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School Climate and Professional Self-Efficacy among Novice English Teachers in Soweto Secondary Schools

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Abstract
Teaching English in Soweto's multilingual secondary schools presents significant challenges for novice teachers transitioning from university preparation to classroom practice. While previous studies have explored teacher induction and classroom challenges, limited research has examined how school climate shapes the professional self-efficacy of novice English teachers in township schools, located in historically under-resourced Black urban communities established during apartheid in South Africa. Grounded in an interpretivist paradigm, this qualitative study adopted narrative inquiry to explore the experiences of six novice English teachers in Soweto secondary schools. Data were generated through life history interviews and were analysed thematically using Social Capital Theory alongside narrative inquiry. The findings revealed that supportive leadership, collegial mentoring, and positive staff relationships strengthened novice teachers' classroom management, professional self-efficacy in teaching English, and ability to navigate multilingual classrooms. Conversely, overcrowded classrooms, limited resources, heavy workloads, and language barriers among learners weakened their professional self-efficacy. The study further found that professional self-efficacy developed primarily through classroom interactions and peer support rather than through pre-service teacher education alone. The study recommends mentoring-focused induction programmes and context-responsive teacher preparation. Further research should examine novice teacher self-efficacy across diverse township school contexts.

Introduction
South African classrooms are characterised by rich linguistic diversity, in which English serves as the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) (Hendricks & Xeketwana,2024), even though most learners speak African languages at home. Within these multilingual contexts, school climate plays a significant role in shaping how language practices are supported, negotiated, or constrained in everyday teaching and learning, particularly through institutional norms, teacher support, learner belonging, and opportunities for student voice and participation (Aldridge et al., 2024; Tomaszewski et al., 2024). In township contexts such as Soweto, this linguistic mismatch creates persistent tensions in teaching and learning, as learners are required to engage with complex concepts in a language that is not their home-language. Research indicates that the dominance of English can limit learner participation and access to meaning, particularly in multilingual classrooms where learners' full

linguistic repertoires are underutilised (Makalela, 2019; McKinney, 2017). However, emerging studies suggest that multilingual pedagogies, such as translanguaging, can enhance understanding and learner engagement by enabling teachers to draw on learners' linguistic resources (Charamba, 2023; Maseko, 2022; Mabasa-Manganyi et al., 2022). Despite this, implementation remains inconsistent due to variations in teacher preparedness, institutional expectations, and school-level support structures.

Novice English teachers in Soweto often enter these classrooms during a difficult transition from university preparation to professional practice. A novice teacher is generally understood as an early career educator in the first few years of teaching who is still developing professional competence, confidence, and classroom expertise (Farrell, 2015). This period is frequently described as "reality shock," as novice teachers encounter the complexity of real classroom environments for the first time. Research shows that they often experience challenges related to confidence, professional identity formation, and instructional decision-making during their early teaching years (Day & Gu, 2010; Farrell, 2015). In the South African context, these challenges are intensified by systemic constraints such as overcrowded classrooms, limited resources, and unequal schooling conditions, which further complicate novice teachers' adjustment and professional development (Spaull & Jansen, 2019; Taylor, 2019).

Despite increasing attention to teacher induction and multilingual education, limited research has examined how school climate shapes the professional self-efficacy of novice English teachers in Soweto secondary schools. This establishes the central problem of this study: the lack of contextual understanding of how school-level conditions either support or constrain the development of novice teachers' professional self-efficacy in township settings. This gap is significant because school environments differ in leadership quality, collegial relationships, mentoring practices, and disciplinary culture, all of which influence teacher development (Johnson et al., 2012; Kraft & Papay, 2014).

The objective of this study is to explore how school climate influences the professional self-efficacy of novice English teachers in Soweto secondary schools. The study focuses on six novice English teachers, enabling an in-depth exploration of their lived experiences across different school contexts. In line with narrative inquiry, the study prioritises rich, contextualised accounts of teacher development rather than statistical generalisation (Clandinin, 2019; Barkhuizen, 2016).

