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Investigating 4th year student teacher preparedness for teaching inclusively in diverse Grade R classrooms.

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate how pre-service teachers perceive the preparation they receive from an Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in one Higher Education Training (HET) institution in Gauteng. This investigation was intended to gain insight into how pre-service teachers are prepared for handling inclusive environments and to enact inclusive pedagogy in Grade R classrooms. This was viewed as fundamental in answering the claim that many learners enrol in Grade One underprepared for formal learning, which has a profound effect on the achievement gap between learners. To address this, data was collected from pre-service teachers using qualitative surveys, focus group, and individual interviews, both interview sets were semi-structured. All 4th-year Foundation Phase pre-service teachers were given equal opportunities to participate as respondents. Six pre-service teachers gave their consent to participate in the study. Data was gathered and analysed, which led to the emergence of four overarching themes. These were: (1) Importance of Grade R, (2) Perceptions of preparedness, (3) Understanding of concepts and (4) Experiences of pre-service teachers. The findings from the analysis were contrasted against the theoretical framework of inclusive pedagogical practice, which informs the study, leading to the following discoveries as key perceptions of preparedness. (i) Pre-service teachers view Grade R as important to both teachers and learners. (ii) Pre-service teachers perceive their school-based training as playing a role to some extent in their pedagogical practices. (iii) Pre-service teachers also perceive concepts such as; diversity, exclusion, inclusion, inclusive pedagogy and differentiation largely influencing their pedagogical practices. These study findings were contrasted with the research questions leading to the conclusion that although school-based training can influence teachers' practices, more so teachers' pedagogical practices are to a larger extent influenced by their preparedness. The study ended with some possible recommendations for future research.

Keywords: *Inclusive Education, Inclusive Pedagogy, Differentiation, Inclusion, Exclusion, Pre-service teachers, Grade R learning.*