient and correct knowledge on homosexuality of learners. In South Africa, their source of information is through media, as homosexuality is legal in the country. LGBTI friends and a few teachers who were introduced to knowledge during their pre-service training in universities and colleges are also valuable resources (Dewling, Rodger & Cummings, 2007). Teachers indicate that they would not feel comfortable teaching about homosexuality because they have not studied it and therefore do not have enough content knowledge. However, they teach about heterosexual relationships because it is within the schools' programme (Francis, 2012b). Therefore, the department of education introduced Sexuality Education into the curriculum, teachers regarded it as forbidden and not appropriate for the youth, with teachers still shying away from teaching sexuality topics (Mcgogo, 2016). Hence the total neglect of homosexuality by teachers.

### 2.2.8 Teachers' Lack of Training in Terms of Homosexuality

Francis (2012a) noted that teachers' comfort and confidence around homosexuality depends on their level of knowledge regarding the topic and their attendance at relevant workshops. The curriculum is silent about homosexuality, and Potgieter and Reygan (2012) noted that most teachers have never been able to attend homosexual workshops as none have been conducted yet, especially in South Africa. Those teachers who had the opportunity to attend workshops were invited by LGBTI organisations in the country. Therefore, teachers frequently replicate heterosexism in the teaching space, despite the post-apartheid rhetoric of broadmindedness and inclusivity.

Potgieter and Reygan (2012) suggest that the better educated teachers are in terms of homosexuality, the more positive their attitudes will be and, crucially, the more likely they

are to feel knowledgeable and comfortable when teaching about homosexuality. In addition, stereotypical knowledge will be eradicated, and teachers will allow themselves to gain new knowledge rather than adhere to myths claiming it is their culture and religious belief, whilst perpetrating homophobic attitude in the process (De Barros, 2019). Consequently, homophobic attitude is escalating tremendously in high schools. As maintained by Barnard (2019), teachers have the mammoth task of guiding their learners towards adulthood; hence, their knowledge and understanding of learner sexual development and identity is crucial.

Teachers should be the ones guiding those learners who already identify themselves as homosexuals and those that are said to be homosexual but not yet 'out of the closet' with correct information, rather than misleading them regarding their sexual orientation. As outlined in the South African Schools Act, teacher knowledge is vital to the design and implementation of an inclusive school Code of Conduct policy. The knowledge and conduct of staff members contribute vastly to homophobic bullying in the school community, as schools play a fundamental part in transferring and transforming insolence towards sexual diversity (Dowling et al., 2007; DBE, 2014,). Poor teacher knowledge on the homosexuality of learners in high schools exacerbates negative attitudes towards this minority group of learners and results in teachers becoming perpetrators of homophobia.

## 2.3 TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF HOMOSEXUALITY

Learners who are involved in same-sex relations globally, as well as in South Africa, endure judgement, rejection, fierceness, disregard and insults by both their teachers and their peers (Msibi, 2014). Therefore, learners identify teachers as contributors to a homophobic environment in schools.

In South Africa, teachers and principals are strong practitioners of homophobia and can even perpetrate homophobic mistreatment. Hence, they share the same sentiments as heterosexual learners (Msibi, 2014). Moreover, teachers' lack of homosexual knowledge and understanding hinders their intervention in the homophobic maltreatment of homosexual learners by both teachers and other learners (Mostert, 2012; William, 2008).

Thus homosexual learners find it challenging to be in the school environment every day in fear of being maltreated.

Some teachers disregard the lesson plans they are meant to impart because of their own spiritual and cultural principles or awkwardness with the topic, mainly when homosexuality becomes part of the curriculum content (Lees, 2017). Therefore little to nothing is said about homosexuality. Msibi (2014) agrees that even teachers teaching Life Orientation (LO) as a subject, where there should be clear teaching on homosexuality or sexual diversity, often sidestep this or become very controlling and scripted when teaching LO. The homosexuality of learners in high schools should be known and acknowledged by all staff members in schools (Lees, 2017: 254):

> Sexuality education, including responses to LGBTI matters, is the task and
> responsibility of all teachers, not simply Life Orientation teachers, and
> should not only rest in the domain of curriculum developers (Lees, 2017).

The perception that sexuality education is solely for LO teachers can hinder the whole school transformation process because it has been recognised that some teachers experience problems in changing their insolent views of the sexual minority youth (Brown, 2019). Inevitably, rules to defy homosexuality are in place. Teachers believe that girls should not behave or dress like boys, and boys should not dress like girls because that exposes their homosexuality, which is meant to remain in the closet while they are at school (Mudrey-Camino, 2002; Francis, 2012a; Lees, 2017). Thus, homosexual learners become invisible, ignored and an embarrassment. According to research conducted by Msibi (2012), teachers think that lesbians should stop wearing trousers because that encourages them to act like boys and exacerbates homosexuality in high schools.

Homosexual teaching is learner-question-driven. If learners do not ask questions directly, teachers will never explicitly mention homosexuality and, when responding to learner questions, teachers either authoritatively avoid questions or express their own perceptions and beliefs on homosexuality (De Palma & Francis, 2014). Consequently teachers display more homophobic attitude or not acknowledging homosexuality of the

learners. A study conducted by Nichols (2016) confirms that many teachers impose their own accepted wisdom and views on their learners, whether openly or discursively. This creates an increased marginalisation of LGBTI youth at school.

In light of the fact that teachers perceive homosexuality as contagious, they aver that the homosexual learners should not be allowed to act visibly and be supported by teachers, as their homosexuality will be transferred to other learners (Msibi, 2012; De Palma & Francis, 2014). Thus other learners should be protected from adopting this type of a lifestyle. Bhana (2012) and Bhana (2014) affirm that to safeguard other learners from contracting the practice, teachers concur with parents not to include homosexual education teaching in class, nor talk openly about it around the school premises.

Research by Mudrey-Camino (2002) and Nichols (2016) showed that teachers have negative perceptions and stereotypical knowledge and myths regarding learners' homosexuality in high schools. Teachers believe that learners should not display their sexual orientation to others at school if it is not heterosexual and heteronormative, as expected.

It is evident that homosexual learners in South African high schools endure judgement, rejection, fierceness, disregard and insults by both their teachers and their peers, which implies that homosexual learners are exposed to homophobic school environments (Mostert, 2012; Kruger, 2011) with homophobic attitude escalating rapidly from members of the school community, homosexual learners feel more unsafe at school.

## 2.4 HOMOSEXUALITY IN THE CURRICULUM

Teaching about sexuality in South African schools is still at risk as there are no direct policies about homosexuality. Teachers feel that they have no sources of reference regarding the facts. There is an acknowledgement in the writings that educators should function without any support from the Department of Education (DoE), which creates negative perceptions when it comes to sexual education, especially homosexuality (Mudrey-Camino, 2002). Teachers are often uncertain as to whether to include same-sex matters in the syllabus or deal with homophobia after it occurs in the teaching space

(Francis & Msibi, 2011: 162). Hence the curriculum is silent about LGBTI information. Potgieter and Reygan (2012) acknowledge the knowledge-practice gap identified by Francis (2012a) regarding the invisibility of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) education in curriculum design and in school textbooks in South Africa.

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) supports teachers with strategies to deal with homophobic bullying in schools and expects teachers to equip themselves with knowledge and strategies to deal with learners' homosexuality. The Department of Basic Education directs teachers who are seeking information and support to contact some of the LGBTI bodies and community organisations (DBE, 2014). This clarifies the fact that the DBE is not yet ready to include homosexuality in the curriculum, despite the South African Constitution (Act 108 of 1996) encouraging inclusivity, non-discrimination and tolerance. However, there is limited research, both internationally and locally, that explains how sexual minorities are constructed and presented in actual curricula, as argued by Mudrey-Camino (2002), Francis and Msibi (2011) and Msibi (2014).

Hypothetically, LO teachers have some content knowledge to teach the subject, but in practice not all teachers have enough content knowledge (Barnard, 2019). Most LO teachers are not trained and are dependent on textbooks that are non-explicit on homosexuality as a topic, with only violence, sexual abuse, teenage pregnancy, STDs and HIV/AIDs as the main topics (Bhana, 2014). As a result teachers do not have enough content knowledge or accurate information. According to De Palma and Francis (2014), most LO teachers are diverted from other subjects such as English or Economics and do not have any training on these topics, which results in a lack of confidence and knowledge when responding to learners' challenging questions on sexual diversity.

LGBTI activists and allies have put more pressure on the DBE to formalise sexual diversity education in the curriculum and equip teachers with knowledge and understanding. Therefore, action by the DBE needs to be taken sooner rather than later (Msibi, 2014; De Barros, 2019). In 2019, the Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga, appointed a task team to evaluate textbooks on LGBTI inclusivity across the curriculum. The reason for the textbook evaluation was to answer the call of inclusivity

and non-discrimination by gender and sexual orientation as stipulated in the South African Constitution. In nine subjects, 38 textbooks were evaluated and only twice were LGBTI people inadequately referenced (De Barros, 2019), as concluded by Potgieter and Reygan's (2012) study on Life Orientation textbooks. Apparently there is no improvement in the inclusion of LGBTI information in the curriculum.

The task team identified that textbooks were influenced by the authors' prejudices against homosexuality. De Barros (2019) confirms that the inclusion of Sexual Diversity Education into the curriculum is not accepted easily by politicians; for example, Reverend Kenneth Meshoe, president of the African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP), is planning to stop the department, claiming that what is intended is "wicked and must be stopped". Concurrently, the Christian organization, Freedom of Religion South Africa (FOR SA), believes that the inclusion of the different sexualities in the curriculum will encourage or teach learners to practice homosexuality, which is unnatural to human beings. Therefore, they advocate that the parents should not allow that to happen and should be free to remove their children from such schools.

## 2. 5  CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES OF TEACHERS ON HOMOSEXUALITY

Culture discusses the entirety of the arrangement of conduct of a group of persons and their relationship to the environment as a stimulus of their perception. Riggs and Fell (2010) and Idang (2015) identified that culture entails people's language, dress, music, work, arts, religion, dancing and their social norms, values and taboos. Therefore, culture influences personal behaviour and attitudes towards issues like the homosexuality and heterosexuality of persons in that area.

African culture is inherited from generation to generation and Africans find it challenging to change and modify. As a result, it is daunting to recognise homosexuality within a society's culture (Riggs & Fell, 2010). Thus, homosexuality is considered taboo in African culture. This is contrary to Antia's (2005) argument that culture is not static but can change at any time if that society is ready to accept change.

Culture is not taught but observed and learned while being practised by others. Hence, a specific culture is not learnt by choice but is adopted if one is immersed in the area that practises the culture (Idang, 2015). Therefore, a school community is prone to practice – intentionally or unintentionally – the cultural values, beliefs and social norms of the society within which it is situated.

In an African context, culture and cultural practices differ from country to country. Ethnicity plays a major role in stipulating which culture belongs to which people, even if they are from the same country (SAHO, 2019). Varying economic affluence also contributes to cultural practice, as people from urban areas are more receptive of cultural changes than those in rural areas where tribalism is rife in leadership. Tribal authorities are the major custodians of culture and rural communities are guided and are coherent to the tribal authority, as are the schools in those communities.

Political status (leadership) is highly influential on societies. If a leader displays homophobia, that community or even the country will resort to homosexual intolerance. In Africa, some prominent country leaders like President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, President Jacob Zuma of South Africa and Mayor Obed Mlaba of South Africa publicly denounce homosexuality as un-African, uncultured and a disease that needs to be cured (Francis & Msibi, 2011; Nkosi & Masson 2017). According to those leaders no person should be homosexual as it is un- African.

Schools in such areas are always under scrutiny by the community as to whether they adhere to the cultures and values of the community. Beckmann and Prinsloo (2007) argue that the state front-runners expect acceptance, conformity and support in reproducing their viewpoints in the upcoming generation through schools, resulting in the education system being stagnant.

In the South African context, the consequences are a silent curriculum and teachers' uncertainty about the issue of homosexuality of high school learners. It becomes a hindrance to the school community when the school governing body (SGB) must adopt other knowledge and practices which are seen as taboo to the community, in this case, the homosexuality of high school learners. On behalf of the parents, the SGB directs and

adopts the curriculum that a particular school will follow; for example, the language of teaching and learning, and the development of a school safety and discipline policy (DBE, 2004; Meier & Hartell, 2009). The culture of heteronormativity in schools is the norm, since most school parents and their communities are heterosexual and the teachers are loco parentis (Francis, 2017). Teachers are expected to adhere to the school policy that is designed to disregard the availability of homosexuality in schools.

As much as culture is said to be based on, directed by and belonging to ethnic groups of different areas and countries, there are connections and trends such as norms, beliefs and values (Amponsah, Omoregie & Ansah, 2018). Therefore, Idang (2015: 100) identified that "Africans do share some dominant traits in their belief systems and have similar values that mark them out from other peoples of the world".

Culture chooses what it takes in or takes part in, especially with regard to persons who are from different cultural settings (Beckmann & Prinsloo, 2007; Nkosi & Masson, 2017). Thus, it is difficult for African cultures to absorb and accept homosexuality into their different settings because it is said to be un-African

Antia (2005: 17) states that "culture is not fixed and permanent. It is always changed and modified by man through contacts with and absorption of other peoples' cultures, a process known as assimilation". This is the reason that some African countries have accepted and legalised homosexuality, although other areas, based on their cultural practices and staunch beliefs, do not accept homosexuality.

### 2.5.1 Views on the Origin of Homosexuality

African history on homosexuality is not well documented, which makes it a challenge for information sharing amongst the citizens of Africa. Consequently, not much is known about homosexuality (Alimi, 2015). African people deny or do not believe that there were any homosexual people and homosexual practices in Africa.

The literature reviewed testifies that homosexuality in Africa is believed to be a Western influence (Francis & Msibi, 2011; Idang, 2015, Alimi, 2015; Nkosi & Masson, 2017). In

most African cultural values, it is believed that same-sex attraction and homosexual practices are not normal and are taboo to the nation. Francis and Msibi (2015) argue that Africans are unaccepting of homosexuality and homosexual practices with the notion that it is uncultured, immoral and un-African.

Furthermore, most African political and traditional leaders believe that homosexuality was never practised in Africa (Masase, 2009). In the African context, homosexuality is Western and was never seen in African culture. Alimi (2015: 5) disagrees and expresses that "The idea that homosexuality is 'Western' is based on another Western import – Christianity. Contrary to what teachers believe, true African culture celebrates diversity and promotes acceptance".

In the South African context, teachers often view homosexuality as uncommon, uncultured and sinful (Francis, 2012b; Potgieter & Reygan 2012). Therefore, they are restrained in dealing with this topic in their classrooms due to their cultural beliefs and devout views

In the few schools where homosexuality is recognised, its connotation and cultural importance are reduced and minimised. Teachers claim that homosexual relationships are completely due to reasons such as a lack of women, being exposed to homosexual activities or are part of a short-lived teenage stage (Murray & Roscoe, 1998; Riggs & Fell, 2010). Hence, most teachers believe that high school learners will outgrow homosexuality as it is just a life phase of learners.

The possibility that a learner may experience homoerotic desire or find desire for another of the same sex is successfully refused in most high schools around the world, as indicated by Murray and Roscoe (1998). The DBE (2014) mentions that homosexuality is denied, ignored or even silenced in South African schools. Despite the realisation of the side-lining of learners' homosexuality in high schools, the DBE has done very little to respond to this concern. The curriculum is still silent, and teachers are still grappling with the decision on whether to talk or teach about homosexuality.

Learners are persuaded to become conscious and more accepting of the cultural heritage of diverse ethnic groups within the school environment (Francis, 2012b; Potgieter & Reygan 2012). However, it is within this accommodating and accepting setting that South African gay and lesbian youth report homophobic insolences and actions perpetrated by their fellow learners and, most disturbingly, by their teachers and non-teaching staff within the high school environment. Homosexuality in South African schools is ignored and denied more than racism, as more activities are conducted and debates are allowed regarding racism than about the silent homosexuality of learners (Francis & Msibi, 2011). Therefore homosexuality is denied existence in South African context.

## 2.5.2 Obstacles to Teachers Teaching about Sex Education

Francis (2012b) noted that the pressure between the curriculum content on sexuality education and educators' own identities, principles and traditional morals form an obstacle to teachers in teaching about sex education, especially homosexuality. Teachers hold dearly onto their morals and values and find it inappropriate to change their perceptions on the homosexuality of their learners (Testor, Behar, Davins, Sala, Castillo, Salamero, Alomar & Segarra, 2010).

Cultural values and morals direct and motivate the choice of behaviour, whether or not it is acceptable in that society and also determine the actions to be taken at the time (Beckmann & Prinsloo, 2007). Teachers complain about homosexuality as a topic that is against their morals and values to discuss in their classrooms, followed by homophobic actions and behaviour towards homosexual learners in high schools.

As members of society, teachers inherit the culture from society that make them believe that homosexuality is a mental disorder that needs to be diagnosed and cured through medical attention or prayer (Bhana, 2012b; Lees, 2017). Thus, teachers find it challenging to teach about homosexuality in class as they believe that those homosexual learners need to be cured. Homosexual learners are being accused of being un-African and less human by their own teachers (Francis, 2017). It is evident that teachers' prejudices and

misconceptions had never been challenged, as not enough studies have been conducted. The curriculum is silent and consequently homophobia was being spread in class.

Teachers lack confidence and knowledge to enable them to answer learners' questions. Cogill (2008) argues that teachers need enough content knowledge so that they do not shy away from difficult questions.

It was proven by Francis (2012b) and Lees (2017) that teachers are embarrassed to even pronounce the word 'homosexual' and constantly refer to the word as 'it', even if learners openly display the desire for teachers to teach them about sexuality and relationships.

Testor et al. (2010) and Francis (2017) maintain that teachers find it challenging to talk about homosexuality in class because of their stereotypical knowledge and belief that homosexuality should remain an individual's secret. Therefore, teachers feel very shy about talking on this topic in class.

