Positioning Diversity in Kenyan Schools

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In order to focus on the background and setting of the case study, the following section sketches the developments of education and diversity in Kenya in a chronological order, from precolonial to contemporary issues. Existing categories and patterns shaping diversity are in the focus particularly from a perspective of disparities and social inequality. Hence, special attention is paid to those aspects of legislature, educational planning and organisation that frame different features of diversity. This includes empirical findings from previous research into diversity in Kenyan education and schooling.

Based on the theoretical and contextual framings, the chapter concludes with the research gap that this study aims to address and the methodological approach taken.

**Indigenous African education until the mid-19th century**

The present-day Kenyan nation state emerged from British colonisation at the end of the 19th century and encompasses, culturally as well as in terms of language and religion, heterogeneous groups of people who maintained trade and other relations during the precolonial time (Ndege 2009). Evidence
of human life in Kenya can be traced back more than several million years. Hunter-gatherer groups were joined by population movements into Kenya from around 2 000 years BCE, and that brought their Southern Cushitic, Nilotic and Bantu languages with them (O’Hern & Nozaki 2014). Along the coast, Swahili states flourished through trade with the Arab states and with Indian, Persian, Arab, Indonesian, Malaysian, African and Chinese merchants, starting 2 000 years ago. A distinct Swahili culture developed mainly through the introduction of Islam and Arabic influences of Kiswahili, a Bantu language with many loan Arabic words (Ochieng & Maxon 1992; Spear 2000). During the 16th century, the Swahili city-states lost their independence as the Portuguese and Arabs consolidated their power in East Africa. In 1895 the East Africa Protectorate was set up by the British and, under colonial rule, parts of the Rift Valley area were reserved for whites (Kanyinga 2009). In the following decades, British colonialisits established a detailed administrative system, including various infrastructures and educational institutions, on the territory that was named Kenya in 1920.

Like the other parts of sub-Saharan Africa, Kenya was not of particular interest to Western historians until the beginning of the 20th century, when a variety of colonial accounts were produced (Eckert et al. 2010). After independence, African historians and scholars began to study the precolonial histories of particular ethno-linguistic groups that comprise the Kenyan nation state. Because, traditionally, no written form of the languages spoken in the region existed, research had to rely on oral history supplemented by sociolinguistic and archaeological findings (Ogot 1976). Hence, insights and evidence concerning the nature, structure and contents of education in precolonial Kenya are limited and, in most cases, not specific to a particular region, but relate to precolonial African societies in general. Therefore, I will refer to authors who have written about general features of African indigenous education, and I will avoid the term ‘traditional education’ because, often, its connotation is that it was outdated and underdeveloped.
Before the widespread dominance of formal education through missionary and colonial influence in Kenya, indigenous education aimed to promote the morals and practices of daily life and to transmit indigenous knowledge of humans and their relationship with their environment from one generation to the next (Mungai 2002). According to Fafunwa (1974), common features of indigenous education and training in Africa included the promotion of creativity, interregional economic relations, political development, socialisation and self-reliance. Mabawonku (2003) points out that education in precolonial Africa has often been characterised as unscientific and outdated; he seeks to show that through colonisation and forced modernisation of African societies, existing culturally integrated knowledge and information systems were destroyed and the newly introduced ones did not make sense. Some evidence shows, for instance, that technological development in the areas of textile production and metal work 2000 years ago was at least as advanced as comparable technologies found in Europe at the time (cf. O’Hern & Nozaki 2014; Teng-Zeng 2006). Precolonial education in Kenya, as elsewhere in Africa, was a non-school education that was solidly anchored in the cultures and everyday experiences of African societies. ‘This education was African in ideology, content and methodology’ (Bunyi 1999: 340); it was rooted in the local context and indigenous languages were the vehicle through which education was conducted. African religion was included in education as the basis of morality; learning methods included active discovery, field experience and close observation. Other features of indigenous education in Africa have been described as practical, relevant to the needs of society and focused on social responsibility, political participation, morality and work orientation (cf. Fafunwa & Aisiku 1982; Woolman 2001). Moumouni (1968) identifies four stages of indigenous education in Africa for the first 16 years of growing up, each stage characterised by changes in the child’s physical and cognitive abilities. He identifies games, story-telling, participation in traditional courts and ceremonies and lastly, initiation around the age of 16 as common educational institutions (Moumouni
Seukwa (2015) points out that this kind of learning was highly differentiated and prepared children in all dimensions of life to become the adults of tomorrow.

**Colonial education 1895–1963**

Colonial education and formal schooling practices were introduced by Muslim and Christian missionaries during the 19th century. Throughout sub-Saharan Africa, implementation of these extraneous formal school systems was justified by the claim that there were no such institutions in precolonial Africa and that Africans were not able to create them on their own (Seukwa 2015). Ideologically, the implementation of formal schooling in Africa was justified by the aspiration of the colonisers to bring civilisation and culture to Africa. For the colonial powers, education served to educate Africans to an extent that they were able to take up lower-ranked positions in the colonial administration and in their private businesses (Seukwa 2015). Basically, colonial Kenyan society was organised in three social groups based on race: Africans, Asians and Europeans – with Europeans at the top, Asians occupying a privileged position below the Europeans, and Africans (who comprised about 97% of the population in the 1940s) positioned at the bottom of the ladder (Mwiria 1991). All societal arrangements, including the labour market and the school system, were structured according to this racial division so that, in fact, three school systems were set up.

Mwiria (1991) distinguishes three phases of formal education development in Kenya: the first phase before the British occupation (1846–1890), the second phase until the setting up of the Education Department (1891–1911) and the third, after the formation of the Education Department (1911–1963) when the colonial government became interested in African education. During the first phase, Christian missionaries were the only educational actors in Kenya. However, British colonial powers were instrumental in firmly installing formal Western education in Kenya after 1885. This process included the establishment of
governmental, social and economic institutions that were similar to those found in Britain at the time (cf. O’Hern & Nozaki 2014). The first formal schools were established for white European groups around the economic and social centres of Mombasa, Nairobi and Nakuru (O’Hern & Nozaki 2014). Village schools for Kenyans were established close to these centres to train the mainly male workforce for tasks required by white landowners, business- or craftsmen. Colonial education in Kenya, as in many other places in Africa, was Eurocentric and ignored contributions of indigenous populations to education and curriculum development (Dei 1994). In her paper, ‘Education for Subordination in Colonial Kenya’, Mwiria highlights these components of the differentiated system of subordination:

Unequal allocation of education revenue to the different racial groups residing in Kenya, selective and punitive public examinations and a school curriculum that underlined the superiority of the European over the African. (Mwiria 1991: 261)

All three aspects contributed to a specific design of education for African children that was exclusive, kept to a minimum and served the colonial purpose of exploitation and oppressive ideology. Virtues to be instilled in the Africans through this technical education to serve the white man included discipline, punctuality, respect and an appreciation of manual labour, among others (Mwiria 1991; Koster et al. 2016).

In the Department of Education Annual Report of 1924, the racist ideology including its pseudo-scientific foundations, which structured education in Kenya under the colonial rule is blunt:

The department holds that education through industry is the only right kind of education for the African of Kenya in his present state of development. It is scientifically correct and in accordance with the dictates of psychology. The mentality of the African is undeveloped and it is universally admitted that handicrafts and manual training are especially valuable in developing the
motor centres of the brain and for this reason figure largely in kindergartens and in schools for defective children ... The psychological order of development is sensation, perception, concept. In his primitive state the African deals mainly with sensations and perceptions. Thought is not highly developed: education must proceed by the training of the eye, ear and hand, and thought must evolve by means of oral or written composition and the expression of form and number out of the work created by his own effort. (Department of Education Annual Report of 1924, quoted in Mwiria 1991: 269)

As imperial Britain pursued a separatist colonialism policy, teaching in the indigenous language of the respective local population was common and encouraged. The indigenous languages were meant for the indigenous majority and English became the language of power. Speaking the language of the political and economic colonial elite was a power in itself compared to the indigenous languages, which were delegitimised and disempowered in that process. Until Kenya’s independence from the British colonial rule, educational access for the African population remained largely restricted, with only 95 secondary schools nationwide for a population of over 8 million people (O’Hern & Nozaki 2014).

Education and school policies after independence

The Kenyatta era 1963–1978

After independence in 1963, the Kenyan government and its first president, Jomo Kenyatta, prioritised the growth of the school system in order to enable access to education for its population (Buchmann 1999; Mwiria 1990).

But due to the limited availability of financial and human resources, transitioning from colonial education – which aimed to keep native Kenyans out – to an inclusive and open system was a tremendous task. However, in the first seven years of independence, the numbers passing through schools increased by
45\% for primary, and fourfold for secondary schools, which was an expensive endeavour (Hornsby 2013). The ruling party, Kenya African National Union (KANU), promised seven years of free primary schooling for all, but it could barely keep up with the growth of the population (Ojiambo 2009). In order to propel the efforts of initiating positive change and community development, Kenyatta called for *Harambee*, a Kiswahili word meaning ‘let us pull together’. The concept embodies ideas of assistance, responsibility, joint effort and community self-reliance and is often described as a traditional custom or way of life in Kenya (Chieni 2011). Since the main concern for the majority of people was to educate their children, communities raised funds and built secondary schools – the Harambee schools (Buchmann 1999; Mwiria 1990). In the next decades, the Harambee movement supplemented the government’s provision of secondary schools substantially.