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to understanding how school climate shapes novice teacher development in multilingual township schools. By foregrounding relational and organisational dimensions of schooling, the study provides insights that may inform mentoring practices, induction programmes, and teacher education, particularly in contexts where English functions as both a subject and the Language of Learning and Teaching (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

Literature Review

School Climate and Novice Teachers

School climate plays a crucial role in shaping novice teachers' early professional experiences, influencing their self-efficacy, classroom practice, and sense of belonging within the school community. Novice teachers' professional experiences are strongly influenced by the school climate, which refers to the shared values, interpersonal relationships, leadership practices, and overall organisational environment within a school (Van Houtte, 2005). A positive school climate is considered to enhance teacher well-being, professional learning, and the ability to implement curriculum demands effectively, particularly in linguistically diverse classrooms and settings. Within

such a positive environment, novice teachers are likely to enjoy strong, structured professional support and collegial collaboration, which equally develop confidence and teaching competence.

Conversely, negative school climates are usually characterised by weak leadership, learner discipline challenges, and high levels of work-related stress that can weaken novice teachers' professional self-efficacy. Evidence from international contexts, including the Netherlands, shows that poor leadership, disruptive learner behaviour, and inadequate institutional support significantly affect the effectiveness and retention of novice teachers (Harmsen et al., 2018). These findings resonate strongly with South African township schools, where systemic inequalities, overcrowding, and limited resources intensify workplace stress and negatively influence novice teacher retention and effectiveness (Mkhize & Davids, 2021; Ngidi & Ntinga, 2025; Morrow, 2007; Soudien, 2007).

Current research further emphasises the importance of supportive organisational structures in strengthening novice teacher resilience. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), mentoring relationships, and collegial teamwork have been shown to enhance teacher self-efficacy, reduce professional isolation, and improve retention (Mabunda & McKay, 2024; Esau & Maarman, 2021). In contrast, weak organisational cultures and inconsistent leadership practices are associated with increased stress, absenteeism, and reduced instructional quality (Bertram, 2023). These findings collectively highlight that novice teacher development is deeply rooted within school climate conditions.

Context of English Teaching in Township Schools

In township schools, English teaching is shaped by multilingual classrooms and unequal resources, where learners often draw on their home languages and lived experiences to make sense of learning. Teaching English in South African township schools is shaped by a complex socio-historical context, including the legacy of apartheid education policies such as the Bantu Education Act and the 1976 Soweto uprisings, which continue to influence educational inequality today (Freer, 1982). Learners naturally transition from home-language instruction to English as the medium of instruction by Grade 4, often encountering numerous challenges in comprehension, academic performance, and classroom participation (Sibanda & Tshehla, 2025; Sibanda, 2021).

In view of this, English functions both as a subject and as the dominant language of teaching and learning, often operating as a gatekeeping mechanism that privileges certain language groups while marginalising others. This phenomenon has been conceptualised as linguicism, where language hierarchies reproduce broader social inequalities in education (Phillipson, 1992; McKinney, 2007; Miller, 2003). These challenges are intensified in township schools, where overcrowded classrooms, limited resources, and socio-economic disadvantage intersect with linguistic barriers to shape the conditions for teaching and learning.

Critical pedagogy offers a valuable lens for examining the relationship between school climate and novice English teachers' self-efficacy in multilingual classrooms. Grounded in Freire's (1970) work, it foregrounds power, language, and identity, and positions learners' linguistic and cultural resources as assets rather than barriers. Within supportive school climates, this approach can enhance novice teachers' self-efficacy by enabling more inclusive and context-responsive pedagogical practices. Modern scholarship further highlights the value of translanguaging and culturally responsive pedagogy in improving learner engagement and comprehension in multilingual classrooms (Liggett, 2014; Makalela, 2015; Mkhize & Balfour, 2017). These approaches emphasise the need for comprehensive pedagogies that respond to the language realities and needs of South African classrooms.

English Curriculum and Teaching Modalities

The English curriculum and its teaching modalities shape how language learning is enacted in classrooms by determining both content and pedagogical engagement. The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for English First Additional Language (EFAL) structures teaching around four skills: Listening and Speaking, Reading and Viewing, Writing and Presenting, and Language Structures and Conventions (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2011). However, research shows that curriculum implementation is often constrained by interpretive ambiguity and limited pedagogical content knowledge, particularly among novice teachers still developing curriculum competence (Govender & Hugo, 2018; Khoza, 2015; Mabunda, 2023).