If a teacher is openly talking about homosexuality in school, parents and staff members would identify the teacher as the one promoting homosexuality in the school, or as a homosexual himself/herself, so the teacher will be stigmatised and even isolated (Francis, 2012). As argued by Testor et al. (2010) and Francis (2017), teachers assume that there are no homosexual learners in their schools and thus there is no need to teach learners about it unless introducing homosexuality to the learners. Homosexuality is regarded as a stage and shall pass.

According to Nichols (2016: 18), "there is also a great resistance not only towards the inclusion of sexuality education in the curriculum, but also towards the teaching thereof".

### 2.5.3 The History of Homosexuality in South Africa

Historically, most countries in Africa have a native word that describes homosexual behaviour and acts, although Africans say that homosexuality is not African. Resources from 1732 to date discredit the myth of the imported heritage of homosexuality in Africa. Homosexuality was there before colonialisation was introduced in Africa, but it was never criticised or stigmatised as it was part of the culture to many people and regarded as a

normal accepted relationship (SMUG, 2014). Unlike nowadays where it is considered un-African.

Murray and Roscoe (1998) and Rudwick (2010) maintain that colonialists did not bring homosexuality to Africa. Rather, they introduced the notion of intolerance with stringent surveillance systems to oppress it until African native people forgot that it was part of their culture and stigmatised homosexuality. Hence, teachers in South Africa view homosexuality as immoral, uncultured and irreligious. With this perception, homosexual learners in high schools are called names, stigmatised and discriminated against by their own schoolteachers.

As in other African countries, South Africa has a rich history of homosexuality. Brown (2014) maintains that the visibility of homosexuals in South Africa dates to 1650 before the Dutch settlers arrived and imposed draconian anti-gay laws in the form of Roman-Dutch Law, claiming that homosexuality is immoral and unnatural and interferes with procreation. They believed it was punishable by death as it was associated with child molestation, rather than two people being in a relationship (Brown, 2014).

Moreover, homosexuality amongst different tribes was organised according to a specific tribe. However, some tribes are not well documented. The powerful Zulu tribe was the most documented, with organised homosexual activities like dances (partner with partner), bride price and wedding ceremonies back in the eighteenth century (Murray & Roscoe, 1998; Brockman, 2000).

Zulu gay people have developed a language that distinguishes them amongst heterosexuals. This language is rooted in the Zulu language and has no English infusion but is purely a traditional and cultured Zulu language (Rudwick, 2010). Rudwick identified that the development of the IsiNgqumo language in KwaZulu-Natal dates back to the eighteenth century when homosexuals learned the language to tighten the bond between them and acceptance that being homosexual is a gift from God.

## 2.6 HOMOSEXUALITY AND TEACHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION

Many scholars have defined the term 'religion' in different ways but are coherent to each other. Myhre (2018: 3) indicates that "the term religion is used to describe time-honoured actions and beliefs that are aimed at connecting people with what could be identified as most true, real, sacred or divine". This seems to be inclusive of all religions. For example, in an African context, religion is supposed to unite people rather than be a source of conflict amongst themselves. Their religion is infused into their cultures and traditions, which are transferred from generation to generation (Dawes & Maclaurin, 2014; Myovela, 2014). Thus people inherit religion from their forefathers and their communities they live in.

Ever since religion was established across the world, Christianity has become the most dominant religion, followed by Islam and Hinduism, as identified by Juan (2006). The non-Western culture has adopted the Christian religion as the modern social construction, followed by Islam, African Traditional Religion (ATR) and Hinduism (Myovela, 2014). In the South African context, except for cultural religion, Christianity is 80% dominant (Juan, 2006). All the identified religions have their own views on homosexuality. For example, Christians have considered homosexuality as ethically incorrect. This is common in churches such as the Catholic, Orthodox and most Evangelical Protestant churches (David, 2012). However, it is important to note that different churches have different perceptions on homosexuality, depending on their knowledge and understanding of sexual diversity. This poses a dilemma to teachers as members of the church who also have the responsibility to teach homosexual learners without discrimination.

### 2.6.1 International Christian Perceptions of Homosexuality

This is reflected in the ongoing debate about the acceptance of homosexuality. According to David (2012), people use the Bible to support the positions they hold regarding homosexuality.

High-profile Christian theologians like Albert Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, stated clearly during the 2015 Certified Biblical Councillors' Conference that congregants should never attend homosexual weddings, even those of their own children (Wolfson, 2015). Attendance will condone the immoral act of the two same-sex people getting married, and congratulations and signals of moral approval of the sinful union will be evident. Mohler further testified that even if scientists can prove that people are born gay, according to the Christian religion and Bible scriptures, this does not eradicate the sinfulness of the act. Mohler's utterances provoked controversy amongst other church leaders like Rev. Joseph Phelps of the Independent Highland Baptist church. In an interview with Wolfson (2015), Rev. Phelps argued that Mohler is causing family divisions and damage to societies.

In research conducted by Pearson (2017), he testifies that Christians – especially those in higher ranks – use the Bible for their own benefit, such as fame and political standing. In addition, they display homophobia to attract more public platforms, even if they feel differently about homosexuality. Pearson (2017) also mentioned the determination of Christians to display the supremacy of the Bible above Human Rights. Therefore, Christians should not accept homosexuality even if homosexuality is enshrined in the country's constitution, which states that the Bible does not condemn homosexuality, contrary to Christian belief.

According to Chinangure (2018) and Pearson (2017), Christians still cannot talk or even pronounce the word 'homosexuality' as Christians are strictly forbidden to talk about this issue.  Hence, homosexuality is regarded as a mental disorder that can be prayed for or that can be fixed with therapy. Some teachers who are members of the church are also unable to pronounce the word in class or in the staffroom and keep referring to homosexuality as 'it' (Francis, 2012b). This is emphasised by Lees (2017), who indicates that most teachers who affiliate to Christianity agree with the perception of their churches that homosexual learners need to be prayed for as they are spiritually possessed and that homosexuality is taboo.

## 2.6.2 African Christian Perceptions of Homosexuality

Recent data from the Gordon Theological Seminary shows that for the first time ever, a larger number of Christians live in Africa than on any other continent (van Klinken & Chitando, 2019). Other African countries, such as Zambia, have declared Christianity as the only religion to be practised by its citizens. Therefore, 95% of Zambians are Christians (van Klinken, 2017).

Myovela (2014) indicates that Christians form 45% of Africa's population, followed by Muslims with a population of 40.6%, and African Tradition religions (ATRs) and Hinduism sharing the remaining 14%. The Catholic Church is the main Christian religious organization. Studies conducted confirm that African Christians, especially church leaders, are more homophobic, using hate speech and derogative remarks, citing Bible verses and using the slogan of a 'sodomite-free' Africa to justify their rejection of homosexuality within societies (Msibi, 2011; van Klinken, 2015). On this notion Christian teachers fully believe in their religion that homosexuality is a sin.

In a resource for church leaders, the Evangelical Alliance (2012) affirms that church leaders should know that homosexuality is un-African and un-biblical and that homosexuals will convert youngsters into their sexual deviance, which is against the will of God. Contrary to this statement is an investigation conducted by Morgan (2003) and Nkosi and Masson (2017) showing that homosexuality is never copied nor inherited, but that sexual orientation is scientifically proven to be a biological issue that can never be reversed or transferred from one person to another. Unfortunately, in the South African context, teachers do not have that knowledge and still believe that homosexuality can be displayed and copied by learners in high schools (Francis & Reygan, 2016). Thus homosexuality should not be allowed in knowledge and in practice at school.

In South Africa, a collaborated study conducted by Astraea, USAID and South Africa (2016) revealed that only 32% of South Africans believe that homosexuality should be accepted by society, with Christianity as the most dominant in persuading homophobic attitudes. The study confirms that prominent religious organisations like Exodus, Global Alliance and Christian Action Network visited South Africa to promote anti-gay

movements and LGBTI convention advocacy. The USA-based Christian Action Network promulgates that homosexual behaviour exacerbates misconduct, fierceness, suicide, substance abuse, child molestation and ailments in South Africa (Astraea, USAID & South Africa, 2016). Therefore, international allies, cohorts and funders are driving the anti-gay movement within African countries (van Klinken & Chitando, 2019). Subsequently teachers believe in the anti- gay movement and practice it silently in schools.

Teaching in faith-based schools is a dilemma for teachers as they are not allowed to teach or even utter the word 'homosexual'. Utterance is equal to expulsion, a notion that is deeply supported by parents (Peter, 2018). Parents are scared that their children will become homosexuals if they are exposed to such information at school (Reygan & Steyn, 2017). This notion is also encouraged by prominent Christian religious leaders, such as Reverend Kenneth Meshoe of the African Christian Democratic Alliance who has a platform to talk to parents. He pleaded with parents to boycott the inclusion of sexuality education into the South African curriculum. Teachers are forced to ignore and deny the presence of homosexual learners or face harsh discipline and stigmatisation by colleagues, school management teams and parents, as identified in studies conducted by various researchers (Bhana, 2012b; Francis, 2012; Reygan & Steyn, 2017; Peter, 2018). Therefore teachers do not mention or teach about homosexuality in line with parents wish.

Parents teach their children as early as pre-school about the will of God in heaven and the immorality and ungodliness of homosexuality. This creates a dilemma for teachers on how to teach learners about sex and sexuality in class (Wolfson, 2015). According to Mohler (2014), children must be scripturally well trained to avoid contact with homosexual people and he mentions that people should develop unpretentious friendships with LGBTI neighbours. Hence, there should be a strong avoidance of LGBTI people in the neighbourhood.

De Barros (2019:3) reported that the Freedom of Religion of South Africa (FOR SA) warned parents about children "being taught about sex and sexuality, which may conflict with their own values, beliefs and opinions". The executive director of FOR SA advised

parents of their rights to remove their children from schools that are teaching lessons contrary to their own values and beliefs (De Barros, 2019). A school that does not display Christian religious ethics is on the verge of registering fewer learners than the ones adhering to Christianity and that notion encourages teachers to ignore and deny the homosexuality of learners in high schools.

Gagnon (2005) argues that homosexuality is an impulse that is determined by a person who chooses whether to act on it – Christians believe that homosexuality is a choice. Teachers believe that homosexuality is a phase that will pass. Therefore, there is a choice, and it is not necessary for teachers to recognise homosexual learners as this phase will soon be dismissed from the body of a learner who claims to be homosexual.

In the South African context, teachers were trained under the philosophy of Christian National Education as Fundamental Pedagogy, especially those trained before and just after 1994 (Reygan & Steyn, 2017). Consequently, they were trained to believe in the Christian religion as the only way schools should be organised. Although Christianity is no longer part of the curriculum, teachers still uphold these Christian ethics from their training and societal practices (Francis & Reygan, 2016; Reygan & Steyn, 2017).

Studies conducted by Testor et al. (2010), Bhana (2012) and Francis and Reygan (2016) confirm that a number of studies conducted in South Africa ascertain that the teachers who are affiliated to the Christian religion resist the new forms of sex and sexuality education, arguing that sexuality education is considered moral- and value-related and therefore cannot be taught in schools. As Christians, teachers believe that they cannot be associated with homosexual learners as that will stigmatise them as people who are teaching and transferring homosexuality to learners.

In Africa, teachers complain that it is against their morals and values as Christians and their culture as Africans to talk about sexuality and homosexuality and believe that the relevant learners need prayer and therapy to correct their abnormal and immoral feelings (Testor et al., 2010; Francis, 2012). So churches should intervene and pray for those learners to repent and stop homosexual behaviour.

## 2.7 TEACHER INTERVENTION

Teachers experience situations in which they need to intervene during occurrences such as homophobic bullying and prejudice towards homosexual learners in high schools. However, teachers do not usually intervene as they regard themselves as only being responsible for learners' academic achievements, rather than their psychosocial life. Hence, homosexuality is less included in their intervention strategies (Testor et al., 2010; Nichols, 2016). Graham (2012: 22) explains that:

> Teachers have the capacity to be involved in both socio-structural interventions by advocating protective policies that include sexual orientation at their schools, and individual level interventions, by being a voice against bullying and providing open support for this minority population. Schools and teachers have the capacity to fulfil both levels of intervention for the betterment, safety and health of sexual minorities".

The significance of knowing and teaching learners about South African Human Rights is regarded as something that should be taken care of by specific teachers – in particular, Life Orientation (LO) teachers – as it is in the LO curriculum for teachers to teach about "constitutional rights and responsibilities and to respect the rights of others" (DBE, 2014. 8). This neglect poses a great challenge to teachers to intervene when need be. Hence, they do not have the confidence and the proper knowledge about what is wrong and what should be done (Johnson, 2014; Bhana, 2015). Teacher knowledge, perceptions, religion and cultural perspectives therefore play a pivotal role in designing intervention strategies in schools. According to Bhana (2015) learners who are not incorporated into the principles enshrined in the Constitution may not be ready to engage in lesbian and rights. Therefore, learners can engage in homophobic behaviour when in school and even as adults.

In the South African context, there seems to be a huge gap in literature on teacher perceptions and knowledge about homosexuality in high schools, as it is still a taboo subject in South African schools. Professor Deevia Bhana is the first scholar in South Africa to come up with an inclusive study with representation on investigations of teachers, pupils, school management teams and parents' perceptions on high school learners' homosexuality (Davis, 2018).

This study seeks to examine teachers' perceptions and understanding of homosexuality and to develop an intervention strategy that will assist teachers when addressing homophobic issues in school environments.

### 2.7.1 Homophobia in High Schools

Homophobia in schools is displayed through homophobic bullying, using verbal and physical assaults and harassment. Research conducted on homosexual youth experiences in high schools proves that homophobia is rife in South African high schools with teachers, learners and staff members either being victims, victimisers or by-standers (Johnson, 2014; Francis, 2017).

When homophobic bullying is happening in schools, teachers usually do not intervene because they are labeled by LGBTI learners as perpetrators of homophobia, as schools encourage heterosexuality and heteronormativity (Msibi, 2014; Johnson, 2014; Francis & Reygan, 2016; Francis, 2017). In order to be able to confront those issues when they happen intentionally or unintentionally in schools, teachers need to have knowledge and understanding of homophobic and heterosexist behaviour and comments.

Studies conducted by a number of scholars in South Africa have found that teachers ignore the homophobic behaviour of learners and staff members. Therefore, no action is taken and there are no corrective measures in place to combat homophobia and heterosexist behaviour in schools (Walton, 2010, Kruger, 2011; Bhana, 2012; Frances & Reygan, 2016). As a result, South African schools are considered unsafe environments for LGBTI youth.

As argued by Francis (2012) and Potgieter and Reygan (2012), teachers complain about being too ill-equipped to intervene since they were not trained and do not have appropriate knowledge and strategies on the phenomenon.

### 2.7.2 Intervention Strategies

Teachers need correct information and knowledge to be able to understand homosexuality and the view of adulthood by learners under their supervision. Francis

(2012), Francis (2017) and Reygan and Steyn (2017) argue that LO teachers lack support from colleagues, administration, school management teams and school governing bodies in teaching sexuality and sexual diversity, causing intervention strategies to be impulsive and a burden to them.

As Msibi (2014) and Nichols (2016) indicate, all school communities must have homosexual knowledge to be able to intervene when needed. Constitutional Rights and inclusivity should be known and understood by everybody in the school to curb violations, especially with regard to the minority youth in the school.

Different countries are at different levels of intervention strategies. This study will look at various strategies from different countries, as well as those developed in South Africa to support the inclusion of LGBTI knowledge in schools and in the curriculum of South Africa.

*2.7.2.1 Teachers' lack of understanding of homosexuality as a concept*

Homosexuality is a complex phenomenon that needs to be unpacked for teachers to understand and to be able to deal with the fact that there are homosexual learners in high schools (Bhana, 2012). Numerous studies have been conducted nationally and internationally to clarify the issue of the homosexuality of learners and strategies to combat homophobic attitudes in schools.

Teachers need knowledge to be well-equipped to take the necessary actions when needed. As argued by Shulman (1986), teachers need correct knowledge to be able to differentiate between facts, myths and stereotypes – in this case, on the homosexuality of learners. Teacher content knowledge builds confidence to teach and face learners' questions without brushing off the learners' questions or comments. Teachers usually do not respond when learners ask questions on homosexuality as they find these questions embarrassing and such discussions are often forbidden in class (Nichols, 2016). Therefore, steps need to be taken to equip teachers on LGBTI knowledge as well as homophobic attitudes by learners, staff members, non-teaching staff, management teams and parents.

In the South African context, teachers are unintentionally homophobic because of their lack of knowledge and false or inaccurate information on what it means to be homosexual (Msibi, 2012). As a result, well-outlined and contextualised programmes need to be developed by the Department of Basic Education to train teachers on the homosexuality of learners in high schools.

*2.7.2.2 In-service Teacher Development*

In-service teacher development can be conducted using different teacher development models to contextualise and improve implementation of the knowledge gained as much as possible because a one-size-fits-all programme has been discouraged by many scholars (Bantwini, 2009). This change will assist teachers to tackle on-site homophobic bullying and non-existence challenges of homosexual learners in high schools.

*2.7.2.3 Teacher workshops*

In South Africa, cluster workshops have proven to be efficient, whereby there are small numbers of participants, and those teachers are from the same area and have similar challenges (Bantwini, 2009). A cluster of rural schools share the same obstacles on teaching homosexuality in a cultural and religious community.

According to Msibi (2012), Bhana (2012) and Francis (2017), teachers need ample interactions with experts to be able to unpack the concept of homosexuality. The DBE needs to collaborate with other sister departments, such as the Department of Justice (JoE) that has already developed some material on LGBTI information for South African citizens. Additionally, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and non-profit organisations (NPOs) can provide necessary information and only need to be aligned with the DBE planned programmes (DBE, 2014).

School-based workshops provide opportunities for a whole school to be informed rather than one person attending and being expected to share the information with the staff, which leads to distorted information being taught (Pearce & Cumming-Potvin, 2017). Hence, it would be easier for everybody to be involved and first-hand information would assist with the whole school's transformation. On-site staff training eliminates the one-

size-fits-all type of training, and contextualised knowledge gaps are easily identified and addressed.