In 1964 the government established an Education Commission to review how the education system could contribute to nation building and unity. The Ominde Report that resulted from the commission, recommended a unified education system for all races including a common curriculum, and also identified six national goals for Kenyan education. These were (1) to foster nationalism, patriotism and promote national unity, (2) to promote social, economic, technological and industrial needs for national development, (3) to promote individual development and self-fulfilment, (4) to promote sound moral and religious values, (5) to promote social equality and responsibility and (6) to promote respect for and development of Kenya’s rich and varied cultures (Ominde 1964). From these recommendations, the government set out the following broad goals for education: national unity, national development, individual development and self-fulfilment, social equality, respect and development of cultural heritage and international consciousness. Owuor highlights that, from the beginning of independent Kenya, the education system has been ‘expected to play a mediating role in the relationship between the diverse cultures, the national culture, and the global
needs of the nation’ (2007: 26). The report also recommended English as primary language of instruction with Kiswahili to support it as the second national language. This resonated with the Kenyan government, which regarded a common language of instruction and literacy as an important means to foster national unity (Mungai 2002). After independence, it had become a status symbol to speak and teach through the language that had been denied to the majority of the people (cf. Bunyi 1999). However, the decision to give two foreign languages (English and Kiswahili) the privilege of becoming Kenya’s national languages, and to not consider local languages for that status, has been widely contested – especially by academics and linguists (Bunyi 2005). ‘In Kenya, the preferential treatment of English produced, in turn, an elite government which shunned the indigenous languages’ (Mbithi 2014: 3). It can be considered an enduring legacy of colonialism that English has remained the main language of education in postcolonial Kenya and, from Grade 4, the only medium of instruction (Bunyi 2005).

Besides standardisation of the curricula and the increase in school enrolment, the reconstruction of education in the first years after independence included the increase of state control, especially with the 1968 Education Act, which converted most colonial-era church schools into state institutions (Hornsby 2013). Even though the changes in the education system were significant during the Kenyatta era, access to primary and secondary education remained uneven with regard to regions and gender and, financially, it was very difficult for Harambee schools to maintain the buildings, pay the teachers and keep a high standard of education. In 1974 a presidential decree abolished all primary school fees for the first four years, which left huge holes in the government school budgets. By the end of the 1970s, secondary schools were preserved for a few – with large inequalities concerning the provision of secondary schools between the regions; for 70% of learners, education was over after primary school (Hornsby 2013). Only 35% of secondary school learners were girls (Chege & Sifuna 2006).
The growth of schools and increase in enrolment figures continued until the mid-1980s. The colonial-era institutions kept their elite status as national schools, while the local and poorer, community-funded and -run Harambee schools of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s were incorporated into the public school system as provincial and district schools (Mwiria 1991; O’Hern & Nozaki 2014). The second Kenyan president, Daniel Arap Moi, was a teacher by profession and made education a cornerstone of his presidency. He extended free primary education to Standards 5, 6 and 7 and, in 1980, the government declared that it had achieved universal free primary education. Figures published showed that approximately 92% of primary school-age children were in school at that time. Until the mid-1980s, educational achievement increased, which is evident not only from looking at enrolment at primary school level but also by the adult literacy rate which was 20% at independence in 1963 and had risen to 64% in 1989 (Hornsby 2013).

But dissatisfaction with the school system and its outdated curriculum increased. Enrolments decreased, and the low completion rate of approximately 50% at primary school level gave expression to that dissatisfaction. Bradshaw and Fuller (1996) explain the decline in enrolments and school attendance as being the result of the poor quality of schools and instruction and diminished local demand for the schooling that was offered. According to O’Hern and Nozaki, the reforms that responded to that trend in the 1980s:

Included a complete restructuring programme whereby the inherited 7-4-2-3 (‘O’ and ‘A’ level) system was replaced with an 8-4-4 format from primary, secondary and post-secondary education. (O’Hern & Nozaki 2014: 48)

The new system was based on the American model and it increased primary school from seven to eight years. The four years
of secondary school now ended with the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education, after which university education comprised four instead of three years. The revised curriculum was informed by the promotion of education for self-reliance, which included more vocational subjects and practical education in order to increase the (self-)employability of graduates. The costs of the reform involved the recruitment of new teachers and the construction of classrooms. The government enforced a cost-sharing model for education,

limiting its contributions to teachers’ salaries only, and requiring that parents pay for building and all other costs in state schools. Levies and charges rose and enrolments dropped amongst poorer families. (Hornsby 2013: 448)

This also left the school administrations with greater power to collect school fees, and to determine the amount parents had to pay, which led to the development of exclusive and expensive schools on one hand, and low-cost and low-quality schools on the other. During the 1980s, universities expanded in Kenya because the University of Kenya, the only national university, could not meet the demand of rising student numbers. Moi University opened in 1984, and others followed in the course of the 1980s. At the same time, the increasing unemployment rate of secondary school and university graduates became a matter of growing concern to the public, and mirrored the economic stagnation of the country. The government was left with a massive debt, and financial dependence on donors like the World Bank to enable the necessary growth and restructuring of the education system resulted in unfavourable decisions and policies for poor families and already marginalised groups (Buchmann 1999; Mazrui 1997; Sifuna 2007). Political turmoil in the 1980s, often connected to tribalism as the political instrumentalisation of ethnicity, severely impacted the universities – riots and fighting left Nairobi University closed for several months, several times (Hornsby 2013). In his District Focus strategy beginning in 1983, Moi
introduced the quarter system in secondary school selections of students:

The system gave more opportunities to students from around the school locally and allowed admission of only a quarter of students who hailed from outside the province. As a consequence, young people who previously qualified and got admitted to good schools outside their provinces were, under Moi’s era, constrained to learn mainly within their provinces. (Wanyonyi 2010: 43)

During the 1990s, unconducive political and economic conditions led to the deterioration of education with increasing numbers of children not receiving formal education or dropping out of primary school (Kinuthia 2009). At the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, and at the Dakar World Education Forum in 2000, Kenya underlined its commitment to free primary education and that

all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality. (The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [Unesco] 2000: 8)

Yet, despite a reduction in tuition fees, education costs and school fees remain a main obstacle for disadvantaged families to access education (Glennerster et al. 2011). ‘As something that began during colonization, education costs and fees remain political issues that continue today’ (Yakaboski & Nolan 2011: 2).

*The Kibaki era 2002–2013*

Mwai Kibaki’s election campaigns in 2002 and 2007 included the political promise to provide primary education for all. The government continued to invest heavily in formal education, as can be seen in the numbers: public spending as a proportion
of gross domestic product increased from 5.1% in 1980/1981 to 15% in 2008/2009 (Ojiambo 2009). Education was still regarded as the key to socio-economic development and scientific and technological advancement. But, despite many efforts and investments, including increased enrolment numbers and improvements to provide universal primary education in Kenya, key challenges in maintaining educational quality and equality remained after the change in government in 2002 (Sifuna 2007). With regard to equality, O’Hern and Nozaki (2014) view the continuation and strengthening of educational disparities as being connected to the numerous and complex domestic and international shifts in economic, social and cultural factors (globalisation). They see Kenya’s uneven development between urban and rural regions, and the disparities in earnings of skilled and less-skilled workforce, linked to its struggle to participate in the global economy. Education is regarded by many families as the key to participate in the economy and for upward social mobility. This can be concluded from the 2005 Kenya Integrated Household budget, which shows that families spent the bulk of their household income on secondary school education (cf. Koster et al. 2016). This leads to the question of quality, namely, whether education in Kenya can fulfil this promise and whether the family investment in education pays off. Hence, researchers have looked increasingly into the question of the quality of education. The Uwezo (2010) annual learning assessment report asked whether Kenyan children are better off as a result of the expansion of schooling in the country. The researchers’ conclusion, after carrying out a learning assessment with 68,945 children aged 3–16 years in 2009, was that the state of literacy and numeracy skills of children in Kenya was grim with, for example, two out of three Class 2 children lacking basic reading and mathematics skills.

Peter Ojiambo summarised the state of education in Kenya as follows:

The initial post-colonial euphoric confidence in education has to a considerable extent been replaced by a mood of disillusionment.
The education system has been accused of being egocentric and materialistic at the expense of collective effort and responsibility, for adopting irrelevant and rigid curricula, for embracing antiquated teaching and learning techniques, for dampening initiative and curiosity, for producing docile and dependent-minded graduates, and for widening the gap between the rich and the poor. (Ojiambo 2009: 135)

An evaluation report by the Kenyan Institute of Education on the 8-4-4 system published in 2008 found that it was very academic and examination oriented, focusing on written assessment results only, and providing little flexibility with regards to education pathways (Sifuna 2016).

To understand the developments in Kenya with regard to diversity and education in past decades, it is necessary to also look at the broader social and political context. For many years, Kenya was regarded as a comparatively peaceful island in a sea of turmoil. But in the wake of Kibaki’s re-election bid in 2007, widespread allegations of electoral fraud led to protests. Violence broke out and tribalism was blamed for it (Kamau 2014; Wanyonyi 2010). Ethnic animosity, which had already been noticed in the Rift Valley in April 2007, reached a crescendo during the election and the months afterwards (Gona & wa-Mungai 2014). The magnitude of trauma and violence that took place during the two months after the general elections was shocking and left more than 1 300 people dead, 300 000 internally displaced and many injured and traumatised (Roberts 2009). Eventually, a political compromise was reached and a National Peace Accord was signed in February 2008. But the question remained as to how Kenya had arrived at that destination of intolerance, ethnic hate, political greed and violent disregard for women and children (wa-Mungai & Gona 2010). A breeding ground for inter-ethnic resentment has certainly been the widespread perception of unfair treatment among ethnic communities, and the belief that political power provides the group of the president and others in high positions with exclusive advantages (Muhula 2009). This highlights the
overwhelming focus on ethnicity when it comes to politics and resource distribution in Kenya.

As discussed earlier, schools and education in general are not neutral when it comes to the production and reproduction of differences and of (seemingly homogeneous) social groups that are positioned in various settings of power dynamics. For an understanding of ethnic identity issues in the Kenyan postcolonial context, it is necessary to look at the social and political debates around group affiliation and difference in Kenya in terms of how categories of difference have been constructed, socially reproduced and utilised.