In multilingual township classrooms, teachers frequently adapt instruction through code-switching to support understanding and participation (Adendorff, 1993; Slabbert & Finlayson, 2009). Learners' perceptions in these settings often indicate that using home languages alongside English improves comprehension and classroom participation. Contemporary studies further position translanguaging as a deliberate pedagogical strategy rather than a deficit practice. Probyn (2019) and Maseko (2019) show that it enables access to disciplinary knowledge, while Shinga and Pillay (2021) argue that code-switching strengthens meaning-making in EFAL classrooms.

Despite this, approaches such as critical literacy and genre-based pedagogy are implemented inconsistently due to limited training and resources (Sibanda, 2021; Ngubane et al., 2020; Dlamini et al., 2024). This reflects a persistent gap between policy and classroom realities, particularly for novice teachers navigating complex linguistic and curriculum demands (Rusznyak, 2015; Bernstein, 2000).

Theoretical Framework

This study is framed by Social Capital Theory and narrative inquiry to examine how novice English teachers in Soweto interpret their early professional experiences in school settings. The integration of these frameworks enables an understanding of both the structural conditions within schools and the meanings teachers construct from their lived experiences.

Social Capital Theory provides a lens for understanding how relationships, networks, and shared norms within schools shape novice teachers' access to professional support, mentorship, and resources. Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988), and Putnam (2000) conceptualise social capital as resources embedded in social relationships that facilitate access to knowledge, collaboration, and support. In this study, social capital is understood in terms of bonding capital, which refers to collegial peer support, and linking capital, which refers to relationships with school leadership, mentors, and broader professional networks. These forms of capital are shaped by school climate and are central to novice teachers' development of professional self-efficacy and classroom practice.

Narrative inquiry complements this perspective by foregrounding how teachers construct meaning from lived experience over time through storied accounts. Grounded in the work of Clandinin and Connelly (2000), it emphasises that experience is not fixed but is temporally, socially, and spatially situated. This approach, therefore, enables a multi-layered exploration of how novice teachers make sense of their professional worlds as they unfold over time, through relationships, and across shifting school contexts. In this way, narrative inquiry captures identity formation as an ongoing, interpretive process, rather than treating experience as static, generalisable.

Together, these frameworks enable an integrated analysis of how school-based relationships and lived experiences interact to shape the professional growth of novice English teachers.

Method

Research Design and Paradigm

This study employed a qualitative research design within an interpretivist paradigm to explore how school climate shapes the professional self-efficacy of novice English teachers in Soweto secondary schools. The interpretivist paradigm was appropriate, as it prioritises understanding participants' lived experiences and the meanings they attach to their early professional practice in real-world contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Research Sites and Context

The study was conducted in four public secondary schools in Soweto (Schools A–D). These schools were purposively selected to ensure contextual variation in school climate while maintaining a shared township setting in which English is the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT).

To support clarity and analytical depth, the contextual characteristics of the participating schools are presented in Table 1. This summary provides a comparative lens through which variations in school climate can be better understood and interpreted within the study's findings.

Table 1: Contextual Profile of Participating Schools

Aspect	School A	School B	School C	School D
Quintile & Fee Status	Q1; No-fee	Q1; No-fee	Q1; No-fee	Q1; No-fee
LoLT	English	English	English	English
Infrastructure	Well-resourced (labs, library, ICT, sports, hall)	Limited	Severely limited	Moderate
Access Control	Secure (guards + sign-in)	Open gate	Secure	Partial control
Participants	2 (NT1, NT2)	2 (NT 3, NT4)	1	1

Participants

The study involved six novice English teachers who were purposively selected based on two criteria: (1) being in the early career stage with one to five years of teaching experience, and (2) teaching English in Soweto secondary schools (Patton, 2015).

Participants were selected to reflect a range of linguistic, educational, and professional backgrounds. Their profiles are outlined in Table 2, which helped clarify how individual life and training experiences connect with and shape their perceptions of school climate.