Brown and Buthelezi (2020) argue that as school-based support teams (SBST) are responsible for the welfare of all learners at school, they should be capacitated and knowledgeable about the homosexuality of learners to protect homosexual learners against discrimination and homophobic behaviour. A well-trained SBST can effectively care for and support all learners without discrimination and prejudice. Msibi (2012) argues that teachers should reconcile with their own values and beliefs and take responsibility for their roles as professionals and their mandate to teach and guide the young towards adulthood.

Furthermore, parents should be advised on the inclusion of LGBTI information in the curriculum. Awareness campaigns can play a pivotal role in capacitating the parents and the community (Page, 2017) to avoid conflict between parents and schools. LGBTI teachers should be utilised to share experiences and knowledge on being homosexual in a heterosexual school environment. They should also mentor homosexual learners (Barnard, 2019) as they would have the opportunity to interact with an LGBTI person.

*2.7.2.4 Inclusion of LGBTI information in the curriculum*

Homosexuality knowledge should be strategically included across the curriculum to engage every staff member and the leadership of the school, as advised by various authors (Msibi, 2012; Pearce & Cumming-Potvin, 2017). This inclusion will support open discussions in class about homosexuality, as it is still a taboo topic in South African schools.

If homosexuality is included in the curriculum, everybody will be responsible for intervention whenever homophobic behaviour is displayed in or out of class, as every staff member will have appropriate knowledge on homosexuality (Brown & Buthelezi, 2020). Hence, the curriculum will provide uniform knowledge on homosexuality and achieve the department's envisaged transformation in South African schools.

The DBE should make available all the resources developed within the department, and schools should be adequately provided for. According to Bhana (2012), school leaders should be assisted to develop school policies that are inclusive of LGBTI persons – as stipulated in the South African Bill of Rights (1996) – for teachers to refer to when intervention is needed. Policies like safety policies, codes of conduct and admission policies are essential to avoid the discrimination of homosexual learners in schools.

Monitoring and support of the implementation of homosexual education in curriculum delivery should be the responsibility of teachers and school leaders (Francis, 2012; Pearce & Cumming-Potvin, 2017; Brown & Buthelezi, 2020). Teachers lack support from school management to prevent parents attacking individual teachers on the homosexuality of learners in schools (Pearce & Cumming-Potvin, 2017; Brown & Buthelezi, 2020). Subsequently parents should be involved and aware of the LGBTI information in the curriculum.

In South Africa, teachers should be allowed to use resource materials from other countries such as Australia, Canada, Scotland and the United Kingdom which are more advanced in the inclusion of LGBTI information in their curricula and have developed intervention strategies and information resources. Teaching of sexuality education should not only depend on prescribed textbooks (Pearce & Cumming-Potvin, 2017). Other resources can be utilised to provide more information and learn more about tried and tested intervention strategies.

## 2.8 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the researcher provided a literature review related to teacher perceptions, knowledge and interventions on the homosexuality of learners in high schools. The first section elaborated on the knowledge teachers have on the phenomenon and how that knowledge shapes their perceptions and ability to talk about learners who are homosexual or who are perceived to be homosexual. This section provided the preparedness and hindrances regarding the reason teachers are unable to teach or recognise the prevalence of homosexual learners in high schools.

The second section focused on teacher perceptions of the homosexuality of learners. It is empirically proven that teachers perceive homosexuality as contagious and transferable and therefore should not be a topic of discussion, as that can promote the homosexuality of learners. Moreover, teachers could be regarded by the communities as promoters of homosexuality in schools.

The third section concentrated on homosexuality in the curriculum. Since there are no direct policies to support the teaching of homosexuality in schools in South Africa, teachers have nowhere to use their knowledge and practice and, therefore, negative perceptions and denial are exacerbated.

The fourth section focused on the cultural perspective. Culture is inherited from generation to generation, with the notion that homosexuality is taboo. Therefore, teachers are directly influenced by their cultural values, beliefs and social norms, which hinders the recognition of homosexuality in high school learners.

The fifth section emphasised teachers' Christian religion. Most teachers in South Africa affiliate with Christianity and are therefore against homosexuality, as Christianity is against homosexuality. Teachers bring their religious beliefs to school and are not able to teach, talk about or recognise learner homosexuality.

The sixth section deliberated on teacher intervention when addressing homophobic attitudes at school. Teachers regard themselves as only responsible for learners' academic achievement, rather than their psychosocial life. Teacher knowledge, perceptions, religion and cultural perspectives play a pivotal role in teacher intervention when homophobic attitudes are displayed, since homosexuality amongst learners is still taboo in South African schools.

In Chapter Three, the procedures used to conduct this qualitative research study on teachers' perceptions, knowledge and intervention on the homosexuality of learners in high schools are described.

# CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

## 3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter elaborates on the qualitative research methodology adopted by this study to investigate teacher perceptions, knowledge and intervention strategies on learner homosexuality in high schools. The research strategy includes the methodology, study participants, procedures, analysis method, trustworthiness and ethical concerns.

## 3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

DeCarlo (2018) argues that a paradigm is a way of viewing the world and is an outline from which to comprehend the human experience. Fraser and Robinson (2004) define a paradigm as a set of beliefs about how a particular problem exists, a set of agreements about how the problem exists and a set of agreements on how to investigate the problem. Therefore, an empirical research study is directed by a specific paradigm, which this study will adopt. According to Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) and DeCarlo (2018), there are three fundamental research paradigms that guide empirical research: positivism, interpretivism and critical research paradigms. These will be briefly discussed. According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), no one paradigm supersedes another, and suitability is determined by the research approach chosen by the researcher to conduct the investigation.

### 3.2.1 Positivism Paradigm

Positivism is commonly used in quantitative research because of its empirical nature to study proof and the ability to be predicted and generalised into different settings and environments (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). Reality produced through a positivism paradigm can be known accurately as it is supported by a reliable and high-quality standard of evidence (Ritchie, Lewis, McNaughton & Ormston, 2013; Pham, 2018). Moreover, a positivism paradigm helps researchers put together scientific assumptions. Hence, the quantitative findings help to offer rigorous answers for any research inquiries (Pham, 2018).

### 3.2.2 Interpretivism Paradigm

An interpretivism approach is a qualitative paradigm which investigates human behaviour and experiences that are due to environmental influences and interaction (Cohen et al., 2007; Starman, 2014). The objective of an interpretivism paradigm is to delineate the full range of beliefs and experiences of contributors, grounded primarily on their own interpretations (Ritchie et al., 2013; Starman, 2014).

Interpretivism is a paradigm that studies people's lived experiences in their own historical and social contexts (Ritchie et al., 2013). Therefore, the philosophical paradigm underlying this study is an interpretivism research paradigm. An interpretivism paradigm was considered ideal for this study to understand the knowledge and perceptions of teachers on the homosexuality of learners through an in-depth investigation in their natural contexts (Thomas, 2010). This paradigm is appropriate because researchers interpret homosexuality based on established research and literature. Furthermore, qualitative research, which is related to an interpretivism approach, is used in this research study.

This approach helps the researcher understand, interpret and demystify social reality through the eyes of different participants (Cohen et al., 2007). Teachers contributed their personal beliefs, experiences and classroom encounters when teaching homosexual learners. The philosophical assumptions rooted in the interpretivism theory paradigm are explained as follows:

**Ontological assumptions:** These relate to what is happening in the world where knowledge is available to humans and the assumption that reality exists (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Moon & Black, 2014). Pham (2018) points out that the basis of the ontology of relativism is that truth is created in the human mind and therefore no real reality exists. Rather, reality is relative and depends on how an individual experiences it at any given time and place. Thus, interpretivism transforms a relativistic ontology in which there may be multiple understandings of a particular phenomenon, rather than a reality that can be determined through measurement procedures (Pham, 2018). There are various

ontological stances that qualitative researchers can take, but there is mutual understanding that the social world is ruled by prescriptive prospects and common understandings (Ritchie et al., 2013). Thus, this study was guided by the rule of prescriptive prospects.

**Epistemological assumptions:** Cohen et al. (2007) and Ritchie et al. (2013) define epistemology as the way of looking at the world and making sense of it. They are concerned about the nature of knowledge and ask: What is knowledge and how can knowledge be obtained? It answers the question of how one goes about uncovering the knowledge of social behaviour (Mcgogo, 2016). According to Moon and Blackman (2014), epistemology is essential because it frames how researchers would conduct the study, as well as the influences and research design to discover knowledge.

### 3.2.3 Critical Paradigm

Ritchie et al. (2013) describe the Critical Theory as one that concerns empowering people to succeed in dealing with social restrictions that limit them. Thus, the Critical Theory challenges the status quo in order to change people's lives politically, socially and economically for a stable and democratic society (Asghar, 2013). Research findings are mainly categorized into race, class, gender, sexual orientation and disability (Asghar, 2013).

### 3.3 RESEARCH APPROACH

According to Gounder (2012), qualitative research includes various methods and approaches found in different research disciplines. It does not involve numbers but uses logical thinking and expressions to describe and get the sense and feeling to define the position. A qualitative method allows participants to provide in-depth data in responding to the investigation questions (Domegan & Fleming, 2007) and will enable the researcher to learn more about teacher perceptions on the homosexuality of learners in high schools. Domegan and Fleming (2007) explain that qualitative research aims to explore and discover questions about the problem at hand, because so little is known about the problem. In addition, there is often uncertainty about the dimensions and characteristics

of problems. As described in the literature review, very little is known about teacher perception and knowledge on homosexuality of learners in high schools in South Africa.

As indicated by Maree (2012) and Abdulkareem (2018), the use of a qualitative approach in this study helped the investigator to gather rich descriptive data regarding teachers' perceptions and knowledge of gay and lesbian learners in high schools. Hence, this qualitative research study solicits the points of view, thoughts and feelings of respondents on the study phenomenon (Gounder, 2012; Heale & Twycross, 2017; Tiley, 2017). Descriptive research includes gathering data to answer questions regarding the present position of the phenomenon of the study and defines and reports the way things are by responding to the 'how' or 'why' enquiries (Gounder, 2012). It also offers the researcher a chance to follow up on answers given by respondents, producing valuable conversations around the subject. In this study, the qualitative approach helped to explore and understand why teachers behave as they do and how they make meaning of their experiences in their daily lives (Hammarberg, Kirkman & de Lacey, 2015). It also helped to understand their knowledge, attitudes and beliefs, as this research studied the phenomenon within its natural setting (Labuschagne, 2003).

According to Hammarberg et al. (2015) and Abdulkareem (2018), a qualitative methodology is utilised to answer questions about experiences, meaning and perspectives. Hence, the objective of this study was to identify teacher knowledge and strategies on how to deal with learner homosexuality in high schools, as the literature reviewed highlighted little knowledge and intervention methods when homophobic actions are displayed.

## 3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

The qualitative research design falls into six categories – namely, phenomenological, ethnographic, grounded theory, narrative, case study and historical – with six data collection strategies applicable to all (Jeff, 2015; Leonard, 2019).

The case study design was selected for this study because of the manageability of scale and in-depth data that would be produced to address the researched phenomenon in its natural setting (Cohen et al., 2007; Leonard, 2019) – in this case, teachers at schools. There were three compelling reasons for choosing the case study design. Firstly, a case study is a profound investigation of a case in its normal setting for the purpose of generating knowledge within a restricted and focused setting (Crowe, Cresswell, Robertson, Huby, Avery, Sheikh, 2011; Rule & John, 2011). Secondly, as case studies generate rich data that are viable in the next level of research investigations, and as research on teacher perceptions of learner homosexuality in the South African context has not yet been done extensively, this study would benefit the body of knowledge regarding this phenomenon, as new proof of teacher perceptions, knowledge and interventions on the homosexuality of learners will be added to the knowledge uncovered through preceding studies. Thirdly, the case study design will detail teachers' real-life experiences and influences according to the context within which they are located, as homosexuality is said to be a complex phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Francis, 2017).

## 3.5 SAMPLING

Sampling is the strategy of selecting a lesser, homogenous sample, the purpose of which is to define in depth some specific sub-group which comprises homosexual learners and directs the focus of the study (Patton, 2002; Lopez & Whitehead, 2013). Therefore, the current study adopted this strategy in order to sample suitable participants to define in-depth the minority homosexual learners in schools.

According to Cohen et al. (2007) and Lopez and Whitehead (2013), the excellence or failure of research is due to the appropriateness of the sampling strategies implemented by the researcher. As this research is qualitative, participants are fewer in number. As argued by Lopez and Whitehead (2013), in a qualitative study there are no generally prescribed principles that control the sample size. Therefore, the richness of data is far more essential than the number of participants. The researcher has made sure that the participants sampled would provide rich data, which would be sufficient to validate the findings.

The availability of resources was considered by the researcher when deciding on the number of participants, as qualitative data needs time and effort to gather, process and interpret information (Koerber & McMichael, 2008). The distance between the participating schools, which would consume travelling time, was also considered.

Five teachers from three different schools participated in this study. As recommended by Creswell (2007) and Koerber and McMichael (2008), a case study can use three to five participants and the researcher should select participants that would present the extensive diversity of perspectives: hence, the choice of participants from different schools in different areas, focusing on the rural parts of the district.

Qualitative research is based on non-probability and purposive sampling and the researcher does not attempt to generalise the findings (Maree, 2012). Purposive sampling was used to find the appropriate participants through specific criteria to sample the participants of this research. To select information-rich participants, purposive sampling was ideal for this study and provided the most effective use of the limited resources available for the study (Patton, 2002). The purposive sampling in this research was conducted before the actual data collection process started so that the researcher could become more acquainted with the case (Yazan, 2015). The teachers sampled are experienced in teaching in high schools and qualify within the chosen scope of the study, namely, semi-rural, rural and deep-rural areas, and they were willing to participate.

To extend the variety of views (Creswell, 2007), this study sampled one participant from one semi-rural school, two participants from one rural school and two from one deep-rural high school around the Gert Sibande District. Experience in dealing with the phenomenon was crucial when selecting the participants, as the participants should be directly involved with the phenomenon to be able to narrate their own special experiences and information and generate valuable data for the study (Patton, 1990; Patton & Cochran, 2002; Koerber & McMichael, 2008; Maree, 2012). Literature reveals that there are homosexual learners in every school in South Africa. Therefore, all teachers have an encounter with a

homosexual learner at some time. This study sampled the teachers in order to narrate their own perceptions on the homosexuality of learners in high schools.

In line with the research question, this study specifically sampled those individuals who are 'information rich'. Five teachers from three different schools were sampled in this study to explore the environmental influences in teacher perceptions on the phenomenon. Three participants are in managerial positions and they could identify management perceptions and interventions on homophobic attitudes. Apart from Life Orientation (LO), teachers are teaching other subjects, which makes the homosexuality of learners every teacher's business (Hoffman, 2001; Lees, 2017). Kruger (2011), Bhana (2012) and Msibi (2014) confirm the presence of homosexual learners in every high school, regardless of race, economic status and social status. Thus, every teacher should be involved in homosexual issues in the school.

## 3.6 DATA COLLECTION

A qualitative study is solicitous with understanding how people make meaning of their experiences. Consequently, the aim of this study is to understand teacher perceptions, knowledge and experiences on teaching homosexual learners in high schools. The procedure of gathering data is directly connected to sampling and is regarded as harmonising with it (Lopez & Whitehead, 2013). Therefore, the researcher sampled participants who were suitable for the data collection strategies chosen for this study.

Stark (1995) argues that there is no specific time to start gathering data. As soon as one becomes interested in a phenomenon and before embarking on the actual study, data can be informally collected through backgrounding, acquaintance with other cases and first impressions. The researcher started collecting informal data on meeting a learner who was chased away from school. The learner informed the researcher that a teacher was responsible for her suspension from school because she had worn trousers instead of a skirt. Thus, the researcher became interested in the phenomenon, started reading about the homosexuality of learners and only embarked on this study after having acquaintances with LGBTI adults and young adults.

Patton and Cochran (2002) argue that data collection methods should directly answer the research question and suffice the research objectives. Therefore, a mark of excellence for case study research is the use of multi-source strategies of data collection – namely documentation, archival records, interviews, physical artefacts, direct observations and participant-observation – as this enhances the validity of the data collected (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

### 3.6.1 Data Collection Instruments

This study used interviews and documents to gather rich descriptive data as recommended by Maree (2012). Five teachers from the three schools were interviewed. The selected schools and government documents on LGBTI learners were analysed as other data collection strategies.

The interpretive approach assists to delineate the full range of the participants' experiences through their own interpretations. The use of Gibson's theory of 'direct perception' derived from the individuals' environmental influences and experiences provided this study with different participant perceptions and levels of understanding on learner homosexuality.

Data was gathered through open-ended interviews and document analysis, and an audio tape was used to capture the participants' responses accurately (Patton & Cochran, 2002).

### 3.6.2 Individual Interviews

Interviews are considered the best technique for qualitative data gathering, representing the supreme shared method for collecting qualitative data and the central path to numerous certainties (Stark, 1995; Lopez & Whitehead, 2013). This study adopted interviews as a specialised form of communication between the researcher and the participants. As Seidman (1998) argues, if the researcher's goal is to understand what meanings the people involved in education give to their experiences, then interviews

provide a necessary, if not entirely sufficient, avenue of inquiry.  The researcher's goal in this study was to understand teacher perceptions, knowledge and interventions on the homosexuality of learners in high schools.

In this study, the researcher has intensely reviewed literature and attended LGBTI activities, such as the LGBTI awareness pride and community dialogues that are constantly conducted by the Department of Justice (DoJ) in South Africa; hence, the choice of using interviews as one of the data-gathering strategies for this study. Qu and Dumay (2011) argue that to gather interview data valuable for research intentions, it is essential for the researcher to attain as much proficiency in applicable topic areas as possible for them to be able to ask well-versed questions. Seidman (2006: 38) confirms that it is crucial to read enough books to be thoughtful and intelligent about the background and history of the subject and to understand what literature on the subject is available. To be able to work intensely with the material after the interviews have been finalised, a return to the readings will assist to analyse and interpret the interview material.