Excursus: Tribe and ethnicity

Trying to understand why ethnic rivalry played such a central role in (or, at least, was blamed for) much of the post-election violence of 2007/2008, Kakai Wanyonyi (2010) looked into the historical origins of tribe and ethnicity in Kenya. He identifies two positions in the literature that focus on the generic perception of the term ‘tribe’, which stems from the Latin words *tribus* (a political entity in the old Roman Empire) and *trubutus* (‘a group of individuals with a common blood heritage eking out a living at a very low level of socio-economic formation’ [Wanyonyi 2010: 33]). Tribe, in this second meaning was used by Western European conquerors who classified indigenous people as tribes and the languages they spoke as vernaculars. Since tribe, and its derivative tribalism, are pejorative and offending terms, Wanyonyi (2010) wonders why colleagues still use these terms when referring to various Kenyan communities. ‘Ethnicity’, derived from the Greek *ethnikos*, which referred to non-Christian and pagan people, is the other term commonly used in the Kenyan context. But as Wanyonyi points out, the originally pejorative implications of ethnic or ethnicity have vanished, and the term has been acknowledged to be more respectful and less offensive in social science discourse than tribe or tribalism, which are still very much connected to Africa and the Eurocentric perspectives on Africa (Wanyonyi 2010).
Notwithstanding the different terms used to refer to categories or groups of people living in Kenya, Wanyonyi deconstructs the notion that ethnic groups in Kenya are ‘pure’, and refers to evidence that people living in precolonial centuries in the area of present-day Kenya have mingled, intermarried, assimilated, migrated and mixed socially, culturally and linguistically and that membership was fluid:

Upon establishing authority over their subjects, however, colonial administrators radically transformed the inter-ethnic relations including the nature of intermingling. (Wanyonyi 2010: 36)

From 1915 onwards, all Africans in Kenya had to wear an identification card around their neck, which rigidified ethnicity; and the colonialists physically separated the settlements of different African groups and assigned certain jobs to certain groups. The same tool was used in parts of Kenya by perpetrators of the post-election violence of 2007/2008 to identify individuals’ ethnicity. Many Africans defied the separating strategy of the colonialists and formed trans-ethnic political parties like the Kenya African Union, which was later banned by the colonial administration (Wanyonyi 2010). As in the colonial era, group affiliations and ethnic identities were used in many instances to build and consolidate political power in the young independent Kenyan nation state. Under the Moi government, for instance, disputes over land were coined ‘land clashes’ between so-called indigenous and non-indigenous people in 1992, and were instrumentalised by the government to control the vote in the populous Rift Valley (Nyairo 2015). Moi’s shifting focus towards districts as units for development from 1983 onwards has also been blamed for having reinforced ethnicism because the districts are formed around certain (sub-)ethnic communities.

Politically instigated and state-sponsored killing dominated the 1992 and 1997 multi-party elections and bequeathed us a new category of citizens: internally displaced persons (IDPs).
'Land clashes' were now known as ‘tribal clashes’ … The tides of resentment and othering had been cultivated through a shifting lexicon. (Nyairo 2015: 46)

The general elections in 1992 and 1997 revealed that every major party in the multi-party democratic system that Kenya had adopted, received greatest support from the ethnic community of the party leader (Muriuki 1995). This led again to initiatives by parties to merge or cooperate and a new alliance, the National Rainbow Coalition headed by Mwai Kibaki, emerged to win the 2002 general elections. For his first cabinet, Kibaki appointed members from all eight provinces of Kenya. But he abandoned this power sharing approach just two years later. Today, politicisation and instrumentalisation of ethnicity by the political elite remains apparent in Kenya:

Ample evidence suggests that ethnic difference and conflict – land grabbing, displacement, assault, rape, murder – are almost always politically engineered … Politicians promote ethnic difference and animosity to advance their careers, to win state power or achieve senior office, all for personal material gain – the reward of power or influence. Political ethnicity therefore comes not, as in some countries, from below, but from above. (Hiroyuki et al. 2012: 159)

In summary, the conflict that has characterised Kenyan politics with regard to ethnicity extends from ethnicising political parties, re-alliances, voters’ ethnic alignment to political leaders, favouritism in the civic service and resource allocations, reinforcement of the inherited divide-and-rule strategy, ethnic-based practices in government, power sharing arrangements and attempts to re-energise the nation building process (Wanyonyi 2010).

In an attempt to show the extent to which peace has been built and restored in Kenya after the 2007/2008 post-election violence, Gona and wa-Mungai assert that:
If any, little has happened in terms of peace building, whether this is understood as the search for social justice, reconciling Kenyans after the conflict, efforts at changing erstwhile perceptions about different ethnic communities or forging new relationships (conflict transformation). (Gona & wa-Mungai 2014: 209)

Furthermore, they argue that peace in Kenya after the post-election violence has been bought at the expense of justice because most perpetrators of the violence have not been held accountable (Gona & wa-Mungai 2014). Hence, distributive justice as one of the core elements for sustainable peace building in Kenya is yet to be realised:

Studies have shown that group inequalities within a particular society create a fertile ground for grievances that can be manipulated by leaders to foment war on the ostensible basis of a group’s ethnic, religious or other identity. (Gona & wa-Mungai 2014: 215)

The struggle for peace includes commemoration of the atrocities and listening to survivors’ narratives. Education is one avenue to redress the past and acknowledge experiences otherwise excluded from public memory, as are some cultural or traditional mechanisms. A call by Kenyans to rewrite history textbooks and thereby change the school curriculum to allow the inclusion of common histories of national struggle and the struggles against poverty and inequality is one tangible starting point in that regard. A move made by the Kenyan government in 2008 was to establish the National Cohesion and Integration Commission, and the Directorate of National Cohesion and Values for the ‘promotion of national unity, ethnic diversity, national values and social justice’ (Republic of Kenya 2008: para. 2). Their task is to spearhead the promotion of national cohesion and values and to train persons in ministries, departments and agencies (as well as those from non-governmental and civil society organisations, educational
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institutions and county governments, among others) and equip them with relevant skills, strategies and knowledge (Republic of Kenya 2008). Under the coordination of the Ministry of Justice, National Cohesion and Constitutional Affairs, a training manual on National Cohesion and Integration was produced in 2011 in order to professionalise trainings, sensitisation activities and presentations on national cohesion and integration across the country, and to ensure that the content delivered is uniform and provides the same information (Nyambu et al. 2011).

Political analysts have regarded the weak national constitution of Kenya as one of the foundations of the post-election violence in 2007/2008. The balance between the executive, legislative and judicial branches of the government was gradually eroded in favour of strengthening the presidential powers (Roberts 2009). As part of the conflict resolution after 2007, the Kenyan government worked on a new constitution that Kenyans voted to adopt in August 2010 (Kramon & Posner 2011). Besides reducing executive power, the new constitution also guaranteed rights to women, minorities and marginalised communities – trying to bring equality concerning education and jobs to groups at the margins of Kenyan society. However, Joyce Nyairo (2015) criticises the simplified assumption underlying the 2010 Constitution of Kenya – that all of Kenya is comprised of mono-ethnic spaces and that there is no space for cosmopolitan, mixed or hybrid identities. Besides the fact that individuals are assigned a location and sub-location as their place of origin in their identification card (even when they have lived in various places in Kenya), Nyairo (2015) points out that what is excluded in the state’s practice of assigning ethnic identities is how a person identifies herself or himself. By trying to spread the national cake between all ethnic groups, individuals are reduced to representatives of one ethnic bloc:

By negating the reality of our cosmopolitan heritage, the constitution fragments rather than builds on the idea of one nation. (Nyairo 2015: 277)
She concludes that obviously the colonial time and Western anthropology, with their practices of ascribing static characteristics and geographies to assigned peoples and categorising them into strictly defined tribes with their own places in the economy and politics of the colonial order, still inform the notion of ethnic identity and logic of ‘fixed identities’ in Kenya today (Nyairo 2015).

**Education in contemporary Kenya**

Kenya has a young population of approximately 47 million people (in 2017) of whom more than 50% are under the age of 25 years. The majority of Kenyans are Christian (approximately 83%). Along the coastal regions, Muslims (approximately 11%) comprise about 50% of the population. Even though primary education is free nowadays, students from poor families still struggle to afford items such as uniforms and books. Over recent decades, Kenya’s education system has seen a tremendous increase in enrolment, a decrease in resources and severe access issues – especially for learners from poor families (Yakaboski & Nolan 2011). Statistics confirm this trend: primary school, secondary school and university enrolment increased substantially between 2014 and 2018, which correlates with growing numbers of educational institutions, as (Table 1) indicates (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics [KNBS] 2019). Private institutions offering education from pre-primary to teacher and university education have increased immensely in recent years as well.

In the majority of public primary schools, facilities are dilapidated and teachers poorly paid compared to other public servants. The teacher–learner ratio in public schools is approximately 1:52 at primary and 1:32 at secondary level (Uwezo Kenya 2016). Under-resourced and overcrowded classrooms with up to 80 learners pose huge challenges to teachers, principals and learners. Frequent teachers’ strikes for salary increases (with related closings of schools just before the examination period) have affected learners badly in past years. Statistics suggest that
### Table 1: Kenya Economic Survey 2019: Educational institutions by category 2014–2018

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<td>Public</td>
<td>21 718</td>
<td>22 414</td>
<td>22 939</td>
<td>23 584</td>
<td>24 241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>7 742</td>
<td>8 919</td>
<td>10 263</td>
<td>11 858</td>
<td>13 669</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sub-total</td>
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<td>31 333</td>
<td>33 202</td>
<td>35 442</td>
<td>37 910</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>7 680</td>
<td>8 297</td>
<td>8 592</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1 350</td>
<td>1 544</td>
<td>1 756</td>
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<tr>
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<td>9 942</td>
<td>10 655</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pre-primary:</td>
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<td>25</td>
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<td>26</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Primary:</td>
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<td>Sub-total</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Public Vocational Training Centres</td>
<td>701</td>
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<td>816</td>
<td>1 186</td>
<td>1 502</td>
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<tr>
<td>Private Vocational Training Centres</td>
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<td>47</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public Technical and Vocational Colleges</td>
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<td>91</td>
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<tr>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>1 962</td>
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<td><strong>Universities</strong></td>
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<td>31</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-total</td>
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<td>53</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GRAND TOTAL</strong></td>
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<td><strong>82 746</strong></td>
<td><strong>86 034</strong></td>
<td><strong>90 313</strong></td>
<td><strong>94 399</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: * Provisional  # Public diploma teacher training colleges  .. Data not available  + Revised  
(Source: KNBS 2019: 225)
between 30% and 40% of the adult population have low literacy rates with large disparities between the provinces (Bunyi 2006; Uwezo Kenya 2016). Efforts to eliminate gender disparities in education have been successful in many regions in Kenya during the past decades (see Figure 3).