Table 2: Profile of Novice English Teachers Participants

Participant	Gender	Age Range	Language Background	Schooling Background	School
NT1	Male	Late 20s	IsiZulu (monolingual)	Rural schooling	School A
NT2	Female	Late 20s	Bilingual (IsiZulu/English)	Rural + urban schooling	School A
NT3	Female	Early 20s	Setswana/English	Suburban (Model C)	School B
NT4	Female	Early 20s	Multilingual (Sotho, Tswana, English)	Township multilingual	School B
NT5	Female	Early 20s	IsiZulu (monolingual)	Rural schooling	School C
NT6	Female	Early 20s	English (monolingual)	Suburban (Model C)	School D

Data Generation and Analysis

Data were generated through semi-structured life history interviews within a narrative inquiry approach, enabling participants to reflect on and reconstruct their educational and professional trajectories over time (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Goodson & Sikes, 2017). The interviews focused on participants' transition from initial teacher education to classroom practice, experiences of school climate (including leadership, collegiality, and mentoring), challenges in multilingual classrooms, and

the development of professional self-efficacy. Interviews were conducted in English, with opportunities for code-switching into participants' home languages to allow for richer and more nuanced expression.

Data were analysed using thematic analysis informed by narrative inquiry, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework. This involved familiarisation with the data, coding, generating initial themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and producing the final report. The approach enabled systematic identification of patterns across participants' narratives while preserving the depth of lived experience. Analysis was further guided by Social Capital Theory, focusing on how bonding and linking relationships within schools shaped novice teachers' professional self-efficacy.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. Confidentiality was ensured through pseudonyms (NT1–NT6). All data were securely stored and used solely for academic purposes.

Researcher Reflexivity

In line with the interpretivist paradigm, the study acknowledges the researcher's positionality in shaping interpretation. Reflexive journaling was maintained throughout the research process to ensure that analysis remained grounded in participants' narratives. While the researcher's familiarity with Soweto schooling provided contextual insight, deliberate effort was made to prioritise participants' voices and minimise interpretive bias.

Discussion

This study examined how novice English teachers in Soweto develop professional self-efficacy in multilingual, resource-constrained school environments. The findings demonstrate that professional self-efficacy is not an individual attribute but a socially constructed and evolving process shaped by school climate, relational networks, pedagogical adaptation, and lived classroom experience. Using Social Capital Theory and Narrative Inquiry, the discussion integrates participant voices (NT1–NT6) to show how self-efficacy emerges through continuous interaction between school conditions and teachers' meaning-making over time.

School climate emerged as a key determinant of novice teachers' professional adjustment and self-efficacy. In supportive school environments, participants reported strong collegial networks and accessible guidance that eased their transition into teaching. NT1 highlighted that "*staff members were really helpful… if you don't understand something, they will sit down with you and explain everything,*" while NT2 described collaborative professional structures, noting that "*teachers work together, share information, and plan lessons collaboratively.*" These accounts reflect strong bonding and linking social capital, in which professional relationships become a key resource for learning and building self-efficacy. They also provide novice teachers with access to professional knowledge, emotional support, and pedagogical guidance. The participants accounts demonstrate that professional self-efficacy develops relationally through access to supportive institutional networks rather than through individual capability alone. Furthermore, aligns with Johnson et al. (2012) and Kraft and Papay (2014), who argue that supportive leadership and collegial collaboration significantly influence novice teacher retention, instructional growth, and professional self-efficacy. Similarly, Harmsen et al. (2018) found that institutional support structures reduce stress and enhance professional adjustment among early career teachers.

In contrast, participants in under-resourced or weakly supported schools experienced reduced professional confidence and increased strain. NT3 described a context where "*you will be criticised more*

than developed… there is no chalk sometimes," while NT4 noted that *"noise from other classrooms makes it difficult to teach properly."* These narratives illustrate how weakened organisational structures and material deprivation constrain teaching practice and limit professional growth. The findings further echo with South African studies highlighting how overcrowded classrooms, limited teaching materials, and unequal school infrastructure negatively affect teacher morale and instructional quality in township schools (Mkhize & Davids, 2021; Spaull & Jansen, 2019). Similar findings were identified by Ngidi and Ntinga (2025), who found that novice teachers in under-resourced schools frequently experience emotional exhaustion and reduced professional confidence due to structural inequalities. The findings therefore show that school climate cannot be separated from broader systemic inequalities that continue to shape teaching and learning conditions in township schools. The uneven distribution of social capital across schools, therefore, produces unequal pathways of novice teacher development.

