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Address for correspondence
Professor Dolina Dowling
Editor-in-Chief
The Independent Journal of Teaching and Learning
PO Box 2369
Randburg 2125
South Africa
E-mail: editor@iie.ac.za

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Notes on contributors

Dr Folake Ruth Aluko is currently the researcher within the Unit for Distance Education at the University of Pretoria, South Africa. She manages the quality of the institution's Open Distance Learning (ODL) programmes. Her research foci include quality assurance in ODL, quality management of ODL programmes, mobile learning, access, social justice, programme evaluation, impact studies, student support, and teacher professional development through ODL. Ruth serves as a reviewer for both national and international journals. Ruth facilitates training and workshops and is involved in the evaluation of ODL programmes. She is an NRF-rated researcher. ORCID: 0000-0003-0499-042X

Azizeh Chalak is associate professor of TEFL at the English Department of Islamic Azad University, Isfahan Branch, Isfahan, Iran. She has more than 22 years of experience in teaching English in graduate and undergraduate programmes in face-to-face and virtual English campuses. She is the editor-in-chief of *Research in English Language Pedagogy* (RELP) published at IAU, Isfahan Branch and was selected as the top researcher of the English Department in 2017 and 2018. She has presented and published many papers at different conferences and journals both at international and national levels, and has been the reviewer of different journals and research projects. Her research interests include teaching methodology, sociolinguistics, intercultural communication, e-mail communications, computer-mediated communication (CMC), and integration of technology in teaching.

Professor Elmarie Costandius supervises MA and PhD students and coordinates the MA in Visual Arts (Art Education) at Stellenbosch University, South Africa. She studied Information Design at the University of Pretoria and continued her MAVA studies at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy, Amsterdam. Elmarie completed an MEd in Globalisation and Higher Education at the University of the Western Cape. Her PhD in Curriculum Studies (Stellenbosch University) focused on social responsibility and critical citizenship in art education.

Stef Esterhuizen, Senior Lecturer and Programme Organiser: Foundation Phase, Faculty of Educational Sciences at North-West University (NWU), Vanderbijlpark, South Africa, lectures undergraduate students and acts as study leader for postgraduate students. She co-authored articles and participated in national and international conferences. She has published chapters in: *Teaching Life Skills in the Foundation Phase; 'Developing Critical Thinking: A multidimensional approach in the context of South Africa; and Re-imaging teaching and learning through play*. She acted as co-editor of 'Multigrade Teaching South-Africa'. Stef believes that all children can achieve their maximum potential through apposite instruction that enhances cognitive and critical thinking skills. Her research interest is the improvement of teaching and learning practices to promote cognitive development among learners in the Early Childhood years (birth to nine years) and prospective teachers. Stef was involved in research projects, 'Schools as Thinking Communities'

(Project-leader: Prof Mary Grosser) and 'Developing Advanced Performers for the 21st Century' (Project-leaders: Prof Mary Grosser and Prof Mirna Nel). She is leader of the project 'Strengthening the capacity for play-based learning in ECDE through a collaborative approach between stakeholders' and involved in 'Early Childhood Care and Education: building partnerships between teachers, caregivers and parents for the holistic development of young children' (Project-leader: Prof Mariëtte Koen). ORCID: 0000-0002-5321-9570

Professor Mary Grosser is an extraordinary professor at North-West University, South Africa, Vanderbijlpark Campus, in the Optentia Research Focus Area. Her research interest centres on teaching that optimises cognitive development and critical thinking development among students at school. She has supervised Master's and Doctorate students, delivered several papers at national and international conferences, published in national and international peer-reviewed journals, authored chapters for textbooks and edited a publication that focuses on the development of critical thinking. She serves as an Advisory Board member for a newly established NPO, Institute for the Advancement of Cognitive Education. ORCID: 0000-0001-9198-521X

Fariba Haghighi Irani is a PhD holder in TEFL at the English Department of Islamic Azad University (IAU), Isfahan Branch, Isfahan, Iran. She has taught undergraduate courses at IAU, Tehran Branches. Fariba has presented and published at national and international conferences and journals. She has been the project coordinator and one of the researchers in the SAMT national project on developing materials for university students. She joined ATINER, an international research centre in Athens, in 2015. Her research interests include teacher education, teacher professional identify, second language teaching and learning, and research methodology.