While the Kenyan government struggles with an increasing demand for education on all levels – from primary to university education – private schools and universities have mushroomed all over the country. Private primary schools promise quality education at low cost, especially in slum areas where government schools are regarded with suspicion by ordinary Kenyans. Because these low-cost private schools are usually not registered with the Ministry of Education (MoE), poor families miss out on the government subsidies for free primary education. Learners who leave these schools with their Primary School Leaving Certificate compete for access to the public secondary schools with learners from upmarket and well-equipped primary schools where parents can afford high school fees. Life for private schools became more difficult when the MoE scrapped examination fees only for public primary and secondary schools. At secondary level, public schools are viewed more favourably than their primary counterparts, and the demand for access to a national, provincial or district secondary school is much higher than the government has been able to provide for.

The guiding principles for the provision of education in Kenya specify the right to access education for all with special emphasis on children, persons with disabilities, minorities, marginalised groups and youth (Republic of Kenya 2013). These principles include the following aspects that are particularly relevant for the context of this study:

- equitable access for the youth to basic education and equal access to education or institutions (Principle b);
- protection of every child against discrimination within or by an education department or education or institution on any ground whatsoever (Principle e);
• promotion of peace, integration, cohesion, tolerance and inclusion as an objective in the provision of basic education (Principle i);
• elimination of hate speech and tribalism through instructions that promote the proper appreciation of ethnic diversity and culture in society (Principle j);
• elimination of gender discrimination … (Principle p);
• non-discrimination, encouragement and protection of the marginalised, persons with disabilities and those with special needs. (Principle s) (Republic of Kenya 2013: 225–226)

The strong focus on nondiscrimination, equity and inclusion, as well as appreciation of ethnic diversity and the diversity of cultures, in the educational guidelines for Kenya provide a background to this study’s question about how teachers experience, interpret and deal with diversity in schools in Kenya.

The school system

From 1985 until 2018, the Kenyan school system included eight years of primary schooling and four years at secondary level, and at least four more years to earn a degree at a university. The secondary tier contained the following three legs:

• the common class of local – primarily day scholar – secondary schools for local populations (district schools);
• a broad middle class of secondary schools with different admission requirements and varying academic performance (provincial schools); these may be girls- or boys-only schools and they may also be full-boarding, mixed-boarding (some learners full-boarding, others day scholars) or day-scholar schools;
• the small number of about 20 elite-class secondary schools (‘national schools’), which are full-boarding and admit learners from all provinces; the national schools are regarded as the highest quality public secondary institutions in Kenya. (O’Hern & Nozaki 2014: 49)
A summative evaluation of the 8-4-4 system carried out by the Kenya Institute for Curriculum Development (KICD) in 2009 found, inter alia, that it was too academic and examination orientated, overloaded and that learners did not acquire adequate social and practical skills (Jwan 2019; KICD 2019). Drawing on this evaluation and on a 2012 report by the Kenyan MoE, the Kenyan government developed a plan to reform the education and training sector; it moves from a focus on examination results and aims to develop the learner’s intellectual, emotional and physical potential in a holistic and integrated manner. The proposed new system, which was introduced in 2019, is underpinned by a competency-based curriculum to develop concrete skills like critical thinking, problem solving, creativity and communication competencies rather than using an abstract academic approach. Furthermore, it puts emphasis on national values of cohesion and integration into the curriculum in order to promote common and nondiscriminatory values in Kenyan society (KICD 2019). However, education researcher Laban Ayiro (2019) highlights that, since independence, Kenya has constituted six commissions and several task forces to look into the education system and initiate reforms, and that this focus on skills and competencies is not new. He sees the main obstacle to implementing necessary curriculum changes as the lack of resources provided to schools and the education system (Ayiro 2019). The new curriculum provoked heated political debates and a dispute between the Kenyan government and the Kenya National Teachers Union (KNUT). The union’s opposition to the new curriculum was based on the fact that, overall, schools and teachers perceived the new curriculum to be more work on their shoulders while not solving any of the day-to-day problems of overburdened and underpaid teachers in overcrowded classrooms and under-resourced schools (KNUT 2019). A multi-stakeholder dialogue held in Nairobi in August 2019 highlighted the need for professional teaching standards and support for teachers as systemic response to teacher education and professional development (Samuel 2019).
Institutions in the formal education sector

All responsibilities for the formal education sector from pre-primary to university education lie with the Kenyan MoE and its subsidiary bodies. The education system is highly standardised despite the variety of educational settings, experiences and opportunities for rural and urban populations. Most relevant for the development of the education system in Kenya are the following subsidiary bodies of the MoE:

- Kenya Teachers Service Commission (TSC): The Kenya TSC is responsible for the training and posting of all public school teachers. Novice teachers, especially, can be deployed to regions far away from their own families. Because remuneration of teachers in Kenya is very low, teachers’ strikes for better pay cause schools to close down frequently. According to the TSC, there is a shortage of approximately 37,643 primary, and 49,750 secondary school teachers in Kenya to meet the increased demand for education (Wanzala 2019).
- The Kenya Institute of Education (KIE): The KIE is the central body that decides on the national syllabus for each subject field and grade, as well as the textbooks to be used by all public schools for every subject field and grade. The teachers can choose from between two and six different textbooks from the KIE’s annual list for each subject field. Criticism has been raised that the KIE’s exclusive jurisdiction over the contents, time frames and methods of instruction does not address the concerns of various educational stakeholders or local contexts, including marked disparities of resources and staffing, such that disconnects have emerged between the KIE and local schools (O’Hern & Nozaki 2014).
- The Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC): The KNEC sets, conducts and posts all nationally administered primary and secondary tests, including the secondary exit examination (KCSE) for all public schools in Kenya. In recent years, it has attracted negative attention because of repeated
scandals. These involved cheating, score fixing, examination errors, the sale of KSCE exam papers to parents and other leakages of exam papers (O’Hern & Nozaki 2014).

The centrally directed and administered Kenyan school system, including the employment of high-stakes tests and exams, has experienced various problems and has been subject to criticism from teachers and educationists. One of the main disadvantages of this system is that it leaves little room for decentralised, creative and participatory teaching styles. Instead, learners remain passive recipients of knowledge, and underpaid teachers are measured by how efficiently they transmit the knowledge and content to the learners that has been selected for them. For the learners, the teacher-centred instruction means repetition and memorisation of the overloaded curriculum, which is synchronised in public schools all over the country (O’Hern & Nozaki 2014). As in other African countries with similar organisational modes of formal education including high state control over school syllabi and examinations and under-resourced school environments, opportunities for the development of democratic skills, human rights awareness, critical thinking and analysis in schools have been practically nonexistent for a long time (Sifuna 2000). The newly introduced competence-based curriculum sets out to address some of this lack.

**Education and diversity**

Historical developments and contemporary issues affecting and concerning education in Kenya have been outlined in the above sections. Explicit reference has been made to some diversity aspects of the national education goals. This section looks at the empirical body of knowledge about diversity in Kenyan schools, and how diversity was defined and researched in recent studies.

Qualitative studies have investigated diversity in Kenyan education mainly from linguistic perspectives (e.g. Bunyi 1999; Mbithi 2014; Ogechi 2003); from the debate around inclusion of
learners with special needs (Kiarie 2014; Muuya 2002; Mwangi 2009; Mweri 2014); on the education of girls and women (Chege & Sifuna 2006; Chege & Arnot 2012); on ethnic and religious diversity (Svensson 2010) and also on the diversity of knowledges and the question of indigenous knowledge in the curriculum (O’Hern & Nozaki 2014; Owuor 2007; Ronoh 2017). Statistics and quantitative data on the provision of, and access to, education as well as learning outcomes have been generated by the Kenyan Bureau of Statistics, Unesco’s Global Monitoring Report on Education and Uwezo’s National Annual Learning Assessment Report. In the next section, diversity will be the lens used to look at postcolonial Kenya and, particularly, at education in Kenya. To contextualise educational debates and empirical studies on diversity issues, I have reviewed the literature on marginalisation and inequality in Kenya as embedded in the social, economic and political settings (as well as power relations) of society. Hence, the aim of this section is to provide context for how difference is perceived, constructed and utilised in Kenya and particularly how it affects Kenyan education. This will serve to better locate teachers’ experiences, interpretations and professional practices in that field.

Diversity, social inequality and marginalisation

The Constitution of Kenya (Republic of Kenya 2010) provides a firm legal and institutional framework for the recognition and protection of the rights of minorities and marginalised groups. Distinction is made between ‘marginalised groups’ and ‘marginalised communities’:

‘Marginalised group’ means a group of people who, because of laws or practices before, on, or after the effective date, were or are disadvantaged by discrimination on one or more of the grounds in Article 27(4). (Republic of Kenya 2010: 163)

And article 27(4) reads:
The State shall not discriminate directly or indirectly against any person on any ground, including race, sex, pregnancy, marital status, health status, ethnic or social origin, colour, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, dress, language or birth. (Republic of Kenya 2010: 24)

A marginalised community is defined as:

(a) a community that, because of its relatively small population or for any other reason, has been unable to fully participate in the integrated social and economic life of Kenya as a whole;

(b) a traditional community that, out of a need or desire to preserve its unique culture and identity from assimilation, has remained outside the integrated social and economic life of Kenya as a whole;

(c) an indigenous community that has retained and maintained a traditional lifestyle and livelihood based on a hunter or gatherer economy; or

(d) pastoral persons and communities, whether they are—
   (i) nomadic; or
   (ii) a settled community that, because of its relative geographic isolation, has experienced only marginal participation in the integrated social and economic life of Kenya as a whole.