Since in-depth interviews utilise a strategy that is fundamentally open-ended, preparation, planning and structure are critical to be able to respond profoundly and wisely to what unfolds as the research continues (Seidman, 2006). Therefore, the researcher planned the interviews very carefully through an intensive literature review and informal conversations with relevant people (Stark, 1995; Qu & Dumay, 2011).

This study is not interested in statistical analysis, so a key informant interview type was conducted to probe the views of the five participants (Anderson, 1998). Cohen et al. (2007) and Taylor and Burke (2009) confirm that interviews allow the respondents to reveal their distinctive ways of looking at the world and to give their descriptions of situations. Teachers revealed their perceptions, knowledge and intervention strategies on learner homosexuality in high schools.

As the interviews were conducted face-to-face and individually, the researcher was able to identify the participants' facial expressions and body language, which clearly expressed

the frustration and confusion teachers feel about the homosexuality of learners. Each interview lasted from 60 to 90 minutes, depending on how the participant expressed him- or herself. Some participants found it a difficult topic to talk about and therefore took more time to relax and air their views.

The open-ended questions allowed for significant but unexpected issues to be raised and the researcher investigated thought-provoking parts that arose from contributors' interests or distresses (Knox & Burkard, 2009). Probing questions were asked, emanating from what the participant had said and whether the researcher needed clarity or assurance of what the participant said.

Recording the interviews was essential, as in-depth interviews should be recorded and transcribed to preserve the words of the participants in their original data (Seidman, 1998). Recording the interviews offers participants the assurance and confidence that what they said would be treated responsibly (Seidman, 1998).

This study made use of a multi-method approach, encompassing individual interviews and government and school document analyses on LGBTI people.

### 3.6.3 Document Analyses

Organisational and institutional documents have been essential in qualitative studies for many years. Bowen (2009) states that there has recently been substantial growth in the quantity of research reports and journal articles that make use of document analysis as a contribution to the methodology. For triangulation, this study used document analysis as another data-gathering method. "Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents – both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) material" (Bowen, 2009: 27). Document analysis is essential in proving rich contextual background information of the organisation and the phenomenon being investigated (Evaluation Briefs, 2018). The homosexuality of learners in high schools is said to be taboo. Therefore, the documents provided information on the schools' context.

This study analysed the written documents – namely, school record books, school policies (safety and code of conduct policies), minutes, logbooks and government policies – to gather more data on homosexual incidences and interventions in high schools. By reviewing the documents, the researcher was able to identify the implementation of policies designed by the school and the policies of the Department (Evaluation Briefs, 2018).

According to Patton (1990), by examining data gathered through diverse approaches, the researcher authenticated conclusions through data groups and thus decreased the effect of possible partialities that can occur in the inquiry. Therefore, some data gathered in the interviews corroborates data from the documents reviewed, and some interview questions were formulated through this document analysis.

What has come to the fore is the lack of adequate detail in most reports available in the reviewed literature that explains the plan of action and the results of the document analysis (Bowen, 2009). The plan of action is detailed below, whilst the evaluation tool results (Appendix D) will be dealt with in Chapter Five to guide and supplement intervention strategies that this study proposed to develop.

### 3.6.4 Document review action plan

Through the advice of Evaluation Briefs (2018), the researcher vigilantly planned and conducted document reviews in the three schools where permission to evaluate documents and interview teachers had been obtained. The following are the steps of the plan:

- **Assess existing documents**
  Available documents were assessed and to be able to answer the evaluation questions, it was determined which ones were needed – namely, the school safety and code of conduct, logbook and minutes. The Department's documents were downloaded online.

- **Secure access to the documents identified through assessment**

  The principals of the three schools granted permission for the researcher to access the documents identified for evaluation. No permission was required to access Departmental documents as those are at schools and available online.

- **Ensure confidentiality**

  Confidentiality always needs significant attention when gathering data for assessment. Names of learners found in the school documents were not to be used, as the study was about teachers only. Names of teachers are not mentioned either and, where necessary, pseudonyms are used to put a name to an incident.

- **Compile the documents relevant for evaluation**

  After securing access to the documents identified to answer the evaluation questions regarding responsive interventions on the homosexuality of learners in high schools, the researcher carefully went through the identification process and a list of identified documents was compiled.

  **Understand how and why the documents were produced**

  To gather usable information for assessment and a better understanding of the context in which the documents were compiled, the researcher talked to the schoolteachers who happened to know about those documents. They offered all the clarity and understanding needed.

- **Determine the accuracy of the documents**

  Speaking with the people involved in the development of the documents helped to determine the accuracy of the documents. Other documents were developed a long time ago and few members of the School Management Team (SMT) were present at that time. They knew the content but were not clear on the reasons for some clauses.

**Summary of the information from documents reviewed**

An assessment tool (Appendix D) was used to summarise the data gathered from the assessed documents. The tool helped to compile and analyse the evaluation findings.

The documents assisted in probing questions during interviews, especially because the interviewees are from the very schools where documents were analysed.

The documentary data were evaluated together with data from the interviews so that themes would emerge transversely from the two categories of data. Documents assessed provided errors of attention, such as revisiting school policies, as they were developed a long time ago, when homosexuality was not an issue of concern.

The next section elaborates on the data analysis of the study.

## 3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

Braun and Clarke (2006) define Thematic Analysis as a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns or themes within data. According to Elo, Kääriäinen, Kanste, Pölkki, Utriainen and Kyngäs (2014), thematic content analysis is the most suitable method for answering the target research question and appraising whether the data is rich enough for use in content analysis. In this study, data generated from the semi-structured individual interviews were analysed through thematic content analysis. Thematic content analysis was used as it minimally organised and described the data set in rich detail and interpreted various aspects of the research topic (Bowen, 2009).

Thematic analysis is sufficient for this study (Patton & Cochran, 2002). To produce themes, this study used content analysis to analyse text, namely, interview transcripts and documents (Patton, 2003). To offer the readers clarity on how data was analysed and the assumptions thereof for trustworthy evaluation (Nowell, White & Moules, 2017), the key stages of the analysis were as follows:

- **Read and annotate transcripts:** A synopsis of the data was given and introductory annotations were created; thus, the researcher became acquainted with the data. The researcher engaged with the data, transcribing and reading and repeatedly listening to the recordings while searching for meanings and codes. This stage offered a foundation for the whole data examination (Nowell et al., 2017).

- **Identify themes:** Throughout this step, the researcher drew preliminary codes from the data to be utilised to delineate the themes. Themes were generated from the codes noted while engaging with the data (Patton & Cochran, 2002: 114). The researcher endeavoured not to make a summary of the data generated and to identify themes. Data within themes were joined meaningfully, while there were flawless and distinguishable differences amongst themes (Braun & Clark, 2006).

- **Developing a coding scheme:** This entailed making a list of all the themes, with codes being applied to the data. It is convenient to start developing the coding system as soon as preliminary data have been gathered to be able to shape data gathering later, and that convenience was used (Braun & Clark, 2006). Verification was done to ascertain that the questions asked were correct and that the participants were suitable. Developing coding schemes with colleagues helped to avoid going down constricted analysis paths and to ensure that there was no bias about what was being investigated (Bowen, 2009).

- **Coding the data:** In this phase, the codes developed were applied to the whole set of data by writing codes in the side-lines of transcriptions (Patton & Cochran, 2002). The codes were organised into simple themes which were integrated into broader or abstract themes. The connections amongst codes, themes and different stages of themes were identified. Some themes were joined, developed and divided or cast off.

- **Defining and naming themes:** During this step, the researcher refined and defined themes to identify the core of what every theme was about and to determine what piece of the data each theme reproduced. As part of the fine-tuning, it was distinguished whether a theme comprises any sub-themes emerging. By the end of this step, all themes were well-defined, and names were given that are succinct, instantly giving the reader a common sense of what the theme is about (Nowell et al., 2017).

The analysis consisted of data excerpts to deliver a succinct, coherent, analytical, non-monotonous and fascinating interpretation of the narrative that the data communicated. The write-up delivered adequate substantiation of the themes contained by the data and

will be able to answer the research questions and make an argument in relation to the research.

## 3.8 TRUSTWORTHINESS

Nowell et al. (2017) defined trustworthiness as the way in which researchers can influence themselves and readers that their research findings deserve attention.

Cameron (2011) explained the four criteria developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to describe the trustworthiness of qualitative research; namely, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. These trustworthiness criteria will be concisely defined and then interwoven throughout a description of how the researcher attempted to conduct a trustworthy thematic analysis in this research.

- **Credibility:** For quality criteria, this study looked at credibility as one of the essential factors in founding trustworthiness and ascertaining how parallel the findings are with reality. As a qualitative investigation, this study used credibility as internal validity to certify that this study measures or tests what is intended. Triangulation was also adopted. Hence, the individual interviews and document analyses were the major data collection strategies (Cameron, 2011).

- **Transferability:** This necessitates the researcher delivering adequate information and context to allow the audience to judge whether the findings can be functional to other situations and contexts (Elo et al., 2014; Nowell et al., 2017). Therefore, enough data was collected through individual interviews and documents to allow judgement to be applied accordingly. Shenton (2004) maintains that the findings of a qualitative project are specific to a small number of settings and individuals and that it is difficult to demonstrate that the findings and conclusions are applicable to other situations and populations. The researcher believes that this study can be used by practitioners who believe that they are in a similar situation to that defined in the study. Therefore, they may relate the findings to their own positions.

- **Dependability:** To discourse the dependability matter in a more straightforward way, the procedures used in this study are described in detail, thereby allowing a future investigator to replicate the work and to achieve the same results (Shenton, 2004; Elo et al., 2014). Sufficient details and documentation of the methods engaged are displayed so that this research may be examined and reproduced (Cypress, 2017). Reflexivity, a self-evaluation of subjectiveness, can decrease bias (when suitable to do so) and increase dependability by intensifying the transparency of the research procedure (Moon, Brewer, Januchowski-Hartley, Adams & Blackman, 2016).

- **Confirmability:** Confirmability can be understood as a point of impartiality or the degree to which the outcomes of the investigation are designed by the respondents and not by the investigator's inspiration or concern (Pandey & Patnaik, 2014; Cypress, 2017). The researcher ensured that the study's findings are the result of the involvements, perceptions and knowledge of the respondents, rather than the investigator's own partialities. This can be attained through an examination track of the raw data, data reduction and analysis, which can be obtained from the study supervisor, Professor L.T. Mabasa.

## 3.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

The defence of human participants through the implementation of suitable ethical principles is indispensable in all research studies. In qualitative research, ethical considerations have a particular quality due to the in-depth nature of the study procedure and human participants (Arifin, 2018). Hence, the researcher was obliged to adhere to ethical considerations when conducting this study. It is critical to obtain permission from the Human Research Ethics Committee before commencing with a study with human participants (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018). Permission was attained from the University of Limpopo's Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC) and the Mpumalanga Department of Basic Education before commencing with data-gathering for this study.

According to Ketefian (2014), research participants should be made aware of how the research is going to be conducted in terms of informed consent. The researcher explained the voluntary nature of participation and that participants were free to terminate participation if they felt uncomfortable, as the study topic required personal beliefs and attitudes. Privacy is essential when doing research with human participants. In this study, participants were made aware of the confidentiality of their responses, as raw data would only be shared with the study supervisor, Professor L.T. Mabasa.

### 3.9.1 Informed consent

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) and Ketefian (2014) confirm that 'informed consent' is the foundation of every research study. The term comprises two significant fundamentals, with each necessitating careful contemplation, namely, 'informed' and 'consent'. Participants were well informed of the reason for the study, which was to explore and understand teacher perceptions and knowledge on the homosexuality of learners in high schools.

The consent form explains in detail the sort of information that is required from the participants and the utilisation of the information provided, including knowing their rights to access their information and being to opt out at any time (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018). Participants had appropriate time to ask questions and address any concerns.

It was mandatory to sign the informed consent form before the interview to indicate their permission to be part of the research. A consent form was signed by each participant. This moral principle is called autonomy (Cohen et al., 2007). Termination of participation would not in any way disadvantage the participants as participation was voluntary (Arifin, 2018).

### 3.9.2 Anonymity and confidentiality

Anonymity means that the researcher would not know the participants of the study (Kuzhabekova, 2017). The Research Board (2017) explains that all researchers conducting research involving humans have a responsibility to protect the privacy of their

participants. This requires researchers to take steps to properly protect sensitive and personal information that participants are reluctant to disclose or disclose to others. As the researcher knows all the participants, appropriate safeguards were in place to protect the privacy of participants and their information from unofficial access, usage, adjustment, loss and theft (Research Board, 2017).

Names of learners were not revealed, and they are referred to as 'a learner' or 'learners'. The data was de-identified and the identities kept confidential. To be able to link data to a specific participant, participants are referred to as T1 to T5 when presenting the data (Ketefian, 2015). As the researcher conducted this study alone, no one, apart from the study supervisor, would access raw data generated during the research. Participation did no harm to the participants as all data collected was treated confidentially and the participants' identities were protected.

### 3.9.3 Voluntary and informed participation

Arifin (2018) asserts that participants should be adequately informed of the nature of the research and be aware of what is expected of them. The researcher thoroughly explained the nature of the study to the participants; that is, teacher perceptions on the homosexuality of learners. They were at liberty to ask questions for further clarification and engage with the study, as homosexuality is a sensitive concept to talk about, especially to those who are not teaching LO. Comprehending the information gave them the power of freedom to decide whether to participate or not.

### 3.10 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the researcher presented the processes and procedures applied in investigating teacher perceptions, knowledge and interventions on the homosexuality of learners in high schools. Documentary analysis was included to identify the recognition and documentation of homosexual issues of learners in schools, and in the Department of Basic Education.

# CHAPTER FOUR: DATA PRESENTATION
# AND ANALYSES

## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, data is presented and analysed to highlight teacher perceptions, knowledge and interventions when homophobia is displayed by teachers, learners, non-teaching staff and management and the School Governing Body (SGB) on learner homosexuality in high schools. The knowledge gained from this qualitative research can inform and indicate how to support homosexual learners and contribute to community education and awareness regarding homosexual persons, as well as add to the body of knowledge on homosexual education and teacher perceptions (Heale & Twycross, 2017).

This study was guided by the following key research question:

● What are teacher perceptions, knowledge and interventions regarding homosexuality amongst learners in high schools?

In endeavouring to answer the primary investigation question, the following secondary questions were formulated:

● How do teachers define homosexuality?
● What are teachers' experiences in teaching homosexual learners?
● What strategies do they use to support homosexual learners?
● Why do teachers regard homosexuality as a problem or part of life?

The researcher started with background images of the schools and as this study uses inductive data analysis, the themes that unfolded in addressing each of the research sub-questions were introduced and discussed. The teachers were profiled to display the subjects that they teach, other than Life Orientation (LO). Literature is also used to either support and validate or negate the findings of the data.

## 4.2 CONTEXTUAL PICTURE OF THE SCHOOLS

Mpumalanga is primarily a rural province containing four districts. Gert Sibande is one of the districts, where the study was conducted. Most schools are in the rural parts of the district and tribal authorities are the custodians of the schools, which makes them more rooted in norms, cultures and traditions than schools in urban areas and townships. Three schools were sampled purposively from 121 high schools in the district.

## 4.3 TEACHER PROFILES

This is a qualitative case study, which means that this study can use three to five participants (Creswell, 2007; Koerber & McMichael, 2008); hence, the choice of five participants. As a researcher, one should ascertain the choice of participants that will present an extensive diversity of perspectives. Data was collected from the five participants. One participant is experienced in teaching Life Orientation (LO). The other four participants are not teaching LO. Lees (2017) argues that all teachers, not only LO teachers, should be able to talk about the homosexuality of learners. This study explored the perceptions, knowledge and interventions of teachers not teaching LO and attempted to identify their knowledge gaps, interventions and how they perceive homosexuality as a complex concept to understand, especially in an African context (Chinangure, 2018).

**Table 1: Teacher Profiles**

| Teachers from schools | Age | Gender | Qualifications | Teaching subject | Post level | Teaching experience |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Teacher 1 (semi-rural) | 59 | F | STD, BA, Bed, Comp. Lit | English & Natural Science | 2 | 30 |
| Teacher 2 (deep-rural) | 26 | F | Bed FET | SiSwati & Agriculture | 1 | 6 |
| Teacher 3 (rural) | | M | STD, FDE | English & Life Science | 3 | 26 |
| Teacher 4 (rural) | 57 | F | STD, FDE & BA | Social Science Geography | 2 | 30 |

| Teacher 5 (deep-rural) | 28 | M | BED | Life Orientation & English | 1 | 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

**Table: 2 School Profile**

| School | Enrolment | Area | Description |
|---|---|---|---|
| School 1 | 601 | Semi- rural | This area is a bit of urban and rural with higher population. There is formal management of the land. Schools have high enrolment as there are many families in the area. |
| School 2 | 420 | Rural | A rural area is a swath of land that has farms, ranches and villages with not very many people. Farming is the main source of income and livelihood. The school enrolment fluctuates due to families migrating to towns and cities for greener pastures. |
| School 3 | 380 | Deep-rural | Deep-rural has fewer people than rural with houses scattered in the land. The school enrolment is very low because of the number of families in the area. |

*Source: Adopted from Cromartie & Bucholtz (2008)*

The next section will examine the key themes that emerged from the interviews and document analysis data.

## 4.4 KEY THEMES

This report follows Anderson's (1998) strategy of qualitative research by organising data into themes. Therefore, data are grouped and matched based on themes and patterns

that emerged during the analysis procedure as described in Chapter Three. Five themes were identified and presented with corroborative data. Four of the themes are directly related to the secondary question of the study. Additionally, the emergence of one theme – teacher beliefs on homosexuality – is not necessarily separate from the research question as it relates to the main research question.

The four themes are: a) Teacher knowledge on homosexuality; b) Teacher perceptions on homosexuality; c) Teacher experiences, and d) Teacher intervention. Teacher intervention will be the last to be presented as it leads to the intervention strategies developed from this study. As this is a qualitative research study, in the next section the data findings and conclusions of the interviews will be reflected on in depth.