Despite these challenges, all participants demonstrated pedagogical agency in adapting their teaching to classroom realities. NT1 emphasised a relational approach, stating, *"I try to talk to them and be patient… encourage them to ask questions,"* while NT2 highlighted differentiated instruction, explaining that *"not all learners receive information in the same way, so I have to accommodate that."* These practices demonstrate how novice teachers develop responsive teaching strategies shaped by learner diversity rather than formal preparation alone.

Resource constraints were consistently reported across several school contexts and significantly shaped instructional decisions. NT4 explained that *"you have to write everything on the board because there are no textbooks,"* while NT3 observed that learners often struggled to engage fully, noting that they *"stand up just to see what is on the board."* These conditions increased teacher workload and reduced instructional flexibility, reinforcing how material deprivation directly influences classroom practice and teacher experience.

Nevertheless, participants also demonstrated innovation in their teaching approaches. NT5 incorporated drama and role-play, explaining that *"learners enjoy it because they learn while performing,"* while NT6 used reflective and communicative writing tasks, noting that learners *"write news reports and journal entries, which improves their writing skills."* These examples show how novice teachers creatively translate curriculum expectations into meaningful learning experiences despite contextual constraints.

A recurring theme across all narratives was the tension between multilingual classroom realities and monolingual curriculum expectations. Teachers consistently reported using translanguaging and code-switching as necessary pedagogical strategies. NT2 explained, *"if I only use English, most learners get lost, so I switch to isiZulu to make sure they understand,"* while NT6 noted that *"you have to mix languages because that is how learners connect with the lesson."* However, this practice was often accompanied by uncertainty, as NT5 reflected, *"I am not always sure if I am doing the right thing when I switch languages."* This reveals a structural misalignment between curriculum expectations and classroom linguistic realities in township schools. These findings support studies by Probyn (2019), Maseko (2019), and Charamba (2023), which show that translanguaging practices improve learner participation and comprehension in multilingual classrooms. However, the uncertainty expressed by participants also reflects the policy and practice tensions identified by Sibanda (2021), where teachers receive limited institutional guidance on multilingual pedagogies despite the linguistic realities of township schools. From a Critical Pedagogy perspective, the findings demonstrate that language practices in multilingual classrooms are closely connected to issues of power, identity, and inclusion. Teachers tend to become mediators who negotiate between institutional language expectations and

learners' linguistic realities in order to promote meaningful participation. Through a Narrative Inquiry lens, participants' stories further reveal central constructs of temporality, sociality, and place as how teachers continuously reinterpret and reconstruct their professional identities while responding to multilingual classroom realities over time. Temporality is reflected in how participants describe self-efficacy developing progressively through past schooling experiences, present classroom interactions, and future professional aspirations. Sociality appeared through their relationships with learners, mentors, and colleagues, which shape their emotional and professional meaning-making. Place was evident in how the township school contexts, defined by multilingualism, resource constraints, and varying school climates, influence teachers' lived experiences and identity formation.

From a Social Capital perspective, this tension reflects uneven access to institutional guidance and limited curriculum support for multilingual pedagogy. From a Narrative Inquiry perspective, it demonstrates how novice teachers construct professional identity through ongoing reflection, adaptation, and lived experience. Self-efficacy is therefore not fixed but evolves through continuous negotiation between policy, practice, and experience.