(Republic of Kenya 2010: 162)

While ‘marginalised group’ refers to all (constructed) large social groups, ‘marginalised communities’ are more closely defined by their (traditional) lifestyle, (isolated) geographic position and non-integration in social and economic life. The constitution recognises the disparities that exist between certain groups and communities in the society and promotes an equitable development by making special provisions for people and groups that have been marginalised. It also makes a clear statement against discrimination and for the promotion and protection of
minorities. Article 21(3) of the Implementation of rights and fundamental freedoms reads:

(3) All State organs and all public officers have the duty to address the needs of vulnerable groups within society, including women, older members of society, persons with disabilities, children, youth, members of minority or marginalised communities, and members of particular ethnic, religious or cultural communities. (Republic of Kenya 2010: 20)

Hence, the constitution of Kenya clearly guides the way in which public officers or those employed by state organs – like the Teachers Service Commission – should be aware of, and address the needs of, marginalised groups and communities. The following quote by Atsango Chesoni, former executive director of the Kenya Human Rights Commission, illustrates how certain factors combine to create a specific, contextualised situation of inequality and marginalisation:

In Kenya, the patterns of racial and ethnic inequality combine with the phenomena of political patronage and sexism to exclude women from decision-making and policy-making. The country’s patriarchal cultural traditions form a base that underlies these factors. For example, if one is from a geographically marginalized part of the country, such as the North Eastern Province, and female, the chances that one is illiterate and will die young are many times more than that happening to an able-bodied man from the Central Province of Kenya. (Chesoni 2006: 205)

The quote from Chesoni and further literature intimate that aside from ethnicity, one has to look at other powerful axes of difference like gender, age, health and disability, socio-economic status, knowledge systems, language and culture, religion and sexual orientation in order to understand how they combine to create situations of inequality.

The competition for the quality formal education that is
closely connected to upward social mobility is high in present-day Kenya, especially because educational opportunities are very limited. Kenyan families spend a large portion of their household income on education in the hope that this will lead to more opportunity and prosperity in future (Otieno & Colclough 2009). In the competitive process, some people are more likely to be excluded or marginalised than others, depending on various circumstances. To measure progress towards the Sustainable Development Goal 4 on education, Unesco works with partners to develop new indicators, statistical approaches and monitoring tools and brings together statistics for example, from demographic and health surveys, multiple indicator cluster surveys, other national household surveys and learning assessments from over 160 countries in the World Inequality Database on Education (WIDE). WIDE provides a useful overview because it

highlights the powerful influence of circumstances, such as wealth, gender, ethnicity and location, over which people have little control but which play an important role in shaping their opportunities for education and life.¹²

Based on the categories of gender, location (urban/rural), region, wealth, ethnicity and religion, the WIDE illustrates disparities with regard to various indicators of formal education between the years 1993 and 2014. In principle, the database allows for adding various categories to differentiate the figures, provided that data are available.

It depicts, for instance, that in 2014, 80% of girls and 78% of boys in Kenya completed lower secondary school so, on average, there is gender equality. But if one adds the category ‘ethnicity’ for girls, the girls’ lower secondary school completion rate differs between the different ethnic groups (as defined by the Kenyan government) between 16% and 100% (see Figure 1).

Disparities also become evident when looking at the tertiary education completion rate of the 25- to 30-year-olds in Kenya (in 2014): while there is almost gender parity (males 17% and
females 14%) in general, it is only 7% of rural but 22% of urban women who complete tertiary education. By adding the category, ‘wealth’, the figures reveal that only 1% of poorest rural women and 2% of the poorest rural men had completed their tertiary education compared to 29% of the richest rural women and 39% of richest rural men (Figure 2).

The WIDE also shows regional differences concerning girls between 9 and 12 years (in 2014) who never went to school: the average number of girls who stated they had never been to school was 6% – of these, 49% of girls were in the North-Eastern Region and 0% in the Central Region (see Figure 3).

Figure 1: Global Education Monitoring Report 2017: Lower secondary completion rate – gender disparities

Source: http://www.education-inequalities.org/

Figure 2: Global Education Monitoring Report 2017: Tertiary completion rate – gender disparities

Source: http://www.education-inequalities.org/
Looking at the figures provided by the Global Education Monitoring Report for Kenya, ethnicity and regional imbalances, as well as wealth and religion, appear to be powerful categories concerning educational inequality. While the data are useful for identifying tendencies and developments over time concerning educational inequalities between different (socially constructed) groups in Kenya through the statistics provided per category, the categories themselves, their adequacy and the notion of fixed boxes can be questioned. In particular, they only capture quantifiable and statistically recorded categories of differences and inequality. Individual perceptions and the felt qualities of inequalities cannot be fully grasped by this rather general data.

More detailed data about the quality and outcome of schooling in Kenya have been provided by Uwezo’s learning assessment reports 2010–2015. Assessments were carried out in 157 districts in Kenya and data from 69,183 households, 130,653 children and 4,529 schools were included in 2015 (Uwezo Kenya 2016). It measured the ability of children to read and comprehend English and Kiswahili and complete basic numeracy tasks. It concludes:

The evidence is rich, but unpleasant. Learning outcomes are low and extremely inequitably distributed across geographic areas, socioeconomic strata and types of schools. (Uwezo Kenya 2016: III)

In greater detail, the facts of the 2015 report (Uwezo Kenya 2016) include the following:

Figure 3: Global Education Monitoring Report 2017: Never been to school – gender disparities

Source: http://www.education-inequalities.org/
1. Learning levels are low with only three out of 10 Class 3 learners being able to do Class 2 work, and eight out of 100 Class 8 learners not being able to do Class 2 work nationally.

2. There is a close connection between the distribution of teachers and learning outcomes, meaning that learners show better learning outcomes in schools with more teachers.

3. Learning outcomes are lower in rural areas, arid areas and poorer households with only 25 out of 100 Class 3 learners being able to do Class 2 work in rural areas but 41 out of 100 in urban areas.

4. Only 4 out of 10 pre-school teachers are trained.

While the report states that gender parity has been reached in most regions (except for poor, arid and semi-arid places where more boys went to school), it also states that ‘geographic, socioeconomic and locational inequalities persist, in favour of urban and non-arid areas as well as non-poor households’ (Uwezo Kenya 2016: 3).

To go beyond the figures and get a better understanding of the ways in which categories of difference create their meaning, I will now put specific focus on those categories discussed in the Kenyan education context. However, it needs to be acknowledged that the categories described below intersect with other categories of difference. Nonetheless, it seems useful to look for generalised attributes that help make meaning of the context and provide a general background.

Figure 4: Pupils who can do Class 2 work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Class 3</th>
<th>Class 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maths</td>
<td>47.1%</td>
<td>94.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>39.9%</td>
<td>96.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiswahili</td>
<td>46.1%</td>
<td>96.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Uwezo Kenya (2016: 11)
Gender

Gender has been a much debated issue when talking about marginalisation and discrimination in Kenyan education. Gender can be understood as a socially constructed way of distinguishing between females and males (including culturally attributed behavioural patterns) and, lately, a third category: diverse (including people not identifying as either female or male). What people learn and perceive to be woman or man can differ in time and place because it is socially constructed (Kamau 2014). Thinking about women and their (changing) status in the Kenyan society, Akinyi Margareta Ocholla writes:

Culturally, unmarried women, childless women, and divorced women have not had it easy in the society … Girls and women have almost always been seen and treated as second-class citizens, a burden to their families, or chattel at best. This has led to the situation of young girls, in certain cultures, being pushed into early marriages and getting an education only if it does not interfere with other duties that affect households. (Ocholla 2010: 128)

Hence, many girls and women have accepted, or have been forced to undergo, genital mutilation in order to not be ostracised from their communities (that would otherwise define them as unmarriageable). Kenya’s constitution of 2010 seeks to raise the profile and worth of girls and women by according them similar privileges as men, for example, the right to own or inherit property, to be given equal consideration for education and jobs and allowed justice for cases of violence and abuse (Ocholla 2010).

Chesoni looks at the history of gender inequality in Kenya as a part of a wider system of inequality and writes:

Given its genesis in racially segregationist settler colonialism, the Kenyan state is inherently exclusivist. The misogyny, sexism, racism, ethnic chauvinism, ageism, classicism or exclusion that is
based on disability are natural outcomes of an exclusivist state. (Chesoni 2006: 195)

Rural women are – generally speaking – affected more strongly by traditionally gendered divisions of labour and dependency on men, for example, when it comes to land entitlements (Freidenberg 2013). Another remainder of male privileges is that most of Kenya’s communities are patrilineal, meaning that children belong to their father’s ethnic group or one of the father’s ethnic groups. This ignores the fact that, in many cases, mothers do much of the socialisation at home. Joyce Nyairo (2015) criticises the fact that one has to have only one ethnic affiliation, and also asks why a mother’s ethnic extraction should be subordinate to that of the father’s.