### 4.4.1 Teacher Knowledge about Homosexuality

*Research sub-question: How do teachers define homosexuality?*

Knowledge is key to teachers in whatever message they want to deliver to learners. Teachers should have knowledge of the different learners in the classes they teach, as a standard requirement is to have a knowledge base for teaching (Shulman, 1986). Learners are different in capabilities and psychological and physical characteristics; hence, sexual orientation is different in heterosexuality and homosexuality, as identified in high school learners (Mcgogo, 2016). In the data, teachers identify themselves as not having the correct or enough knowledge to enable them to stand courageously in front of learners and talk about or answer questions on homosexuality. All five teachers interviewed agreed that they did not have enough knowledge to talk about or teach about homosexuality, as indicated by the following excerpts:

| T1 | "Honestly, I have never taught about that subject, never. It has never been there. In English there are themes that we use when we teach, so we have never had a theme that needed us to talk about homosexuality at all but maybe in Life Orientation they do have I am not sure I might be wrong." |
| T2" | "Well, it is something that is not easy to teach about in most times. I was lucky to teach Life Orientation in Grade eight and I came across that topic |

| | |
|---|---|
| | and it was not easy to teach it. I was guided by the textbook content which does not make it easy also as there is not enough content knowledge on the topic." |
| T3 | "My knowledge is not enough because in genetics we talk about it when we talk of chromosomes X and Y. From the Life Science that I am teaching homosexuality comes from hormones but I cannot say only from there." |
| T4 | "To be honest I do not teach about homosexuality in class for the fear that maybe I will utter something that shows some disrespect to those learners. I do not have correct or better definition of homosexuality because mine is just learnt from the streets as we have never been taught about it." |
| T5 | "It is a bit difficult touching it in class, but I try and teach them about diverse sexualities but not specific on homosexuality. I tell them not to hate homosexual people that is how I teach about it." |

The little knowledge that teachers have about homosexuality makes them fear homosexual learners in their classes. They become more frustrated, as mentioned by Teachers 4 and 5, because they do not have the correct knowledge about the reasons why those learners are homosexual. Moreover, they think that homosexuality can be adopted as a style of life.

| | |
|---|---|
| T4 | "There are those teachers who do not understand homosexual learners. They cannot handle the topic as they still fear homosexual learners. I think it not exactly homophobia but frustration. When the teacher sees this learner and wonders why is this learner like this and thus it relates into fear as homosexuality can be adopted and transferred to other learners." |
| T5 | "Some teachers think learners change or adopt homosexuality and therefore have a problem with them as they say, boys want to be girls and girls want to be boys." |

According to literature reviewed, all teachers should have knowledge about the homosexuality of learners in high schools so that they can handle homophobic situations in their different classrooms and around the school premises. In this study, data revealed that teachers ignore the learners' homosexuality and regard them as learners like every other learner in the school. This poses difficulties for the homosexual learners to be recognised so that their needs can be understood and catered for. Therefore, heteronormativity is the norm above all sexualities (Francis, 2017). Some teachers even label and ridicule homosexual learners, which causes learners to be fearful to come out or even talk to the teachers. The data confirms that teachers are more concerned with their rights to be at school than their sexual orientation. The right to be at school and be taught undermines the right to their sexual orientation and is therefore ignored. This exacerbates the discrimination that learners are facing at school.

| T1 | "Yes, definitely they have a right to be at school so they should be allowed whether they are homosexual by choice, or it is fashionable or natural they have a right to learn like any other child." |
|----|----|
| T2 | "I think they should be allowed at school because every learner has a right to be at school and be educated, although I would not like them talking openly about their sexuality as that would be promoting homosexuality to the other learners." |
| T3 | "Yes, they should be allowed to come to school because whether we like it or not, we cannot chase them away. Talking openly about their homosexuality is against my Christianity, so it troubles me. I think all teachers have a responsibility but when and if there is a problem because we cannot just teach about it when there is no problem because that might create a problem." |
| T4 | "As a learner they have a right to learn and be educated…. we have just to learn to live with them. I avoid talking about it out of respect of their choice of what they think is right for themselves. So, I do not talk about it." |
| T5 | "Indeed, the school should be an inclusive school and be able to cater for all learners irrespective of their sexual orientation." |

It is evident that teachers lack content knowledge (CK) and pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) to enable them to teach and recognise the homosexuality of learners in high schools. Cogill (2008) indicates that teachers with sufficient content knowledge do not shy away from having to teach challenging aspects of their subjects, such as the homosexuality and sexual diversity of learners. It was expressed by T3 that:

| T3 | "As teachers, we cannot always shy away because we lack knowledge as if homosexual learners do not exist, we must be afforded a way of handling, accepting and supporting those learners." |
|---|---|

Therefore, the homosexuality of learners is still disregarded by teachers in schools, as they are labelled as perpetrators of homophobic attitudes, although not all teachers are homophobic (Msibi, 2014). Learners ask questions to which they already know answers in an attempt to test their teacher's knowledge and perceptions on homosexuality. The teacher will either shy away or side-step the correct information to be imparted to the learners (Hoffman, 2001). Thus, negativity or a denial of homosexual existence is displayed at the school premises, as shown by the following citations from T1 as HOD of the school and T2:

| T1 | "One day a parent came to school to complain about a teacher who is always saying to her son that he is acting like a girl or pretending to be a girl and she does not like the way the teacher is treating her son in front of other learners. I summoned the teacher and explained the parent's complaint. The teacher said she was just joking. I explained that she cannot joke like that because to the learner it was victimisation especial in class in front of every learner and they laughed at him." |
|---|---|

| T2 | "Other teachers ridicule and call them names in front of other learners, and they end up losing respect for that teacher and homophobic bullying is exacerbated. That teacher will tell everyone as if that is a joke and that learner will receive a change of treatment from both learners and teachers." |
|---|---|

The teachers interviewed take it upon themselves to protect the rights of homosexual learners to be at school and learn like any other learner, although they do not want them talking openly about their homosexuality. Teachers fear transferability and copying of homosexuality by other learners. Contrary to what teachers want for learners, learners need teachers to speak openly to equip them with knowledge to face their sexual challenges (Lees, 2017).

Teachers 2 and 5 in this study have experience in teaching LO. Although T2 does not have ample experience, the teacher mentioned that very little content knowledge is available on the subject to enable teachers to teach homosexuality with confidence or even comprehend homosexuality. T5 is teaching Grades 10 to 12 and confirmed that there is no explicit knowledge on homosexuality in the LO text books. Bhana (2012) confirms that the LO guidelines by the Department of Education (DoE) (2002) do not make any reference to homosexuality, although there are numerous references to sexuality and, by inference, heterosexuality. T5 attests that even the recently introduced LO scripted lessons (DoE, 2017) do not capacitate them adequately, as the lessons are on sexuality, but nothing is said about homosexuality. This is coupled with very limited time allocated to teach the scripted lessons (Mcgogo, 2016), which leads to teachers not teaching the scripted lessons at all.

The following theme will elaborate on how teachers perceive the homosexuality of learners.

## 4.4.2 Teachers' Perceptions of Homosexuality

***Research question:*** *What are the teachers' perceptions of the homosexuality of learners?*

In line with literature reviewed, teachers perceive the homosexuality of learners as the choice of a lifestyle that is preferred by some learners. Teachers perceive homosexuality as contagious – that it can be transferred, learned or copied from someone. Thus, homosexual learners should not be allowed to display or talk openly of their sexuality. Contrary to this perception, Nkosi and Masson (2017) argue that homosexuality is inborn and can never be learnt from any book or be copied from anyone.

The teachers confirm that abusive home experiences a learner might have experienced when growing up could contribute towards learners choosing homosexual relationships. The data also displays that most teachers perceive the homosexuality of high school learners as just a fashion that needs to be stopped. Hence, learners should not be allowed to dress differently from others of their gender as this would be promoting homosexuality. The visibility of homosexuality in the classroom through behaviour and style haunts teachers, as described by the following excerpts:

| T1 | "According to my perception to some of them it is just fashionable to be homosexual and to some others I think there is something wrong with their hormones, unlike a person becoming homosexual because of having problems in a relationship." |
|----|----|
| T2 | "Some of them is their upbringing as you can find a girl raised dressing like a boy and a boy dressing like a girl and the devil will plant the spirit of homosexuality in the head of that child. To me talking about it openly would be as I am promoting homosexuality and I would run away from that scene." |
| T3 | "These are learners who do not want to follow their gender like boys want to be girls and girls to be boys. Homosexual learners are not normal and should be treated like people with disability. As teachers we say it is okay to ridicule |

| | a homosexual learner because of not doing his or her homework, teachers still use derogative language and want to duplicate themselves to learners." |
|---|---|
| T4 | "Learners are copying this style of life from others either here at school because we always have four or five learners who parade themselves as homosexuals. Some learners came to school not being homosexual and later copy from those that are here at school." |

T5 has more understanding of learner homosexuality and thinks that learners may be born and not bred to be homosexuals. Therefore, the homosexuality of learners in high schools is not a trend, but rather describes their real sexual orientation. Homosexual learners need their teachers to guide them, as some are confused about what is really happening to them. This notion is confirmed by T5. Hall and Rodgers (2018) assert that learners start to identify their sexual orientation between the ages of 11 and 18, and homosexuals display confusion as they know nothing about being homosexual. T5 believes that those learners need to be supported to be able to cope with the fact that they are a minority in school and in the community, especially in rural areas where homosexuality is still taboo.

| T3 | "Teachers want to duplicate themselves to learners." |
|---|---|
| T5 | "I think social media is contributing immensely in homosexual people coming out of the closet. It is not that we did not have homosexual people back then we did so it is not a trend but a reality. Learners feel free and brave enough to come out as they now know somebody somewhere is like them and they can easily relate to that person. Learners feel they can get the support they need any time they need support. Teacher Religion interference hinders sexuality education, especially homosexuality teaching in class." |

Nichols (2016) argues that many teachers enforce their own believed perceptions and opinions on their learners, whether openly or discursively, as substantiated by T3 and T5.

Homosexual learners are still perceived as abnormal and unnatural, hence, "something should be done to make them normal", as mentioned by T2.

| T2 | "The Bible says it is possible for them to become normal again through prayers and also a person must try to resist because it is a temptation and thinking it is the right direction but it not a good thing at all." |
|---|---|

Homosexual learners still suffer ridicule, discrimination and humiliation by their own teachers, who perceive homosexuality as transferable, fashionable and something that can be promoted by discussing or by learner cross-dressing. Families are held responsible by the teachers for their children choosing to be homosexuals, blaming their abusiveness or confusing the dressing up of their children. According to the data, girls should stop wearing clothes like boys as that encourages them to think and feel as though they are boys and start homosexual behaviour. T2 expressed it succinctly, by stating that:

| T2 | "Girls growing up dressing like boys will definitely act like boys and eventually become homosexuals. In my school all girl learners wear skirts even those that recognise themselves as lesbians, if the girl does not want a skirt she is free to look for another school to enrol in." |
|---|---|

This is in line with the observation by Masase (2009), who found that homosexuality is influenced by the environment, background or heredity; hence, the view that homosexuality is a learned conduct.

Teachers display stereotypical knowledge, negative perceptions and myths on the homosexuality of learners in high schools (Mudrey-Cumino, 2002; Nichols, 2016). Thus, talking about or even mentioning the word 'homosexual' is regarded as off-limits in schools, and rather derogative words are used to refer to homosexual learners or learners perceived to be homosexual. Teachers' experiences in dealing with and teaching homosexual learners will be discussed in the next section.

### 4.4.3 Teachers' Experiences of Homosexuality

***Research question:*** *What are teachers' experiences in teaching homosexual learners?*

For this theme, teachers described their life experiences and classroom encounters when teaching homosexual learners; hence, the behaviour teachers displayed towards the phenomenon of the homosexuality of learners in high schools.

Data confirms that teachers have different experiences from their own personal environments to school environments. Teachers who have LGBTI family members give their perceived reasons for their family members being homosexual, consequently contributing towards the homosexuality of learners at school, either negatively or positively. Understanding homosexuality is still a problem. They believe that one should rather just let them live their lives as they have chosen to do, as it is their choice. Homosexuals need to be tolerated, as perhaps acceptance seems far-fetched.

| T1 | "I have a cousin who was married for ten years, became depressed in her marriage and decided to become a lesbian. Therefore, to me in her case it is a choice to be a lesbian but with others maybe it is natural I do not know." |
|----|----|
| T3 | "In my family we have one also and we tried to talk her out of it but she is living that and we accepted her as she is. So, I can say we slowly accepting them." |
| T4 | "In my immediate family we do not have any one like that but within my extended family they are there, and we mix in family gatherings. If I do not have a broader understanding, I will discriminate them but no I do not." |

Teachers who have homosexual family members have learnt to accept homosexual people, although they use the strategy of ignoring the sexual orientation of the person and just accept him or her as a family member. Teachers indicate that they do not want to discriminate against people. They would rather look at the person, not the sexual orientation, because a boy is a boy and a girl is a girl, regardless of the sexual orientation.

At school, teachers bring in their own acquired experiences that are either destructive or constructive for homosexual learners. Teachers sometimes pretend to be accepting of homosexual learners, whilst in most cases they do not want learners to come out openly with their sexual orientation, claiming that it has nothing to do with them as they are teaching a child, not his or her sexuality (Mudrey-Cumino, 2002; Nichols, 2016). The teachers use discrimination as a shield to avoid specifically talking about LGBTI learners.

| T2 | "Yes, I teach every learner in my class regardless of sexual orientation and I would not want them speaking openly about being homosexual in my class." |
|----|-----|
| T3 | "In my class I teach learners as they are. Whether the learner is homosexual or not does not concern me as I do not want to discriminate between the learners in my class. I make sure they are treated equally like everybody in the class." |
| T4 | "To me it is another child in my class, sexuality does not count as I will teach the learner just like any other child." |

When teachers need to intervene during a conflict between a homosexual and a heterosexual leaner, the teacher will emphasise that they are learners and that there is no need to judge the incident citing sexual orientation; they are just learners fighting or quarrelling (Testor et al., 2010; Nichols, 2016).

| T1 | "I am always neutral, meaning I don't judge a case being influenced by the sexuality of the learner but what really is the problem at the time." |
|----|-----|
| T2 | "It does not matter whether one is homosexual, and the other is not, they are both learners and the conflict should be resolved amicably." |
| T3 | "I do not even think about the sexual orientation of the learner as a fight is a fight, there is no need to discriminate between homosexual and heterosexual learners." |

Moreover, teachers ignore the reason, or the homophobic language used to start the fight (Daniels, Struthers, Maleke, Catabay, Lane, McIntyre & Coates, 2019). Teachers emphasise the statement that, "No one wants to be treated differently and no learner

wants to be different" (Wiltz, 2018: 69). Consequently, the notion that all learners should be treated equally undermines the fact that some teachers still display homophobic attitudes towards homosexual learners. Therefore, in this context, teachers continue to enforce voicelessness on gay learners (Reygan, 2019).

| T1 | "The teacher said she was just joking. I remember I was just general when addressing the issue to the teachers, actually I talked about discrimination as a cause of suicides and emotional destruction hence the bad remarks. I said to the teachers let us remember we are different so let us embrace each other as human beings. I never mentioned the word homosexual." |
|---|---|
| T2 | "It does not matter if the other one is normal and the other one is not normal because they are both learners and their conflict should be solved without any one being hurt so I will be neutral in solving the conflict." |
| T3 | "To me it is a normal child though they will behave differently and other learners will make fun of them but to me it is just another child that I am going to teach." |
| T5 | "Personally, I have not taught any homosexual learner that I know is homosexual because those learners are in the closet as this is a rural area community, so learners are afraid to show their being homosexuals. This community does not understand homosexuality. Parents are against us teachers teaching their children about homosexuality." |

Teacher 5 is teaching in a deep rural area and has not meet homosexual learners at school since homosexuality is still a taboo in the rural areas of South Africa. It is empirically proven (Daniels et al., 2019) that rural area communities have a great impact on homosexual rejection in schools. As part of the school community, the SGB has an influence on how teachers should perceive, treat and regard homosexual learners. In addition, parents resist the integration of homosexuality into the curriculum as they insist that it would be encouraging learners to copy and practice homosexuality (Peter, 2018). Schools should therefore adhere to the community norms and values.

| T5 | "The community also contribute in not teaching about homosexuality as they are against it and do not want their children to be taught about it. They believe homosexuality can be transferred and learners would want to experiment and end up hooked in it." |
| --- | --- |

## 4.4.4 Teachers' Beliefs

*Research sub-question: Why do teachers regard homosexuality as a problem or part of life?*

Teachers believe that the homosexuality of learners in high schools is copied from other learners. It is unbelievable that a person is born a homosexual and therefore learners should be monitored and should not copy or learn about homosexuality. It is evident that some teachers are strong Christian believers and believe that homosexuality is demonic and needs to be prayed for. Teachers are struggling with their own beliefs that they bring to school, whilst they are supposed to teach learners to cope with real-life challenges. Therefore, they resist teaching sexuality education (Francis & Reygan, 2016). What they have learned to believe in is evident when they say:

| T1 | "God created a man and a woman to mate and populate the earth and also enjoyment between husband and wife. So, with homosexuals it means their sex is just for enjoyment and not populating the earth yet the main reason for sex is to populate the earth." |
| --- | --- |
| T2 | "Christianity highly opposes homosexuality because the Bible says such people were cursed because they did not listen and that is why they became homosexuals. That kind of person received a punishment from God. The Bible says it is possible for them to become normal again through prayers and also a person must try to resist because it is a temptation and thinking that it is the right direction but it is not a good thing at all.'" |

| ET3 | "I am a Christian that is why I said if I have control, I would remove them from my school. Christianity more so where I come from, we believe in what happened in Sodom and Gomora to be partially caused by homosexuality." |
| --- | --- |
| T4 | "In the church where I come from being homosexual is a sin, although I have learnt to live with the learners perceived or displaying homosexuality." |
| T5 | "One would say the Bible says no one is allowed to date the same gender and even quote scriptures to support that. That impact a lot in my class because majority of learners belong to Christian religion." |