Professional identity development was evident across all participants and closely linked to reflective practice and experiential learning. NT4 stated, *"I had to go back and find strategies that work for the learners,"* while NT5 reflected that *"my teaching methods are continually improving each year."* NT1 noted that *"each lesson that goes well builds your confidence,"* showing how confidence is gradually constructed through classroom experience. NT6 further reinforced the relational dimension of learning, explaining that *"when learners reuse what I taught in their own speech, I know I am making progress."* These accounts show that teacher self-efficacy is reinforced through classroom interaction and feedback. The steady development of self-efficacy described by participants reflects Farrell's (2015) argument that novice teacher identity evolves through experience, reflection, and situated classroom practice. Narrative Inquiry provided an understanding on how teachers continuously reinterpret their professional identities over time within changing school contexts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The participants' narratives illustrate that professional identity is not fixed at qualification, but is continually reconstructed through reflection on classroom success, learner interaction, institutional support, and professional struggle. This demonstrates the temporal and empirical aspects of Narrative Inquiry, where meaning is constructed through lived experience across time and context.

Learners also emerged as active contributors to teacher development. NT2 observed that learners initially *"take time to trust you,"* but engagement improves as relationships develop. These highlight teaching as a relational process in which trust and interaction shape both learner participation and teacher confidence.

Overall, the findings indicate that novice English teachers' professional efficacy develops through the interaction of three interdependent dimensions: school climate (structural and relational conditions), pedagogical adaptation (classroom practice in multilingual contexts), and lived experience (temporal identity development). Supportive environments enhance self-efficacy through strong social capital networks, while constrained environments require teachers to rely on resilience and adaptive strategies.

In summary, this study extends understanding of novice teacher development by showing that professional self-efficacy is not linear or individual, but socially embedded, contextually shaped, and temporally constructed. It emerges through continuous interaction between teachers, learners, school structures, and broader educational inequalities. The integration of Social Capital Theory and Narrative Inquiry, therefore, provides a coherent explanation of how novice English teachers in Soweto negotiate the formation of early professional identity within complex school environments.

Results

School climate emerges as the primary enabling or constraining condition shaping novice English teachers' experiences of collegial relationships and classroom practice in Soweto schools. Participants consistently describe school environments as setting the tone for their early professional experiences, influencing whether they feel supported and professionally anchored or isolated in their roles. Within these contexts, collegial support and classroom practice are experienced as mutually reinforcing processes. Access to mentoring, collaboration, and responsive guidance strengthens teachers' sense of self-efficacy, while limited support weakens managing classroom demands. Such corresponds with existing research showing that supportive professional relationships strengthen novice teachers' emotional resilience and instructional confidence (Esau & Maarman, 2021; Mabunda & McKay, 2024). The findings reinforce Social Capital Theory, which positions collegial networks as critical resources for professional learning and adaptation. In contrast, schools influenced by weak leadership and limited collegial engagement reduce opportunities for novice teachers to develop self-efficacy and professional agency. The findings therefore reveal that professional self-efficacy is socially produced through interaction, mentorship, and institutional relationships.

These relational dynamics also shape how novice teachers engage with multilingual classroom strategies. In linguistically diverse classrooms, participants report that the use of learners' home languages and flexible communication practices is often enabled or constrained by the extent of collegial encouragement and pedagogical support within the school. Resource conditions further facilitate these experiences, as material shortages and uneven institutional support directly affect teachers' ability to sustain consistent and effective instructional practice.

Across NT1–NT6, confidence development is therefore unevenly distributed across school contexts. Teachers in more supportive environments (NT1, NT2) demonstrate greater professional assurance due to stable collegial networks and leadership support, whereas those in constrained contexts (NT3, NT4, NT5, NT6) report diminished self-efficacy linked to limited resources and weaker institutional structures. From a Social Capital perspective, both bonding capital (peer collaboration among novice teachers) and linking capital (leadership and institutional support) emerge as critical in shaping confidence development, with stronger networks associated with greater adaptability and professional assurance.

From a Narrative Inquiry perspective, the data further show that confidence is not an immediate outcome of qualification but is gradually constructed through lived classroom experience, reflection, and evolving professional identity. Across all participants, confidence emerges as a process of meaning-making in which teachers continuously interpret, negotiate, and respond to the realities of their teaching environments, resulting in a gradual yet uneven trajectory of professional growth. This finding reflects Narrative Inquiry's emphasis on lived experience, temporality, and identity construction (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Participants' stories reveal how confidence develops unevenly over time through reflection on classroom experiences, learner responses, and institutional support structures. Rather than presenting confidence as a quantifiable outcome, the narratives position professional growth as a developing and interpretive journey shaped by personal meaning-making within specific school contexts. The findings therefore demonstrate that novice teachers construct professional identities through continuous negotiation between personal histories, present classroom realities, and future professional aspirations.