Chege and Sifuna (2006) investigated girls’ and women’s education in Kenya on all levels and found that Kenya still has a long way to go to achieve gender parity in access to, and participation in, education:

Obstacles to female education that are often region-specific seem to hinge on various factors that include perceived irrelevance and opportunity costs linked to educating girls and cultural beliefs and practices that portray girls’ education as an unwelcome challenge to male hegemony. Others are school cultures whose hidden curriculum serves to alienate girls, disempower them and eventually push them out of the system. Also, formal curriculum perpetuates traditional gender boundaries and employment opportunities that do not favour female labour. Moreover, there are socio-cultural attitudes, expectations and definitions that characterise successful womanhood in terms of feminine qualities of subservience and domestic roles. (Chege & Sifuna 2006: XIII)

Interestingly, a later study carried out in 2014 on boys’ education – in the context of programmes and projects supporting girls in education in Nairobi (urban primary schools) and Kirinyaga (rural primary schools) – found high awareness among teachers and principals to encourage girls to complete school and that,
in more than half of the sample schools, the girls outperformed the boys. While female teachers were aware that girls need to be encouraged and empowered in order to successfully complete school, and served as role models for the girls, most male teachers in the study did not show any ambition to encourage boys or serve as role models. Hence, Chege et al. conclude:

For boys and girls to succeed equally within school and through the outcomes of their schooling, teachers need to consciously portray equal enthusiasm in a gender equitable schooling that is devoid of discrimination against either gender. (2013: 15)

An interesting intersectional study that tries to unravel gender and HIV/AIDS education in the multicultural context of a refugee camp in a Kenyan host community found that Muslim girls and boys from Kenya’s neighbouring countries behaved differently from their Christian classmates of various nationalities. The Christian teachers tried to make sense of this behaviour and interpreted it, on the basis of their own religious background, as disobedient. Subsequently, these learners were excluded from teaching in many ways (Ochieng 2010). Ochieng and Chege (2014) argue that teachers need to be much better prepared and sensitised to understand how their own and the learners’ religious beliefs influenced their teaching and learning in order to enhance inclusive learning and prevent conflict.

Arguably, curriculum materials, subject content, school rules and customs, student services, school calendar decisions, scheduling of student activities, school diet, holiday celebrations, teaching materials and school financing could jointly or singly conflict with a community’s religious beliefs and practices. (Ochieng & Chege 2014: 12)

As has been observed, religious teachings may conflict with specific tenets of health education (Ochieng & Chege 2014) so specific subject fields can be regarded as more sensitive than others.
Another intersectional study looking at education in Kenya analysed the education-gender-poverty relationship among young females and males from poor households and the ‘complex interactive combinations and bonds in which education outcomes are shaped by, and shape, both poverty and gender’ (Chege & Arnot 2012: 195). They found gender differences in terms of the lives females and males hoped to build and, also, that their research participants were aware of changes in gendered identities and roles. While recent figures suggest that gender parity in education enrolment and learning outcomes has been achieved in Kenyan education, traditional gender roles seem to persist in other areas of life.

*Ethnicity, culture, religion*

Given that ethnicity, culture and religion are overlapping and often interchangeably used categories of identity, it is difficult to single out and interrogate only one of them. Yet, the focus of analysis can be on one or two of the aspects when looking at discriminatory or marginalising societal structures and circumstances. However, for the purpose of merely providing a background, they are not treated as independent singular categories.

As described above, ethnicity plays an important role when talking about identity in Kenya. However, according to Afrobarometer findings for Kenya (Institute for Development Studies [IDS] 2017), only a minority of respondents felt more strongly to belong to their own ethnic group; the majority felt equally or more to be Kenyan (Table 2).

On being asked about differential treatment and discrimination, more than half of the respondents stated that their own ethnic group has been treated unfairly by the government (Table 3).

On being asked about personal experiences of discrimination, approximately 30% of respondents stated they had been discriminated against or harassed during the previous year, based on their ethnicity (Table 4).
**Table 2: Identification with ethnic group in Kenya**

Q85B. Suppose that you had to choose between being a Kenyan and being a [R’s ethnic group]. Which of the following statements best expresses your feelings?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel only (ethnic group)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel more (ethnic group) than Kenyan</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel equally Kenyan and (ethnic group)</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel more Kenyan than (ethnic group)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel only Kenyan</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refused</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Afrobarometer in IDS (2017: 68)

**Table 3: Unfair treatment according to ethnic group**

Q85A. How often, if ever, are [R’s ethnic group] treated unfairly by the government?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refused</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Afrobarometer in IDS (2017: 69)

**Table 4: Experiences of discrimination based on ethnicity**

Q86AD. In the past year, how often, if at all, have you personally been discriminated against or harassed based on any of the following: Your ethnicity?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once or twice</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Several times</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many times</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Afrobarometer in IDS (2017: 69)
The role of religion in the secular state of Kenya has recently been debated in the context of integration of Islamic laws and institutions into the legislature of the Kenyan state because Kenyan Muslims have expressed the wish to establish and live in a society guided by Islamic religious practices. During several centuries before colonisation, Muslims along the coastline were governed by Sharia law. Under colonial rule, British authorities partially allowed the coastal people to continue, but also started interfering with the Kadhis courts and eventually weakened the position enjoyed by Sharia in the region. The first constitution of independent Kenya of 1963 provided for the establishment of Islamic Khadis courts for certain legal aspects but they were controlled and administered under the secular legal system of Kenya (Mwakimako 2014). In politics, adherents of Islam have been underrepresented. For instance, during Kenyatta’s 15-year rule, not a single Muslim minister, permanent secretary or provincial commissioner was appointed (Hornsby 2013). However, institutionalisation of the Kadhis courts appeased the Muslim community because their religious beliefs and practices were being recognised to a certain degree (Mwakimako 2014). But debates and protests continued and intensified with every reform in the last decades that touched on Sharia law and on African customary law, with the government being accused of ‘Westernising’ Kenya and driving the assimilation and homogenisation of Kenyan communities (Mwakimako 2014).

Christian, Muslim and Hindu representatives participated in a review process on the Kenyan constitution at the end of the 1990s until 2010, but they differed on fundamental issues and the integration of religion in the political discourse proved to be highly divisive:

It gave rise to a situation in which members of each religious group increasingly came to perceive members of other groups as ‘them’ while seeing their own religious group as ‘us’. (Mwakimako 2014: 82)
The contestations continued with strong opposition to the proposal to integrate Islam law in the constitution, especially from Christians who argued that Islam would be treated unjustifiably preferentially if that proposal was accepted. Hence, ‘in defence of Christian Kenya’, church leaders vehemently objected to the inclusion of Kadhi courts for Muslim people in the new constitution. A High Court ruling eventually declared the inclusion of Kadhi courts illegal because they were counter to principles of nondiscrimination and separation of religion and the state.

In the formal Kenyan school system religious education focuses on teaching children about the religion of their own denomination. Due to historical reasons and proportions, Christianity and Bible knowledge are taught in most primary and secondary schools (Alles 2010). Other options for minorities often do not exist (KAICIID 2017). However, the school and university curricula have been looked at during past years in terms of how to emphasise life skills for social cohesion and include a wider range of interreligious and multi-faith approaches.

**Age**

In his essay ‘Gerontocracy and Generational Competition in Kenya Today’, Tom Odhiambo (2010) writes about gerontocracy (rule by the old) to describe a state of generational differentiation characterised by gate-keeping and isolationism that is based on the institution of patriarchy in many Kenyan communities. He identifies the increasing youth restlessness and disposition to violence on one hand, and gate-keeping by the older generation on the other – for example, it is impossible to attain political power or a professorship in a Kenyan university below a certain age, irrespective of the person’s (academic) qualifications – as a central feature of the crisis in modern Kenya. According to Odhiambo, the notion that old age is an automatic qualification for leadership and authority can be partly attributed to residual indigenous cultural practices, and partly to the colonial system
that naturalised hierarchies and demanded that Africans be ‘experienced’ before they qualified for stepping up in the colonial hierarchy:

Unless Africa is able to transcend the socio-cultural hierarchies that place the youth at the bottom of the social scale, we are stuck with the reality of inter-generational competition and conflict. (Odhiambo 2010: 100)

Even though age as a category does not seem particularly relevant to education and schools, it is important when thinking about the status of children and youth in society and their opportunities to use education for their own and society’s advancement.

Language

Kenya is a multilingual country – as are all African countries. To foster national unity, English and Kiswahili have been chosen as national languages for use in public and official contexts. Hence, it is necessary to speak English and Kiswahili in order to participate in the formal economy and engage with public institutions. The high regard for the two national languages is accompanied by a devaluation of the many other African languages spoken in Kenya. It consigns the mother tongues of most people to their homes and villages and leaves many less-fluent English and Kiswahili speakers marginalised.

Bunyi (1999) investigated how the delegitimisation of indigenous languages and the use of English in Kenyan education contributed to a differential treatment of learners, leading to the perpetuation of social inequalities. She argues that for education to liberate itself from colonial heritage and play a positive role in social and economic development in Kenya, indigenous languages must be given a more central role in education (Bunyi 1999). From observations and interview data with teachers and principals, she found that learners who entered school in a rural and disadvantaged area were not able to speak English and were
consequently characterised as problematic. They learned very slowly and the teachers’ way to handle the ‘language handicap’ was to repeat every word and sentence over and over again. This case was contrasted with a class in a socio-economically advantaged urban school where the learners had no problems with English and had an interesting, intellectually challenging lesson. Arguments put forward against the use of indigenous languages in education include that it is too expensive to print textbooks, train teachers in their respective languages, and so forth, and that it would divide people along ethnic lines. In opposition to this, Bunyi argues that it was more expensive to lose so many learners on the way (dropouts) and that the use of indigenous languages in education may divide people along ethnic lines but English divides them along class lines: ‘I believe we should adopt a positive attitude towards linguistic and cultural diversity in Kenya and in Africa’, she concludes (1999: 349).