Christianity and cultural beliefs play a pivotal role in influencing teachers' understanding and willingness to teach sexuality education, especially homosexuality (Beckmann & Prinsloo, 2007; Bhana, 2012; Peter, 2018,). Teachers aver that that their own culture does not accept homosexuality in their communities and in schools. The schools where this study was conducted are immersed in cultural communities and Mpumalanga is geographically rural (Daniels et al., 2019). Therefore, teachers should uphold the cultural norms and standards of their communities willingly or unwillingly, otherwise they would be labelled as promoters of homosexuality in schools, as shown in the following comments:

| T1 | "I am Xhosa and in Xhosa it is very wrong, not natural and not supposed to be done. Even in other cultures as I am staying among the Swazi people it is the same, for an example there was a learner who was homosexual at my school who could not reveal to his parents as a result of their culture and the parents' status in the tribal authority. Culture is very strict on gender and culture does not conform, what is there and known remains unchanged. No matter I feel culture should accommodate the new society of LGBTI persons there is nothing I can do about that." |
| --- | --- |
| T2 | "I am a Tsonga person. According to Tsonga culture they do not like it at all especially those who are really into culture and traditions." |

| T5 | "Culture and Christianity want their children to do what they believe in like choosing husbands and wives for their children. So, homosexuality is out of question as people should produce grandchildren for future generation." |
|----|---|

Teachers believe that homosexuality is un-African, unnatural and immoral and therefore cannot be allowed at school. They believe that gay learners should not talk openly about being gay and that for teachers to talking openly means that they are supporting and promoting homosexuality, or they themselves are homosexual, and they will therefore be stigmatised and targeted by the communities (Bhana, 2012). T4 believes that it is unfair not to guide learners on their sexuality, but their hands are tied, no matter how much they understand and accept homosexuality in schools. The community is totally against homosexuality acceptance. This was clearly expressed by T1 and T4 who stated:

| T1 | "I am saying it is not natural in fact very unnatural because our anatomy says as woman you are meant to receive." |
|----|---|
| T4 | "Culture emphasise that homosexuality is not African and should not be accepted in the communities, as a man should be married and have kids so does a woman. To me it is unfair, but we do not have powers over the communities these are their children." |

In the South African context, parents have powers to determine what religion and culture they want for their children. Therefore, it is a struggle for teachers to teach homosexuality to learners who are from communities that do not want their children to have anything to do with homosexuality. De Barros (2019) confirms that the executive director of FOR SA advised parents on their rights to remove their children from schools that are teaching something contrary to their own values and beliefs.

### 4.4.5 Teacher Intervention

***Research question:*** *What strategies do they use to support homosexual learners?*

Through both literature and this study, it is evident that teachers ignore homophobic language when used in schools. As a result, some teachers use homophobic language to discipline learners. Furthermore, stigma and victimisation are suffered by those learners who are identified as or perceived to be homosexuals. Therefore, schools are not safe environments for the minority homosexual youth in South Africa (Mostert, 2013; Daniels et al., 2019). Teachers do not deal with homophobic behaviour but instead intervene if learners fight or quarrel. Teachers think that they are being fair if they ignore homosexuality when intervening, whilst the homosexual learners consider it unfair (Wiltz, 2018). Literature confirms that teachers usually ignore fights that involve homosexual learners. They do not intervene because they do not regard homosexuality as an issue. This was succinctly expressed by T1, T2, T3 and T4 and is in line with Meyer (2000) and Wiltz (2018), who aver that the homosexual learners do not report their experiences. They conceal the actual cause of the conflict, as identified below:

| T1 | "I am always neutral meaning I do not judge a case being influenced by the sexuality of the learner but what really is the problem at the time." |
| --- | --- |
| T2 | "I am always fair; it does not matter if one is normal and the other one is not normal. Some learners bully them because they say that it is what they deserve." |
| T3 | "I treat my learners equally; sexual orientation is not an issue to me. A fight is a fight it does not matter who is involved." |
| T4 | "Yes, learners quarrel in class but not because the other one is homosexual they fight because of normal stuff as kids." |

Data in this study shows that teachers do not intervene the way they should. They believe that learners have copied homosexuality from others and want to change from being a boy to being a girl, and vice versa. In high schools, teachers believe that homosexuality

is a trend. This poses a challenge when they must intervene, as they do so with a preconceived reason for the conflict either between learners, the learner and staff members and the learner and admin staff. Contrary to this belief, T5 thinks that homosexuality is not a trend in high schools but a reality that teachers need to accept, understand and learn more about in order to transform schools into safe places for all, as discussed in the following section.

*4.4.5.1 School as a safe place for homosexual leaners*

Schools should be safe places for all learners, irrespective of gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation. For schools to be safe environments for all learners, especially the minority youth, there should be measures put in place that are known to everybody within the school community (Leave it out, 2008; African Safety Promotion, 2016; Reygan, 2019). The five participants of this study unanimously attest that they know of nothing in place to support and protect homosexual learners in high schools. T1, T3 and T5 are in school management teams and have participated in the development of school policies, which exclude the subject of learners' homosexuality in school. T2 mentioned that in her school, the dress code indicates that girls must not wear trousers, otherwise that learner will not be able to enter the school premises. Those who cannot accept that rule should not enroll at that school. This statement proves that some schools in South Africa, especially in the rural areas where this study was conducted, forbid the recognition of homosexuality and emphasise conformity to gender identity, as required by the communities. Therefore, homosexuality is still forbidden in many schools in South Africa, particularly in the rural communities (Zondi, 2017**).** T1, T3 and T4 stated:

| T1 | "As far as I know, there is no policy that talks about homosexuality in my school not in any way even a document about homosexuality nothing, we do not even talk about that." |
|----|----|
| T3 | "There is nothing talking about homosexuality as the word specific, we categorise them under the types of discrimination as they are learners here at school." |

| T4 | "Our policies yes, they include bullying but not homophobic bullying. Homosexual learners are there but there is no discrimination against them hence no one ever talks about them." |
|---|---|

According to data, homosexual learners are not recognised and are rendered voiceless because they are not allowed to talk publicly at school about their sexuality. Thus, other learners become curious about what exactly is happening with these learners because they usually walk, talk and act differently from others and like to cross-dress. Other learners then start bullying homosexual learners (for example, boys may try to strip a learner to see if he is a real boy), which results in violence. T1 had distinctive evidence of homophobic bullying during a school camp, but still addressed the issue as a normal fight between the boys and just separated them, despite the gravity of the incident.

| T1 | "During exam camps in high schools' learners sleep over and that is where homosexual learners experience a lot of problems such as harassment and name calling. Some boys attempted to strip the supposed learners naked to examine his manhood." |
|---|---|

When corrective measures are to be taken to address a situation, teachers aver that the learners should not discriminate against each other as everybody is equal, but they never explicitly address the homophobic nature of the conflict (Reygan, 2019). This enforces the invisibility of homosexual learners. Homophobic bullying is rife in South African schools, although it is never documented or talked about, as confirmed by the participants in this study. Daniels et al. (2019: 4) confirm that: "There is limited statistical data on school violence experienced by LGBTI students in South Africa, but it has been found that they experience discrimination, rejection, isolation, non-tolerance, marginalisation and harassment, with little support from teachers and administrators". Teachers and SMTs need information to develop measures on how to prevent bullying and make schools safe environments for everybody (DBE, 2014). Schools should be safe and

welcoming places for every learner. Therefore, the DoE should ensure that LGBTI learners are well supported so that their experiences are happy, healthy and educational.

As much as it is evident that homosexual learners are marginalised, teachers in this study have voiced their concerns about homosexual learners who misbehave, bully others and even target teachers in the process. Teachers state that when they try to discipline them, this is deemed to be equal to homophobia rather than ordinary discipline, as succinctly identified by teachers T1 and T2.

| T1 | "There was this lesbian learner who had a bad behaviour. She would walk like a boy, wear pants like a boy and was a bully." |
|----|---|
| T2 | "The homosexual learners have a tendency of harassing other learners because they demand intimate relationship with them. Some homosexual learners harass even teachers, I have first-hand experience of a homosexual learner harassing me and when I discipline the learner, the learner complained of me being homophobic." |

Therefore, teachers recommended that they need content knowledge for them to be able to recognise and support homosexual learners, as discussed in Chapter Five.

## 4.5 DOCUMENT ANALYSES PRESENTATION AND FINDINGS

In this study, documents were analysed to verify the availability of homosexual information that is documented in the school context and at the Department of Education (Daniels et al., 2019). Documentation facilitates research in the context of homosexuality education and related phenomena being investigated (namely, three related concepts: perception, knowledge and intervention). Therefore, documents from the three schools and the Department of Education were analysed using the template designed by Bowen (2009), as the five participants are from the three schools. Permission was granted to analyse the school documents to corroborate data collected from the interviews.

For the purpose of verifying documented information on the homosexuality of learners, a few documents were analysed, as they were able to provide an effective means of completing research (Bowen, 2009; Evaluation Briefs, 2018). Examples of selected files and analysed data are given in Appendix C. Document data was analysed along with interview data so that themes emerged in both sets of data.

Data collected from interviews confirm the existence of homosexual learners in high schools despite homosexual learners being denied open visibility. Although serious incidents have occurred, no participant had ever recorded or seen any incident being recorded. This statement correlates with the documents analysed that there is no formal recording of homosexual happenings and issues in high schools, as conflicts and bullying exclude the notion of the homosexuality of learners. There is no conversation about homosexuality captured in the minutes. Therefore, the reviewed documents amplified the interviews and served a useful purpose in answering the research question (Scambor, 2014) as analysed in Appendix C.

The school documents, namely the logbooks, minutes and codes of conduct, are neatly typed and arranged in beautifully covered files, whilst the departmental documents in the school are nicely stored and in good condition. The logbooks and minutes are continuous with specific dates, whilst the codes of conduct and school safety policies need to be revised as they were developed a long time ago. These schools have been there for quite some time.

The document data displays no evidence of the word 'homosexuality', which means that it is never talked about or written about anywhere in the school or in the departmental context. Therefore, the knowledge of homosexuality cannot be found anywhere within the Department of Basic Education. It is therefore easy for teachers to be perpetrators of homophobia because they have no idea how to differentiate between jokes and homophobic attitudes and utterances. Moreover, teachers and learners use derogative language anyhow and anywhere. These practices become the main thread of the school structure and permeate schools' daily activities.

## 4.6 CONCLUSION

It is evident that the homosexuality of learners in high schools in South Africa is still suppressed and denied, mostly in rural areas. Teachers are bound to conform to the norms and values of the communities, despite homosexual learners suffering many forms of homophobic attitudes. Additionally, there is no syllabus to assist teachers to enhance their knowledge and guide homosexual learners.

Many complexities emerged. The teachers mentioned their frustrations and lack of understanding, coupled with parental interference in talking about, let alone teaching, homosexuality in class. Teachers bring their own religions, cultures and beliefs to school, which they want to replicate to learners and in this way, they contribute to negative perceptions of homosexual learners.

Not documenting homophobic incidents and the lack of intervention strategies in the school exacerbates the invisibility and muting of homosexual learners. Teachers and learners simply forget that there is any homophobic attitude around the school.

The next chapter presents the findings and discussions of this study. An intervention strategy model will be proposed, and suggestions made for future research are offered.

# CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the results and discussions of the study as described and analysed: a) Teacher knowledge on homosexuality; b) Teacher perceptions of homosexuality; c) Teacher experiences; d) Teacher beliefs on homosexuality, and e) Teacher intervention. This study has also developed a South African context intervention strategy that can be utilised in schools. Findings from the literature reviewed and this study exposed numerous impeders of teacher perceptions on the homosexuality of learners. The research findings confirmed that a number of these impeders are also eminent in the failure of teacher understanding, knowledge and intervention on homosexuality issues in South African high schools.

## 5.2 TEACHER KNOWLEDGE ON HOMOSEXUALITY

Knowledge is key to enabling teachers to stand in front of learners and teach or answer questions. Enough content knowledge shapes teachers' confidence to teach in a more dynamic and interesting manner than a teacher with little content knowledge (Cogill, 2008). Bertram (2011) describes the importance of content knowledge for teachers as an insightful understanding of concepts regarding their subjects and not just pieces of collected information – in this case, information on homosexuality – as it is a complex concept that needs to be unpacked and understood by teachers and the school community (Greenbaum, 2014). Perez-Jorge, Hernandez, Dominguez, Jimenez and Lupson (2020) confirm that teacher knowledge on LGBTI persons is still very skimpy and distorted by an unwillingness to gain new knowledge and work on their cultural and religious beliefs. Data collected displays no new knowledge gained by teachers, therefore there is no improvement in teacher understanding of homosexuality of learners. It is evident that homosexuality is still regarded as taboo in South African communities, and therefore teachers do not want to work with homosexual people and teach homosexual learners.

In line with literature reviewed, this study confirms teachers' lack knowledge of homosexuality as a concept. Teachers are unwilling to change and acquire new knowledge and accurate information and are stuck in their myths and stereotypes. Homosexual learners depend on teachers to guide them on what exactly is happening with them. Some learners are confused and have no one to talk to as their families do not accept them or talk about being a homosexual (Lees, 2017; Perez-Jorge et al., 2020). Even the teachers in school-based support teams and those teaching LO do not want to talk about homosexuality, as they lack accurate information and enough knowledge on homosexuality. However, the curriculum has nothing to offer teachers. Even the newly introduced LO scripted lessons have made no mention of homosexuality as a concept for teachers to acknowledge. Therefore, the DBE should take better and quicker strides in equipping teachers with the necessary knowledge to enable them to teach about homosexuality, as every school has homosexual learners that need recognition (Hall & Rodgers, 2018).

There is also a requirement for the DBE to make explicit recommendations that homosexuality is a crucial area for debate, knowledge and information (Bhana, 2012; Francis, 2017; Hall & Rodgers, 2018'; Perez-Jorge et al., 2020). Such knowledge should benefit the school community and not only LO teachers. Currently, schools depend on LO teachers and school-based support teams who are not trained to teach homosexuality as a concept, while homosexual knowledge in the curriculum is non-existent.

Francis (2012a) noted that teacher comfort and confidence in the area of homosexuality depends on their level of knowledge regarding the topic and their attendance at relevant workshops. In line with literature reviewed and data collected from this study, South Africa has never conducted such workshops for in-service teachers. Few newly-appointed teachers had an opportunity to attend homosexuality training modules at universities that train pre-service teachers on homosexual content – for example, the University of Stellenbosch; University of KwaZulu Natal, which was the first to launch an LGBTI curriculum in South Africa; Wits University and the University of the Western Cape. There is a gap between university and practice. Therefore, teachers may have gained

knowledge, but that knowledge cannot be utilised because it is prohibited by the SGB and management to even mention the word 'homosexual' in schools.

In line with literature reviewed and data collected, it is evident that learners sometimes ask questions about homosexuality and teachers will answer the question with shallow answers or completely avoid the question, fearful of giving inaccurate information as they lack knowledge on homosexuality as a concept.

The data revealed that teachers are not willing enough to learn more about the homosexuality of learners as they think that homosexuality is not part of their academic teaching. Therefore, homosexual learners need to keep their sexual orientation to themselves.

### 5.2.1 Inclusion of LGBTI Information in the Curriculum

Data revealed that parents are against the inclusion of homosexuality education in South African schools since it is regarded as un-African and unholy. Therefore, the DBE should include parents in debates to avoid conflict between schools and parents and to capacitate them when dealing with their children's homosexuality, especially in basic education (Francis, 2017). Parents are strongly warned by their religious leaders to teach their children to avoid any contact with homosexual learners at school, which compels teachers to ignore homosexuality in schools (De Barros, 2019). If homosexuality is included in the curriculum, teachers will have accurate knowledge and reference to connect schools and parents in order to drive awareness campaigns in their respective communities. Schools will also be able to document homophobic attitudes without fear. In line with literature and this study, there is currently no documentation of homophobic issues in South African schools, although homophobic attitudes and prejudices are rife in high schools.

An inclusive curriculum will encourage teachers and everybody at schools to recognise the prevalence of homosexual learners without discrimination. Inclusivity would assist teachers to stop condoning hostility at school as they would have knowledge and understanding of homosexuality. While the curriculum is still silent about homosexuality in schools, teachers will not be able to handle or intervene in homophobic attitudes as

there is no reference when making judgements. Therefore, they ignore or deny the homophobic nature of the incident, and no one is allowed to mention the real cause of the conflict. Teachers make disparaging comments in class, in the corridors and in the staffroom about LGBTI persons or the word 'homosexual' in general. Lees (2017) recommends that sexuality education, including responsiveness to LGBTI matters, is the task and responsibility of all teachers, not simply Life Orientation teachers, and should not be limited to the domain of curriculum developers. Thus, all teachers in the education system need to be knowledgeable on LGBTI issues. The inclusion of LGBTI knowledge in the curriculum will emancipate everybody in the school to be able to take care for, guide and support homosexual learners.

### 5.2.2 Homosexuality and Equality

Article 9(3) of South Africa's Constitution (1996) states:

> No person shall be unfairly discriminated against on the grounds of race, gender, sex, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language, birth, or marital status (S.A. Constitution, 1996).

Adding homosexuality to schools' programmes is not a contravention of the Equality Clause (Bhana, 2012) and schools should recognise the homosexuality of learners without fear. However, the data revealed that teachers understand equality to mean that all learners should be heterosexual, and they regard talking about and attending to homophobic attitudes as discrimination against the learners. They state that no learner should be discriminated against, and they would rather look at the learner as a learner and not at their sexual orientation. Homosexual learners in high schools suffer silent discrimination which renders them voiceless and invisible. They are denied their constitutional right to be visible – rather, they are regarded as learners who should not be at school unless they stop being homosexuals.