Table 3 summarises the key contextual and pedagogical factors shaping novice English teachers' self-efficacy across NT1–NT6, highlighting differences in experience and their corresponding impact on the development of professional self-efficacy within different school environments.

Table 3: Factors Shaping Novice Teacher Self-Efficacy

Theme	Teacher Experience (NT1–NT6)	Impact on Confidence	Theoretical Link
School Climate	NT1–NT2 report strong support; NT3–NT6 report weak support	Supportive climates strengthen confidence; weak climates reduce it	Linking Capital
Classroom Practice	All teachers report learning through teaching experience	Confidence develops through repeated practice and reflection	Narrative Inquiry
Collegial Relationships	NT1–NT2 emphasise collaboration and mentorship	Enhances emotional and professional confidence	Bonding Capital
Multilingual Strategies	NT2, NT6 actively use translanguaging; NT5 expresses uncertainty	Improves learning but creates pedagogical uncertainty	Contextual adaptation
Resource Constraints	NT3–NT4 most affected; others indirectly impacted	Reduces instructional flexibility and confidence	Structural limitation
Professional Identity Development	NT1–NT6 show gradual confidence growth over time	Confidence strengthens through experience and reflection	Narrative Inquiry

In summary, the table reinforces the central finding that English novice teachers' self-efficacy is shaped by the relationship among contextual circumstances, relational networks, classroom practices, and resource availability. Rather than developing uniformly, self-efficacy emerges unevenly across participants, depending on the strength of school climate, collegial support, and school resources. Collectively, these factors underscore that professional efficacy is constructed gradually through lived experience and sustained engagement within specific school contexts.

Limitations

This study is based on a small sample of six novice English teachers in Soweto, limiting generalisability. However, the aim of qualitative inquiry is depth of understanding rather than broad generalisation. Additionally, reliance on self-reported narratives may reflect subjective interpretations at a specific point in time. Despite this, life history interviews provided rich insights into professional development trajectories.

Conclusion

This study examined how school climate and relational dynamics shape the professional self-efficacy of novice English teachers in Soweto secondary schools. Grounded in an interpretivist paradigm and Social Capital Theory, the findings show that novice teacher confidence is not fully established during initial teacher education, but is continuously developed through classroom practice, learner interaction, and school-based relationships.

Participants consistently described teaching as the key site of confidence development. NT1 noted that confidence is "built in the classroom, lesson by lesson," while NT6 highlighted learner feedback as affirming professional growth when students "use what I taught them." However, school climate strongly influenced this process. Some teachers experienced collaboration and support, while others reported limited guidance and resource constraints, with NT3 noting that "you will be criticised more than developed… there is no chalk sometimes."

The findings further show that multilingual classroom demands require constant pedagogical adaptation, shaping how novice teachers evaluate their competence. This aligns with multilingual education research which argues that teachers in linguistically diverse classrooms continuously negotiate between curriculum expectations and learner language realities through adaptive pedagogical strategies such as translanguaging and code-switching (Probyn, 2019; Charamba, 2023).

The study demonstrates that novice teacher self-efficacy is socially embedded, contextually shaped, and continuously reconstructed through school climate, school support, and multilingual classroom engagement. Social Capital Theory explains how relational networks within schools shape access to professional support, while Narrative Inquiry reveals how teachers construct meaning from their growing classroom experiences over time.

The study contributes to South African literature by providing context-specific evidence of how social capital and school climate shape early career teacher confidence in township schools. It extends Social Capital Theory by illustrating how relational support within schools directly influences professional self-efficacy.

The main implication is that novice teacher confidence must be actively supported through structured mentoring, collaborative school cultures, and strong instructional leadership. Policy and school systems should prioritise relational induction practices that strengthen social capital. Future research should adopt longitudinal designs to track how teacher confidence evolves across diverse school contexts.

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