Only in 1999, after campaigns in favour of African languages by Ngugi wa Thiong’o and other influential intellectuals, did the Kenyan government recognise African languages in the formal education sector (Mbithi 2014). The current language policy for Grades 1–3 reads that in linguistically homogeneous school environments, the indigenous language may be used in school and as a medium of instruction, while in linguistically heterogeneous environments English or Kiswahili are to be used (Athiemoolam & Kibui 2013; Bunyi 1999). According to Grace Bunyi (2005), Birgit Brock-Utne (Brock-Utne & Hopson 2005), Neville Alexander (1999) and many other influential educationists, the language question in multilingual postcolonial African education needs to be a focal point when talking about nondiscrimination, social equality and decolonisation. The social division created by colonial education among Africans based on the mastery of the English language has affected education policy and practice (Brock-Utne & Hopson 2005). In summary:

The retention of European languages as the dominant media of instruction has had a serious negative impact on African
education and on the academic performance of African learners.
(Brock-Utne & Hopson 2005: 2)

Ogechi focuses on language rights in the Kenyan education context and identifies a gap between policies concerning mother tongue education and reality:

Many parents, guardians and even head teachers insist that English be used not only from primary one but also even in kindergarten largely because it has a higher sociolinguistic market. (Ogechi 2003: 284)

He also doubts that enough teachers are able to teach in the vernaculars, and refers to the fact that Kenyan publishers have not been able to publish in all Kenyan languages (Ogechi 2003). Ogechi (2003) and Mweri (2014) also identify severe obstacles and disadvantages for learners from hearing and visually impaired communities given that no learning materials exist in their mother tongue, and too few teacher training programmes for special needs schools exist. Hence, language needs to be considered when thinking about diversity in education in postcolonial Kenya.

**Knowledge systems**

Another aspect relevant to diversity in Kenyan education refers to different epistemologies, teaching contents and diversity of knowledge systems. In particular, the role of indigenous knowledge is a current topic of discussion:

Indigenous knowledge reflects the dynamic way in which the residents of an area have come to understand themselves in relationship to their natural environment and how they organise that folk knowledge of flora and fauna, cultural beliefs, and history to enhance their lives. (Semali & Kincheloe 2002: 3)

Indigenous knowledge has received increased attention, especially
where Western knowledge systems have failed to solve problems related to poverty, certain illnesses or sustainable development (Horsthemke 2004; Odora Hoppers 2002). One of the central questions around indigenous knowledge and education that has been discussed during past years deals with the integration of indigenous knowledge in the school curriculum, and which common values, practices and perceptions are shared by communities and hence, should be integrated in formal (local) education (Ronoh 2017).

In Kenya, the discussion on indigenous knowledge in education began right after independence. A broad reconstruction of syllabi in the 1960s aimed to reflect diverse indigenous ways of knowing and practice in order to decolonise the Western dominated education in Kenya. This was seen as a means to reclaim cultural identities and indigenous traditions as well as to make education more practical to Kenyans (Owuor 2007). Yet, Owuor (2007) argues that the commitment to indigenisation was superficial and that it failed to de-centre the educational elites who were themselves products of Western education and schooling. ‘Indigenous knowledge’ refers to contextualised, situated or experience-informed knowledge which is held by Kenyan people locally. Integration of this form of indigenous knowledge in the Kenyan school curriculum has also been a matter of discussion in past decades as a means to achieve decolonisation, nondiscrimination and social equality in formal education.

Questions still remain as to how indigenous knowledges can be integrated into the curriculum, for example, in the field of sustainable development (Owuor 2007). Owuor (2007) asserts a lack of empirical studies – due to (amongst others) resource deficiencies – to enable informed policy-making and development of learning materials.

**Socio-economic status**

Another dimension that touches on diversity issues in education is the question of socio-economic status and poverty. Besides very different climatic conditions and natural resource occurrence
in the different regions in Kenya, access to public services like education and health have played a vital role in perpetuating disparities (or equalising) living standards. Particularly in the arid and semi-arid areas, children and especially girls are often not sent to school because families struggle to survive in very difficult and poverty-stricken circumstances.

Ali and Orodho (2014) investigated whether subsidies and financial support for poor families have a positive impact on access to, and participation in, education for the children of such families. They refer to the 2009 Economic Survey, which revealed that almost 47% of Kenya’s population live below the poverty line (Ali & Orodho 2014). Targeting Mandera county as a region with high rates of poverty\(^{13}\) as well as a notable gender gap in education with girls and women being disadvantaged, they found that as poverty levels rise, child labour increases. Families often rely, especially on the girls, to work as domestic helpers in the urban areas.

Other reasons found for the high dropout rate in that region included negative attitudes towards education among parents and children as well as sociocultural and religious factors connected to initiation and traditional gender socialisation. They concluded that policies by the Kenyan government to support marginalised groups, and empower girls and women have begun to make a positive impact but that many other factors contributed to the high dropout rates especially of girls in that region (Ali & Orodho 2014).

Another study carried out by Edith Mukudi (2003) focused on the nutrition status of children and its impact on the children’s achievement in school. Through the association between nutritional stress, school attendance and educational achievement, the prevalence of nutritional stress as an expression of poverty was identified as an educational problem (Mukudi 2003).

**Disability**

In the context of Kenyan communities, persons may be considered disabled if they have to depend on others for assistance and cannot
fulfil the role expected of them within that community or in society. Given that the role of children is also to support their parents when they grow old, parents who have a child with a disability perceive themselves as having an insecure future (Mwangi 2013). Before independence, mission schools, religious and non-governmental organisations provided education for children with special needs, almost exclusively. In 1986 the Kenyan state established the Kenya Institute of Special Needs Education to take the lead in training teachers in that area (Ndinda 2005).

Article 54 of the constitution of Kenya (Republic of Kenya 2010) gives a number of entitlements to persons with disabilities, including access to education and facilities integrated in society. Since the adoption of Universal Primary Education in 2003, when fees in primary schools were abolished in Kenya, efforts have been undertaken to provide better access to education for children with special needs and, if possible, to include them in mainstream schools. However, the sudden influx of pupils after 2003 led to overcrowded classrooms and a shortage of teachers and learning materials. Consequently, children with special needs have not received adequate attention, nor has teacher training for different special needs requirements. Reliable figures and statistics on children with special needs and their integration in schools do not exist (and/or are lacking) for Kenya (Mwangi 2013). Mwangi clarifies that the term ‘children with special needs’ generally does not include children with learning difficulties but refers to children with physical and sensory impairments. The provision of adequate educational facilities, equipment, trained teachers and professional support staff to address the special needs of the children has not been sufficiently implemented to provide equal access and educational opportunities. Hence, teachers tend to feel unprepared to respond effectively to children who have behavioural and intellectual difficulties; and often, there are no support structures like a referral system, intervention from professionals, collaboration with parents or effective school management strategies in place (Mwangi 2013).
Sexual orientation

Sexual minorities in Kenya are subjected to homophobic violence, hostility and discrimination. In a 2013 survey, 90% of people in Kenya were found to be against homosexuality and to judge homosexuality as unacceptable (Finerty 2012). Religious and political leaders publicly speak against same sex relationships. While same sex relations are protected under Article 31 of the constitution of Kenya (Republic of Kenya 2010), the law criminalises same sex sexual conduct and consenting adults can face up to 14 years of prison for same sex sexual conduct (Gona & wa-Mungai 2014). Ignorance and prejudice against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people is widespread and often backed-up by religion. According to the Afrobarometer findings (IDS 2017), the interviewed Kenyans are very tolerant about having neighbours who have a different ethnic background, religion or with an immigrant background, but the majority of the respondents would not like to have homosexuals as their neighbours (Table 5).

Table 5: Preference of specific social groups as neighbours

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q87C: For each of the following types of people, please tell me whether you would like having people from this group as neighbors, dislike it, or not care: Homosexuals</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly dislike</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat dislike</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would not care</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat like</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly like</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refused</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Afrobarometer in IDS (2017: 71)

Margareta Ocholla (2010: 123) concludes that ‘there is ignorance of sexuality and sexual orientation, compounded by inherited colonial criminal law, dogmatic religious belief, and the rigidity of social and sexual hierarchies’.
The research gap and research questions

In the above sections developments in the education system in Kenya, with its disparities, have been outlined. Rooted in these configurations and institutional framings, teachers in Kenyan public and private schools have to cope with a number of challenges such as lack of facilities and learning materials, overcrowded and heterogeneous classrooms and meagre payment. Barriers to learning for the children are manifold. In many cases, effective school management is extremely difficult given the overall socio-economic conditions. Opportunities for teachers to participate in in-service courses are rare, even though these have been increased and encouraged over past years. Few teachers have capacity for, or take the initiative to, find out about the background of learners who show learning difficulties and do not develop like other children. Having to teach 70 to 80 learners in one class does not allow the teacher to pay much attention to individual learners (Mwangi 2013).

Public primary teacher training colleges and diploma teacher training colleges run 2-year residential courses for primary teachers and 3-year in-service upgrading programmes. Diplomas and certificate courses can be added for the purpose of specialisation, for example, in the fields of counselling or special needs education. The Diploma in Special Needs Education run by the Kenya Institute for Special Needs Education covers, for example, hearing, visual, physical and intellectual impairment; another diploma course in audiology is offered by the University of Nairobi. Besides primary school teachers who complete the basic 2-year diploma, untrained teachers who have completed secondary school work in primary schools and wait for the opportunity to study. Other categories of primary school teachers include those with an approved teacher status – they have qualifications in other disciplines (e.g. a Bachelor of Arts) – and teachers with a bachelor’s or master’s degree. Some primary school teachers do not participate in training courses after doing the pre-service teacher training, others do short courses, seminars and trainings on various issues like science, HIV/AIDS or
guidance and counselling. Mwangi (2013) asked approximately 100 primary school teachers about challenges experienced in their classrooms, and found that poverty was the major driver of these challenges (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Teachers’ challenges in the classroom

![Bar chart showing teachers' challenges in the classroom](image)

Although courses for professional development, continuous education, in-service training and part-time or refresher courses are increasingly available for primary and secondary school teachers, they fall far short of the demand for further education. When looking at diversity issues in teacher education or, more particularly, diversity education concepts, there is little to be found
in the curricula. One course that includes an active reflection on diversity issues is the guidance and counselling course that teachers can choose to be trained in. Every school has a guidance and counselling teacher to whom learners are referred in situations of conflict or behavioural and other problems. Although the majority of counselling theories focus on individual clients, and not on classes or types of people, ‘it is important to learn which diversity factors make a difference in the problem situation of the client’ (Wango 2006: 206). Even though guidance and counselling are partly included in the teacher education curriculum, the course as a subject field is only offered to teachers who plan to specialise in that field. Social categorisations like gender, health status and ableism play a role in various subject fields of teacher training – but not as different dimensions of the common phenomenon of social boundary-making, which leads to discrimination and exclusion.