According to teachers, homosexuals should not mix with heterosexual learners for fear of transmission and copying of homosexuality. There seems to be a gap between equality

as policy and actual practice in schools. Equality is based on the fact that all learners are the same, which emphasises heteronormativity and oppresses homosexuality and other sexual orientations. Moreover, school policies do not include the homosexuality of learners or adults. Therefore, there is an urgent need for the Department of Basic Education (DBE) to incorporate LGBTI information and train schools in developing inclusive school policies. It is evident that schools are operating on outdated policies that do not cater for the new transformation with regard to LGBTI. Teachers should teach learners the Equality and Human Rights of LGBTI people to equip them with knowledge and understanding. Bhana (2015) argues that learners who are not properly introduced to the ideologies preserved in the constitution may be not well prepared to participate in debates and dialogues about the rights of gays and lesbians.

## 5.3 TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE HOMOSEXUALITY OF LEARNERS

Homosexuality is a complex concept that needs to be unpacked for teachers to understand (Chinangure, 2018). The complexity involves how one perceives homosexuality as a concept. Like any other person, teachers have their own perceptions that are influenced by the different environments in which they grew up and the communities in which they live, as identified by Gibson's Theory of Direct Perception and Constructivism (Demuth, 2013). This study was conducted amongst semi-rural, rural and deep rural areas. Therefore, teacher perceptions are almost similar as they are influenced by nearly the same environment.

Myths and stereotypical knowledge on homosexuality are deeply rooted within school communities and therefore homosexual learners are not allowed to live or talk about their sexuality openly at school. In addition, teachers perceive homosexuality as contagious and fashionable. They also believe that it can be copied or learned and is a choice of lifestyle which can be stopped whenever the learner decides to do so or is guided to change. Gender conformity is taken very seriously and there should be no cross-dressing; boys should dress and act like boys and girls should wear skirts and not be allowed to wear pants in order to stop them from thinking that they are boys and becoming homosexuals. Teachers hold parents responsible for learners being homosexual as they

have been abusive or are homosexuals themselves. Thus, teachers become more homophobic.

Ibanga (2017: 64) analysed the scientific data from biological science research conducted into the phenomenon of homosexuality and identified the originality of homosexuality by stating that:

> External factors do not exert influence on us as such; on the contrary, internal elements of our being condition the influences which come from outside of our being. It is the internal factors of our being that colourate the external factors that seek to influence our consciousness. Biological studies have proved that sexual predicator, whether heteroerotic or homoerotic, is imposed from within our biological nature of which we have no control.

Data revealed that teachers perceive homosexuality as a joke or a choice, and they use derogative words when addressing homosexual learners in front of other learners. Nichols (2016) confirms that many teachers impose their own believed perceptions and ideas on learners, whether openly or discursively. Therefore, these learners have no-one to talk to in terms of their needs and challenges at school and at home. Homosexual learners need guidance more than heterosexual learners, as they are confused and do not know why they feel the way they do and why they are different from most learners.

As teachers have identified the challenges they face when dealing with learner homosexuality, it is recommended that they be afforded accurate information and knowledge on homosexuality.

## 5.4 TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES OF LEARNERS' HOMOSEXUALITY

This study has identified that teachers who have more acquaintances with LGBTI persons have more tolerance with homosexual learners than those who have no contact. Having a homosexual member in the family also helps to understand homosexual life, although homosexuality is tolerated, as opposed to being accepted. Therefore, teachers need to be assisted to not only tolerate but also accept homosexual learners at school without

judging them. The data confirms that teachers have experiences in their own environments that differ from experiences in school environments. Thus, they display their own perceived reasons why those learners are homosexual, which results in constructive or destructive attitudes towards homosexuality.

Teachers ignore homosexual learners in their classrooms, mentioning that they do not have knowledge nor accurate information on how to deal with homosexual issues (Francis, 2017). This is a situation that leaves homosexual learners vulnerable to discrimination, violence and homophobic language (Reygan, 2019). When teachers intervene during a conflict between a homosexual and a heterosexual learner, the teacher will stress that they are learners fighting and quarrelling and there is no need to judge the incident by mentioning sexual orientation. Teachers therefore disregard the real reason for the homophobic language used to start the conflict. Teachers do not want to be associated with homosexual learners, as they fear being labelled as encouraging the homosexuality of learners at the school. Therefore, learners should not display or talk openly about being homosexual. Data revealed that when there is a homophobic issue that needs to be resolved, the management will not be specific. They talk about embracing each other as human beings should, but no mention of the word 'homosexuality' is ever made. Those teachers who want transformation fail dismally in achieving it as there is no support from management, who believe that schools are for academic purposes and not the sexuality of learners (Francis, 2017). In line with this study, teachers mention that the sexuality of learners is none of their concern because learners should be at school and attend classes and teachers should teach. Those learners need to be taught how to conduct themselves normally, meaning behaving as heterosexuals. Thus, homosexual learners are rendered invisible or non-existent. Data proves that teachers deny having homophobic behaviour in schools, but they do not worry about any homophobic utterances as they use words like 'Sisi boy', that is to say 'gay', when disciplining learners in class and other learners would laugh. Consequently, homosexual learners are the most disrespected people at school by both teachers and learners (Daniels et al., 2019).

In deep rural areas, learners are not allowed to display homosexuality, as the community would be up in arms if there is a homosexual learner at school. Therefore, teachers from those areas do not have any experience in teaching homosexual learners. Moreover, parents are totally against the visibility of homosexuality at school and in the community. They resist the integration of homosexuality into the curriculum as they insist that that would be inspiring learners to duplicate and exercise homosexuality (Peter, 2018). Schools are encouraged to adhere to the community norms and values. If learners belong to the Christian religion and a culture that considers homosexuality a sin and uncultured, it makes it even more difficult for teachers to teach sexuality education as they need to be extra careful of what they say in class. They would be labelled as homosexuals themselves, which that would make life difficult for them. Thus, the DBE should involve parents in dialogues, debates and information sessions to raise awareness on the inclusion of homosexuality in the curriculum to avoid conflict between schools and communities (Bhana, 2012; Msibi, 2014; Francis, 2017). Teacher beliefs influence teacher perceptions, as explained in the following section.

## 5.5 TEACHERS' BELIEFS ABOUT THE HOMOSEXUALITY OF LEARNERS

Data from this study confirm that teachers have pre-conceived beliefs on the homosexuality of learners and therefore struggle with the concept of homosexuality. They consider homosexuality to be transferable and abnormal and no learner should be encouraged to live a homosexual life as it will contaminate other learners. It is evident that the teachers are strong Christian believers and believe that homosexuality is demonic and needs to be prayed for or should be punished by God. They cite the story of Sodom and Gomorrah and other verses from the Bible. As teachers are part of the community and follow the Christian religion, they consider heterosexuality a norm of living (Francis, 2017). Depending on their knowledge and understanding of sexual diversity, different churches have different perceptions on homosexuality, which poses a dilemma to teachers who are to teach homosexual learners without discrimination (Bhana, 2012). In line with literature reviewed, this study has identified most teachers as staunch Christians and it is not easy for them to transform. They would rather tolerate those learners and just let them be. They mentioned that if powers were vested in them, they would not allow

them to attend school. Teachers want learners to be normal and stop seeking attention by displaying homosexuality at school. They believe that learners' different sexuality should be kept within themselves, and they should not bother other people. Consequently, homosexual learners suffer silencing, victimisation and marginalisation by their teachers and everybody else at school. Christianity and cultural beliefs play an important part in persuading teachers' understanding and preparedness to teach sexuality education, especially homosexuality. As part of communities, teachers believe in the community culture that says homosexuality is un-African and uncultured. Therefore, schools are not able to talk about homosexuality, which is prohibited by culture, and they should not be forced to teach about a topic that is contrary to their own communities. This study acknowledges those teachers who understand homosexuality – their knowledge is not enough, but they are willing to learn more about this phenomenon. They use 'Human Rights' to protect homosexual learners, although not directly mentioning sexual orientation, but it is meaningful that they are willing to listen to the learners' needs to the best of their ability. Data revealed that teachers are willing to go against their Christian religion and their culture to understand and protect homosexual learners in schools. Religion emphasises love between people, and homosexual learners are people who need to be loved just like any other learners at school. The DBE (Western Cape Province) has taken a huge step in developing guidelines: *Draft guidelines on gender identity and sexual orientation in public schools of the Western Cape Education Department* (2020). These guidelines aim to capacitate all school communities on the inclusion of sexuality into the curriculum, which is a necessity to make schools in South Africa safe environments for everyone, especially the minority homosexual youth. All teachers, not only LO teachers, are expected to intervene when homophobic attitudes are displayed at school, as LO teachers cannot be in all places in the school at the same time. The draft guidelines tabled how whole schools should be transformed. However, LO teachers cannot be responsible for transformation of a whole school, and they complain of a lack of management support. The following section will elaborate on how teachers intervene in homophobic attitudes at school.

## 5.6 TEACHER INTERVENTION

It is evident that teachers do not intervene appropriately when homophobic behaviour is displayed, but rather joke about homosexuality and use derogative language about those who are or are perceived to be homosexual (O' Higgins-Norman, Goldrick & Harrison, 2010). Instead of supporting and guiding these learners, teachers think that they should become heterosexual again as they believe they have changed.

It emerged from the data that teachers have needs to be met by the DBE to be able to understand, treat and support homosexual learners in an appropriate manner, as well as to challenge homophobia in schools. Intervention should start with the DBE assisting teachers with interventions at school. Bhana (2012) and Frances (2017) assert that it must be noted here that schools are often seen as places of learning and teaching, not sexual spaces, so even with policy support, the general discussion of sexuality remains silent, even if it exists. This study highlights how teachers hypothesize the rights of gays and lesbians and how their religion, culture, sexuality and teaching coalesce to yield constrictions and opportunities for interventions.

According to data, there are contextual obstacles that need to be addressed for them to be able to transform and make schools safe environments for all.

Firstly, teachers need knowledge because homosexuality is a complex phenomenon (Chinangure, 2018) in Africa that has never been part of their pre-service training and continuous professional development (Frances, 2017). A teacher development programme can be arranged for them to be able to interact contextually, as the issues in rural areas are not the same as those in urban areas. In line with this statement, Bantwini (2009) suggests that effective professional development models should take care of the internal and external factors that affect the understanding of new changes for improvement and their social exercise.

Professional development models are methodical endeavours that differ in content and layout but that share a common function – namely, changing teacher professional practices, their beliefs and attitudes towards their learners (Guskey, 2002). In this regard, teachers need to have their beliefs and attitudes towards the homosexuality of learners set aside or changed. This study suggests that the development programme should comprise workshops, road shows and dialogues that will include all teachers, non-teaching staff and SGBs (Bhana, 2012) and that the school community should be involved in all activities that concern LGBTI persons.

Teacher collaborations should be in small group settings – both across schools in the local district and within specific school sites – to compare and contextualise the information gained for successful implementation in schools. LGBTI teachers should be involved as they can help by sharing their experiences and identifying the learners' needs and frustrations, and they should be given an opportunity to contribute openly. It would be advantageous for teachers in a specific area, district or province to put forward their contextual needs rather than a one-size-fits-all development programme (Mokhele, 2013).

Secondly, the curriculum should be explicit on homosexuality and not just on sexuality so that teachers have some reference when teaching learners about gays and lesbians and they are more equipped with knowledge and confidence when dealing with LGBTI issues.

Thirdly, collaboration with different departments like the Department of Justice and other stakeholders should be enhanced since they have already developed resources and have experts on LGBTI issues, and understanding is essential. Collaboration with experts will assist in unpacking the concept of homosexuality to the school community. The stakeholders' resources, including websites for further referencing, should be made available in all schools and teachers should be guided on how to utilise and integrate those resources into different subjects.

In addition, the DBE should develop resources with the aid of teachers to be able to address current school communities' uncertainties, misconceptions and stereotypes about homosexuality. The developed resources should be made known and should be available for all schools, coupled with well-designed homosexual inclusive school policies and intervention strategies to be utilised to transform the schools. Schools also need to be capacitated in developing their own LGBTI inclusive policies and intervention strategies.

In order to develop an intervention strategy that will assist every teacher and learner, Francis and Msibi (2015) argue that schools are places where learners and teachers can participate in dialogues about crucial social issues. Therefore, working with teachers to develop a transformative approach to challenge and re-adjust the constricted establishment of sexuality remains important.

## 5.6.1 Workshops

As identified in this study, even recently, most teachers were unable to pronounce the word 'homosexuality' and they referred to the phenomenon as 'it' (Francis, 2017). Therefore, by means of a formal introduction of homosexuality as part of sexuality to school communities, teachers need to be trained not to feel embarrassed or offended by the word itself.

Workshops should be inclusive of different experts from stakeholders such as universities, the Department of Justice, Department of Health and LGBTI organisations to be able to plan, unpack and contextualise the knowledge to be imparted in a specific context. Social settings differ in South Africa and teachers feel more comfortable addressing their specific needs, making decisions and taking ownership of school improvements (Avalos, 2010).

Additionally, parents should be advised on the inclusion of LGBTI information in the curriculum. In this regard, awareness campaigns such as dialogues and road shows can play a pivotal role in capacitating parents and the community to avoid conflict between

the schools and the communities (Toolkit for Teachers, 2017). The Department of Justice is already conducting those activities and the DoE needs to collaborate with them and set up a plan for those activities to include schools.

## 5.6.2 Teacher Intervention Strategies

In line with the literature reviewed, it is evident that teachers' religion, culture and beliefs interfere immensely with teaching, accepting and acknowledging homosexual learners in high schools. Therefore, teachers need to work on their beliefs, religion and culture to eliminate replicating themselves in learners, and to teach them as mandated by the DoE (Msibi, 2014). Teachers should accept the prevalence of homosexual learners in high schools as they are there no matter how much schools ignore or deny their existence, even if it is against teachers' morals and values to talk about homosexuality in class (Testor et al., 2010; Lees, 2017). Msibi (2012: 518) argues that "South Africa has adopted one of the most progressive constitutions in the world by according full rights to LGBTI people, but it remains true that a great disconnect between policy and reality exists". Therefore, the DBE should take urgent strides in equipping teachers with the necessary knowledge to combat myths and stereotypes about the homosexuality of learners and LGBTI persons in general and make known their Constitutional Rights to curb the violation thereof (Francis, 2017). As the custodians of South African Human Rights, the Department of Justice should be directly involved in training teachers. Some LGBTI learning material has already been developed.

Knowledge platforms will assist teachers to debate, compare and contrast their own knowledge with the new knowledge they receive. Discussions and reflection activities about diversity, positive and negative attitudes, myths and stereotypes about LGBTI people will strengthen teacher intervention and give them strategies to use in the classroom to address LGBTI issues. In South Africa, teachers complain about having little knowledge and distorted information (Francis, 2017; Lees, 2017). Therefore, teachers are holding religiously onto their beliefs, which poses a challenge to homosexual learners. If teachers are equipped with knowledge, it is easy for them to intervene with confidence if homophobic attitudes are displayed. Bertram (2011) argues that those teachers who have

attended teacher development activities that are well researched to meet the teachers' needs are expected to change their knowledge, attitudes and beliefs.

## 5.6.3 Towards Intervention Strategies

Different countries are at different levels of teacher intervention strategies that are being implemented in schools. This study has designed intervention strategies emanating from other countries, South African empirical studies and also different organisations that have tried and tested strategies.

As the SGB is responsible for the adoption of school policies, schools need to include parents when advocating for LGBTI youth in schools so that they can share accurate information gained during the teacher knowledge platforms. New LGBTI-inclusive policies need to be developed in schools (Francis, 2017; Hall & Rodgers, 2018).

The DBE has developed a resource for schools to challenge homophobic bullying and acquire rich LGBTI knowledge (DBE, 2014). The booklet consists of six major topics on how to challenge and intervene in homosexual issues in South African schools, including the development of inclusive school policies and parental involvement. The booklet is only available online and schools have denied having or knowing about such a booklet. The booklet is called '*Challenging homophobic bullying in schools'* (DBE, 2014). According to this booklet, schools are expected to draw up their own school-specific Code of Conduct for learners and staff members that is inclusive of LGBTI persons. Contrary to the objectives of this booklet, it cannot be utilised without first work shopping the schools to understand and change attitudes and beliefs on homosexuality. The knowledge offered can then be learned and implemented to make schools homophobic-free environments.

Schools are encouraged to seek information from different organisations in South Africa and other countries, such as the USA, Canada, Australia, Scotland and the United Kingdom, as they are advanced in homophobic intervention strategies in schools and communities (DBE, 2014). This study has developed the following intervention strategies to guide schools on challenging homophobia:

## 5.7 CONCLUSIONS

The statements and conclusions drawn from this study cannot be generalised to include all teachers in various high schools in South Africa. Teachers' perceptions, knowledge and intervention strategies are elaborated in broad perspective. Teachers' needs in supporting, teaching and handling homophobic issues in high schools are also explicitly analysed and recommendations tabulated. This study has developed an intervention strategy to guide teachers towards intervention on the display of homophobic attitude. Data revealed that teachers are willing to change and challenge heteronormativity in schools, provided that the Department of Basic Education acts decisively on the inclusion of homosexuality in the curriculum and trains teachers on homosexual knowledge and intervention strategies. It is hoped that the findings of this study will encourage more research and contribute to the body of knowledge in the field of homosexual knowledge and perception.