The sections above outlined the development of education and schools in postcolonial Kenya as case for this study. Given the highlighted disparities and social inequalities affecting education in Kenya, as well as discriminatory and exclusionist structures and practices, this study wants to look at how teachers perceive, experience and deal with diversity in their professional practice. Such investigations into diversity, discrimination and social exclusion in the education sector, and especially how problems are experienced, interpreted and responded to by Kenyan teachers, are largely missing. Hence, little evidence has been produced as to the kind of problems Kenyan teachers experience concerning social diversity and inequality – and how they deal with them. By interrogating the configurations, representations and encounters of diversity in the Kenyan school context, and from the teachers’ angle, this study aims to offer perspectives for teachers, schools and teacher education to address issues of discrimination and exclusion – and for disrupting the cycle of reproducing social inequalities. To that end, the study is guided by the following three questions:
1. How is diversity experienced and interpreted by teachers in their professional practice in postcolonial Kenya?
2. What are the drivers, strategies and consequences of experienced diversity in Kenyan schools?
3. Which strategies for schools and teachers can be recommended that help reduce the reproduction of social inequalities in schools?

**Methodological implications**

The theoretical lens, including the study’s critical interpretivist paradigmatic stance, call for a qualitative, inductive methodological approach to investigate these main questions. Placing the research in a critical paradigm (Kivunja & Kuyini 2017; O’Donoghue 2006; Charmaz 2013; Denzin & Lincoln 2005; Kincheloe 2008; Willis et al. 2007) intends to develop insights that help to transform socially unjust structures, policies and practices regarding diversity in Kenyan schools. Besides the envisaged theoretical contribution to understanding diversity in postcolonial school contexts, the third research question therefore refers to practical recommendations as a product of this inquiry. These intentions and orientations hold consequences for the research design, for the methodological approach including the sampling, data generation and analysis techniques as well as for ethical considerations when investigating diversity in Kenyan school contexts.

In order to demarcate the case under investigation, the interpretive approach of a qualitative case study design offers a way to generate a detailed analysis and intensive examination of the Kenyan case (Bryman 2008). Given the dearth of relevant and broadly supported theories and conceptualisations of the research phenomenon, the Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM) with its inductive approach of building a grounded and contextualised theory, offered the most promising tool for this study. A grounded theory approach neither suggests a system of a priori defined social categorisations of diversity, nor a group-centred approach
of selecting particular social groups of interest. Rather, it suits the purpose of mapping different inequalities in the Kenyan school context, investigating their significance, and exploring how teachers deal with these differentiations and social categorisations.

From the various directions that Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM) has taken since its ‘discovery’ in the 1960s (Glaser & Strauss 1967), the constructivist GTM (Charmaz 2006) blends well with the critical interpretivist paradigm of this study. According to Charmaz, GTM provides

- a set of flexible analytic guidelines that enable researchers to focus their data collection and to build inductive middle-range theories through successive levels of data analysis and conceptual development. (Charmaz 2005: 507)

However, Charmaz (2014b) also reminds us that it is important to consider research methods as being embedded in the locations and conditions where they are developed, and that there is no natural way of doing research. This not only indicates the need of adopting and adapting grounded theory methodologies under the specific conditions of inquiry, but also refers to a more general concern, namely the researcher’s positionality, including the need to reflect on the power asymmetries, norms, values and interpretation frameworks that the researcher brings to the field (cf. Barongo-Muweke 2016).

For centuries, research carried out in a North/South context was framed by imperialism and colonisation, and characterised by exploitation, knowledge extraction and misrepresentation. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) shows how research methods can reproduce colonialist forms of knowledge and also colonial relationships between researchers and the research participants. Even though global North–South relations have changed formally, ethical concerns driven by the need for decolonisation and for producing contextualised and locally relevant knowledge under fair conditions remain valid. Hence, the ethical considerations for
this study had to go beyond having filled in informed consent forms and the acquisition of ethical clearance from the authorities.

Through my involvement in academic cooperation projects with East and South African universities in the field of education research and teacher education, I was able to share and validate the study, its findings and my interpretations with my East and South African colleagues and some of the research participants at all stages. For instance, memo-writing during the coding of the data offered a way of including question marks and ambiguities where various possibilities of interpretation could be tried, refused and retried – based on discussions and interactions with my Kenyan colleagues. A careful initial coding of the spoken words, line by line and sentence by sentence, aimed for careful handling and capture of the research participants’ perspectives.

Nevertheless, my outsider position certainly held limitations, particularly with regard to the data interpretation and construction of theory. But during the data generation process, the outside position also sparked positive effects, as it inspired my research participants to explain issues that might have been taken for granted if I had been a Kenyan myself – for example, their perceptions of ethnic affiliation, identity and belonging or common issues of discrimination caused by hegemonic discourses.

Furthermore, an open discussion between the research participants and an insider researcher – meaning a Kenyan with their own (ethnic, gender, class, regional etc.) identity – might have been flawed by distorted, internal Kenyan power relations between different social categories that affect the interaction and dialogue between various positionalities. This point was stressed by various Kenyan colleagues who confirmed that it would have been impossible for them to gather data as rich as I had.

The data for this project consist of 16 interviews of 60–95 minutes each. They were carried out between 2016 and 2018 and from these in-depth interviews, I selected eight to comprise the body of my research. The selection was based on the richness of the data per interview on one hand, and on contrasting types of
diversity experiences and professional practices on the other – in order to include a wide range of experiences.

It seemed important not to restrict the sample to one type of teacher, or one type of school, or one region in Kenya. There was no empirical basis for such a selection. Hence, I decided to capture data on diversity-related aspects of both primary and secondary, public and private schools. Given that questions of representation, and the speaker’s social position play a central role when interrogating discrimination and diversity, gender and ethnic background, as two central categories in all intersectional studies, were considered when choosing the research participants. Due to the vast disparities between the living conditions in urban and rural areas, as well as in different regions, it seemed advisable to include experiences from schools and participants in various contexts. Hence, my sample included:

• female and male teachers;
• teachers from different ethnic backgrounds; and
• teachers with at least three years of working experience
  • in primary and secondary public and private schools,
  • in different regions of the country, and
  • in urban and rural areas.

The interview guide consisted of two main parts in order to generate both (a) narrative data referring to the biographies of the teachers including instances where they felt *othered*, excluded or discriminated against, based on their identity; and (b) data that focused specifically on the issue of diversity in education and on the teachers’ professional practices in schools.

Unlike many grounded theory works, this study relied on interview data only in an attempt to establish teachers’ perspectives on issues of diversity in education. As depicted in the first chapters of this book, the biographical diversity experiences of the research participants not only promised insights into the representations and encounters of diversity in Kenya, but they
also provide an understanding of the teachers’ identities as foundation of their teaching practice. To include this important aspect in data generation, the interview guide borrowed its initial question from the narrative interview technique (Küsters 2019; Schütze 2016), prompting research participants to tell the story of their upbringing and going to school and ways in which they experienced diversity in their biography.

The second part of the interview guide followed the problem-centred interview method (Witzel 2000). It consisted of a set of guiding questions based on the research interest, my previous knowledge and sensitising concepts of diversity (education), intersectionality and nondiscrimination. At the same time, the guide included open-ended questions that left space for the research participants to focus on specific issues that seemed relevant to them. It comprised several questions for each of these items:

- the diversity interpretations and experiences in the research participants’ lives;
- their diversity interpretations in the Kenyan context;
- their professional experiences, challenges and practices concerning diversity in schools and
- recommendations they had for improving the situation with regard to diversity in Kenyan schools.

In linking biographical and professional encounters and representations of diversity to the literature on diversity studies, the interrogation into the teachers’ biographical diversity experiences took a deconstructionist approach by looking at the individual and their emerging intersecting identity factors as significant to their social positioning and chances concerning education. In contrast, the teachers’ experiences and practices as professional teachers in schools primarily looked at group-related explanations concerning diversity in the Kenyan school context. However, both approaches in the context of this research revolve
around issues of power and query the ways in which hegemonic discourses and social practices drive discriminatory, exclusionist and othering conditions that reproduce social inequality.

The level of trust showed by the research participants, particularly in the first part of the interview, was remarkable and hence, the data generated through interviews combining narrative and problem-centred interviewing techniques proved to be very rich.

The tools that GTM provided for organising and analysing the data, developing higher levels of analytical categories on the way, proved feasible with the generated data.

**Conclusion**

The government of independent Kenya has attempted to move from the exclusionist colonial provision of education to providing access to primary and secondary schooling to everyone. However, disparities remain concerning access, participation and success in education – as shown by education statistics that include various indicators and factors mirroring prevalent social inequalities. Furthermore, tribalism, sexism, ableism and other oppressive systems depicted in empirical studies and the literature emerged as significant for reproducing social boundaries, discrimination and inequality. The Kenyan government has highlighted the role of education and schools to foster unity in diversity, social cohesion and nondiscrimination. Aside from promoting guidance and counselling at schools in order to promote diversity and fight discrimination, strategies for diversity in teacher education and institutional frameworks of schools are largely missing. Against this backdrop, the research gap for this study has been identified as the need to interrogate the teachers’ perspective (their experience of, and professional practice regarding, diversity in the schools) in order to generate approaches in (teacher) education that circumvent the use of diversity for reproducing or manifesting exclusion and inequality. Finally, the methodological implications
for approaching the research problem were discussed in order to explain how the data were generated and analysed. A constructivist and social justice-orientated GTM enabled focus on teachers’ strategies and professional practices in trying to develop theory on diversity in education in a Kenyan context.