### 5.8.1 Recommendations

This study recommends that the Department of Basic Education should act swiftly in adding homosexual knowledge to the curriculum to enable teachers to be innovative. Language teachers should also design and conduct lesson plans on LGBTI persons, and all teachers should be afforded an opportunity to learn accurate knowledge on homosexuality as one of the sexualities. Teachers should put their religions and cultures aside and learn more about the homosexuality of the learners they are mandated to teach. LGBTI education should be studied by every teacher in pre-service training as part of closing the gap between pre-service training and actual teaching practice, as well as to fast-track the number of fully equipped teachers on the homosexuality of learners. This study urges the DBE to engage urgently in debates and dialogues to work with preconceived teacher perceptions for the betterment of homosexual learners in high schools.
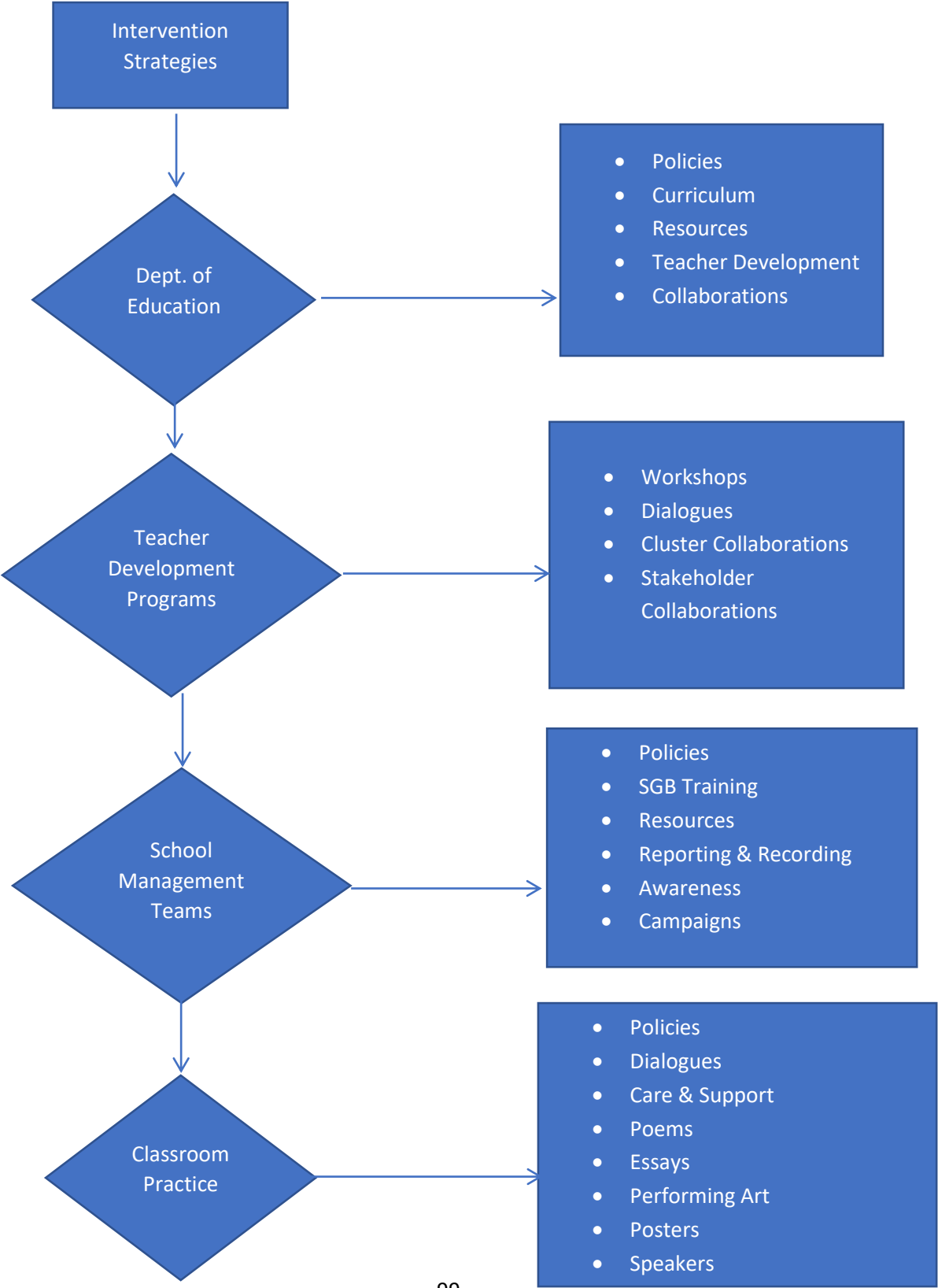
### 5.8.2 Proposed Intervention Strategy

Homophobia can escalate to homophobic bullying. It is therefore essential for schools to tackle any signs of homophobia before it is too late. Language is the main source of homophobic harassment, victimisation and discrimination. Homophobic language can be used by teachers, management, support staff, SGBs and learners. Literature and this study have proven that teachers do not intervene when homophobic language is used because they lack support and the confidence to do so, as they say that they do not have knowledge and strategies to intervene. Homophobic language is sometimes used consciously or unconsciously as it has been used for quite some time. Consequently, teachers regard it as normal or just a joke (Kibirige & Tryl, ud; Nzimande, 2015).

It is evident that teachers bring to school their own pre conceived perceptions and knowledge, therefore they device their own means of intervention like ignoring the LGBTI existence in high schools. Homosexual learners are not allowed to display and talk openly about their sexuality which exacerbates discrimination and derogative language used by both learners and teachers. Teachers do not intervene appropriately or not at all when homophobic behaviour is displayed. Literature has proven that high schools are not safe environment for homosexual learners and the data collected explains clearly how teachers feel about learner homosexuality and obstacles to intervention. Lack of accurate information and support from the Department of Basic Education in terms of inclusive curriculum plays a major role in homosexual learner harassment, discrimination and name calling. I found that teachers hate homosexual learners and wish they be kicked out of school due to their own religion, culture and communities they come from. An immediate intervention strategy is necessary and eminent hence this study has developed an intervention model to assist the education system.

This model is designed to assist in planning and conducting activities that will enhance accurate information and intervention strategies that is contextualized. School community awareness campaigns will enhance the practical inclusion of LGBTI learners into the curriculum without conflict between schools and communities.

The following model demonstrates the intervention strategies to improve LGBTI knowledge and understanding in schools.

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┌──────────────────┐
│   Intervention   │
│    Strategies    │
└──────────────────┘
         │
         ▼
    ◇ Dept. of ◇            ┌────────────────────────────────┐
    ◇ Education ◇ ─────────▶│  • Policies                    │
                            │  • Curriculum                  │
                            │  • Resources                   │
                            │  • Teacher Development          │
                            │  • Collaborations              │
                            └────────────────────────────────┘
         │
         ▼
    ◇ Teacher ◇             ┌────────────────────────────────┐
    ◇ Development ◇ ───────▶│  • Workshops                   │
    ◇ Programs ◇            │  • Dialogues                   │
                            │  • Cluster Collaborations       │
                            │  • Stakeholder                 │
                            │    Collaborations              │
                            └────────────────────────────────┘
         │
         ▼
    ◇ School ◇              ┌────────────────────────────────┐
    ◇ Management ◇ ────────▶│  • Policies                    │
    ◇ Teams ◇               │  • SGB Training                │
                            │  • Resources                   │
                            │  • Reporting & Recording        │
                            │  • Awareness                   │
                            │  • Campaigns                   │
                            └────────────────────────────────┘
         │
         ▼
    ◇ Classroom ◇           ┌────────────────────────────────┐
    ◇ Practice ◇ ──────────▶│  • Policies                    │
                            │  • Dialogues                   │
                            │  • Care & Support              │
                            │  • Poems                       │
                            │  • Essays                      │
                            │  • Performing Art              │
                            │  • Posters                     │
                            │  • Speakers                    │
                            └────────────────────────────────┘
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*5.8.2.1 School policy*

In South Africa, teachers complain of not having anywhere to reference a homophobic incident to support the intervention strategy used. School policy forms the bedrock in tackling homophobic language. Therefore, designing an inclusive school policy would be fundamental. A school policy needs to be developed that plainly categorises homophobic language as incorrect and not to be endured from any member of the school community; that is, learners, staff or parents. This would set out clearly that homophobic language is not acceptable, and teachers will know the standing of the school when they need to intervene whenever they hear homophobic language, as they will have a formal reference. The policy should be made known to every person in the school and the community should understand that if they enroll their children at the school, homophobic language is strictly prohibited. Promoting the policy should be carried out at assembly and in corridors, staffrooms and in classrooms.

The best policies are those designed by the whole school community, involving learners, parents and governors in deciding the policy wording. Above all, it should be clear that this is something that the whole school, especially leadership, takes seriously.

*5.8.2.2 Staff training*

Training sessions need not to be too long as 30-minute sessions can be of great value to avoid interference with teaching time, and as many sessions as possible could be conducted. A short school staff survey should be conducted to assist on items to include in the plan when conducting the training. The following survey questions can optimise the planning:

i.   What kind of homophobic language is being used, how often and by whom?
ii.  How often do teachers and other school staff members intervene? What actions do they take?
iii. How confident are teachers and other staff members to intervene?
iv.  Why do staff members not always intervene?

v.    Schools can download resources from local and international websites, invite speakers, and write their own contextual case studies and poems to be used for training sessions.

vi.    Should pre-service teacher training be implemented?

*5.8.2.3 Dealing with homophobic language every time it occurs*

Consistency is crucial when challenging homophobic language. The schools that have most efficiently challenged homophobic language are those that use a zero-tolerance method. This means that all members of staff, including non-teaching staff, should challenge homophobic language whenever it is used. Staff should refer to the school's anti-bullying policy; explain why the language is homophobic; the effect it has on homosexual learners; and what the repercussions will be for repeat transgressions.

*5.8.2.4 Reporting and recording*

It is proven that in South Africa, reporting and recording homophobic language is non-existent (Daniels et al., 2019). Recording how, when and where each instance of homophobic language happened and what actions were taken allows schools to identify trends and hotspots in the use of homophobic language. It also assists to safeguard the consistency of dealing with every incident in the same way. For instance, if one friendship group keeps using homophobic language, a meeting with parents might be needed. If incidents are taking place across a particular year group, then a specific assembly should deal with it. Alternatively, if homophobic language is happening across the whole school, it may be time to review the school policy or check whether staff are feeling assured enough to tackle it. No learner or staff member wants to be reported and recorded for a wrongdoing; thus, the school community will refrain from using homophobic language. These intervention strategies cannot be realised without the immediate intervention from the DBE to include LGBTI information into the curriculum.

## 5.9 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The limitation of this study is that it does not include parent and learner perceptions on homosexual learners in high schools. Teachers mentioned parents wanting to stop different sexualities being taught in fear of introducing homosexuality to their children at school. This study offers teacher perceptions, knowledge and interventions, whereby parents are said to influence how homosexuality is constructed in high schools. Non-teaching staff and management perceptions are also vital to complete the perception package on the homosexuality of learners in high schools.

## 5.10 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

There are specific areas in this research that need further study. It is important that studies like this should be seen, heard and replicated in numerous schools with different participants, including parents and non-teaching staff in various areas – namely, other parts of South Africa, including urban areas – with as many different races as possible, so that the varied perceptions, knowledge and intervention on homophobic issues in high schools can be examined.

Heterosexual learners also need to be included in a study like this to identify their knowledge and perceptions of LGBTI learners in high schools so that the knowledge gap and intervention strategies can be identified and be used to make schools safe environments for everybody. Further studies can shape the inclusion of homosexuality and the speedy implementation of an inclusive curriculum in South Africa, as homosexual learners are struggling to survive and learn in the discriminatory and unsafe school environment.

The better-informed people become, the better opportunities there are to re-shape teacher education and continuous professional development. Further research is essential to augment the findings of this study. One may include other areas that need to be researched. For example, the influence of religion on LGBTI perception, school stakeholders' perceptions of LGBTI learners, experiences of LGBTI learners and possible

causes of homophobic practices in schools. These are just few examples. Researchers can add more.

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**APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM**

**Title of Study: Teacher perceptions of homosexual learners in high schools around Gert Sibande District of Mpumalanga Province**

I, Charlotte Nkosi, a student of the University of Limpopo studying towards a PhD, am required to conduct research for my study thesis. This study will be exploring the perceptions of teachers pertaining homosexual students in high schools.

As a teacher, you volunteer to participate in this study. Any information you will provide will be highly confidential; no other person will be allowed to it except for my study supervisor. Pseudonyms will be used. As a participant, you are free to terminate your participation at any given time. Termination of participation will not disadvantage you in any way. Data will be collected through recorded interviews. You will be required to sign the consent form.

I……………………………………………………… (Full names of participant) hereby consent that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I accept participating in the research project.

I understand that I am free to terminate my participation in the project at any time, if I choose.

------------------------------------          --------------------------------

Participant signature                                           Date

**APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

For this study, data will be gathered through the following questions for interviews (Prompts are included in parentheses):

1. How long have you been teaching?
2. How long have you been teaching at your current school?
3. What grades have you been teaching?
4. What subject(s) are you teaching?
5. What is your post level?
6. What do you understand about the term 'homosexuality'?
7. How do you teach about homosexuality in class?
8. How do you feel teaching learners who are identified as homosexuals?
9. What impact do religion and your own religion have on how you treat homosexual learners at your school?
10. What is your culture saying about homosexuality?
11. How do you feel about your cultural perspectives on homosexuality?
12. If you were to make a judgement in a homophobic situation in your school, how would you handle the judgement and the outcome of the judgement?
13. Homosexuality is a trend in High Schools; please tell me what do you think about this statement?
14. In your own opinion, should homosexual learners be allowed at your school?
15. How do you feel about homosexual learners speaking openly about their sexuality at school?
16. If you are or you were a manager, how would you support homosexuality at your school?
17. Your school has different policies – for example, safety policy – what are those policies saying about learners' homosexuality?
18. According to your own opinion, are all teachers responsible for teaching learners about homosexuality or there are certain teachers who are responsible for teaching about homosexuality?

19. What processes are in place for your school to be a safe place for homosexual learners to learn without discrimination, name-calling and ridiculed?

20. Describe an experience that stands out for you in terms of homosexuality of learners in your school.

21. What interventions do you think can enable you to be more accommodative of homosexual learners in your school?

22. What comments or questions do you have for me? Is there anything you would like me to explain? What would you like to tell me that you've thought about during this interview?

## APPENDIX C: WRITTEN DOCUMENTS ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

| Document selected | Data analysed |
|---|---|
| Log book | Incidents recorded |
| Minutes: staff meetings and SGB meetings | Formal conversation on homosexuality |
| Code of conduct policy | Gender conformity and behaviour |
| School safety policy | Safety of learners in the school excluding minority youth (LGBTI) |
| Departmental school safety policy | Bullying and its impact (homophobic bullying) |
| Life Orientation Overview | Homosexuality in the curriculum |
| Scripted Lessons | Homosexuality in sexuality education |

# APPENDIX D: RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE
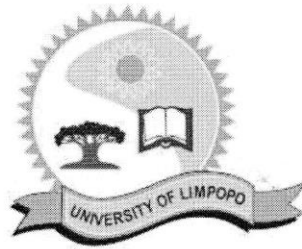
**University of Limpopo**
**Department of Research Administration and Development**
Private Bag X1106, Sovenga, 0727, South Africa
Tel: (015) 268 3935, Fax: (015) 268 2306, Email:
makoetja.ramusi@ul.ac.za

| TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE |
| --- |
| ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE |

MEETING:                  24 March 2021

PROJECT NUMBER:       TREC/59/2021: PG

PROJECT:

Title:               Teacher perceptions, knowledge and intervention on homosexual learners in high schools around the Gert Sibande District of the Mpumalanga province: Towards a responsive intervention

Researcher:       CD Nkosi
Supervisor:       Prof LT Mabasa
Co-Supervisor/s:       N/A
School:       Education
Degree:       PhD in Education Studies

**PROF P MASOKO**
**CHAIRPERSON: TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**
The Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC) is registered with the National Health Research Ethics Council, Registration Number: **REC-0310111-031**

| Note: | |
| --- | --- |
| i) | This Ethics Clearance Certificate will be valid for one (1) year, as from the abovementioned date. Application for annual renewal (or annual review) need to be received by TREC one month before lapse of this period. |
| ii) | Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure as approved, the researcher(s) must re-submit the protocol to the committee, together with the Application for Amendment form. |
| iii) | PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER IN ALL ENQUIRIES. |

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# APPENDIX E: PROVINCIAL RESEACRH COMMITTEE CERTIFICATE

**education**
MPUMALANGA PROVINCE
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Ikhamanga Building, Government Boulevard, Riverside Park, Mpumalanga Province
Private Bag X11341, Mbombela, 1200
Tel: 013 766 5552/5115, Toll Free Line: 0800 203 116

| Litiko le Temfundvo, Umnyango we Fundo | Departement van Onderwys | Ndzawulo ya Dyondzo |
|---|---|---|

Enquireis: DM Mtembu
Contact:013 – 766 5148

Charlotte Nkosi

PO Box 1354

Elukwatini

1245

Email: charlotte.nkosi02@gmail.com

## RE: TEACHER PERCEPTIONS, KNOWLEDGE AND INTERVENTION ON HOMOSEXUAL LEANERS IN HIGH SCHOOLS AROUND GERT SIBANDE DISTRICT OF MPUMALANGA PROVINCE: TOWARDS A RESPONSIVE INTERVENTION

Your application to conduct research study was received and is therefore acknowledged. The tittle of your research project reads: **"Teacher perceptions, knowledge and intervention on homosexual leaners in high schools around Gert Sibande District of Mpumalanga Province: Towards a responsive intervention"**. I trust that the aims and the objectives of the study will benefit the whole department especially the beneficiaries. Your request is approved subject to you observing the provisions of the departmental research policy which is available in the department website. You are requested to adhere to your university's research ethics as spelt out in your research ethics.

In terms of the research policy, data or any research activity can be conducted after school hours as per appointment with affected participants and COVID -19 regulations to observed. You are also requested to share your findings with the relevant sections of the department so that we may consider implementing your findings if that will be in the best interest of the department. To this effect, your final approved research report (both soft and hard copy) should be submitted to the department so that your recommendations could be implemented. You may be required to prepare a presentation and present at the departments' annual research dialogue.

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For more information kindly liaise with the department's research unit @ 013 766 5124/5148 0r n.madihlaba@mpuedu.gov.za

The department wishes you well in this important project and pledges to give you the necessary support you may need.

**MRS LH MOYANE**
**[A] HEAD: EDUCATION**

03 / 06 / 2021
**DATE**