Hossein Heidari Tabrizi is associate professor of TEFL at the English Department of Islamic Azad University (IAU), Isfahan Branch, Isfahan, Iran. He is the director in charge of Research in English Language Pedagogy (RELP) published at IAU, Isfahan Branch and was selected as the top researcher of the English Department in 2016. His research interests include ELT, language assessment and testing, translation studies, and discourse analysis. ORCID: 0000-0002-9360-1555

Dipane Joseph Hlalele is a Professor in the School of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Prior to this, he was Assistant Dean and Senior Lecturer at the University of the Free State, a college of education lecturer and high school teacher. His research interests include sustainable rural learning ecologies, the exclusion/inclusion conundrum in education as well as community engagement in rural contexts. ORCID: 0000-0003-4455-4876

Theresia Joakim Kanyopa is currently a PHD candidate at the University of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa where she obtained her Master's in Educational Psychology in 2019. She also holds a Bachelor of Education Honour's in Education Management from the University of South Africa in 2015, and the Bachelor of Arts in Education from the University of Dar Es Salaam in Tanzania in 2011. Her research interests are in Inclusive Education, Early Childhood Development (ECD) and Integration of learners as minor stakeholders in the Education system.

Magda Kloppers is Senior lecturer in Mathematics in the School of Mathematics, Science and Technology in the Faculty of Education of the NWU (Vaal Triangle campus), South Africa. She completed a BSc with Mathematics and Information Technology as majors. The focus of her postgraduate studies is on cognitive development, critical thinking skills and dispositions, teacher training, technology enhanced teaching and learning, and Mathematics. Magda has published in national and international journals and has presented papers at several conferences. She is a member of IAVM (Institute for the Advancement of

Vedic Mathematics), IACE (Institute for the Advancement of Cognitive Education) and the research focus area SDL (Self-directed Learning). ORCID: 0000-0003-2435-0809

Derica Alba Kotzé is an Associate Professor at the Department of Development Studies at the University of South Africa. She specialises in gender and development; development theories, policy and strategies; sustainable development and participatory project management; donor aid; monitoring and evaluation; and food security. She teaches under- and postgraduate courses in development studies and supervises Master's and Doctoral candidates. ORCID: 0000-0002-3248-1561

Kobie Meiring is a lecturer in Art Education at the Education Department at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, South Africa. She is currently exploring teacher training in higher education from posthuman and new materialist perspectives in her PhD research.

Albert Michau is an Education Consultant at the University of South Africa (Unisa). He is involved in curriculum transformation and learning development in Open Distance Learning (ODL). He holds a National higher Technical Diploma, HED technical and an MEd from the University of Johannesburg. His research interests include the design of ODL materials, work-integrated learning in higher education, and different engineering fields.

Jane Ndinisa is a Curriculum and Learning Development Specialist at the University of South Africa (Unisa). Her role involves curriculum transformation and learning development in Open Distance Learning (ODL). She holds a Master's in Computer-Based Education from the University of Johannesburg in South Africa. Her research interest includes the delivery of eLearning in the ODL environment.

Professor Mirna Nel is Deputy Dean for research and innovation in the Faculty of Humanities, North-West University (NWU), South Africa and a researcher in the Optentia Research Focus Area. Her research interest is primarily focused on the role teachers play in teaching and supporting all learners in inclusive classrooms, as well as teacher education for inclusion. She has published several articles in national and in international journals, written numerous chapters, co-edited and sole edited textbooks, and supervised and delivered Master's and PhD students. Conference papers were presented at national and international conferences. She has also been invited to do workshops and presentations in several European countries, as well as keynote presentations at various national and international conferences on a variety of topics relevant to inclusive education. ORCID: 0000-0003-0170-3296

Karolien Perold-Bull is a designer/researcher/teacher. She currently coordinates and teaches in the Visual Communication Design division of the Visual Arts Department, Stellenbosch University, South Africa. Here her focus lies in design thinking, typographic design, information design, experience design and navigating the dynamic relationships between these fields and relevant design philosophy and theory. In her research, she explores design from posthuman, new materialist perspectives. Her PhD thesis focused particularly on design education within the context of transformation and decolonisation in South African higher education. Specific areas of interest include design for social innovation and positive future change, post-qualitative research methodology, and critical pedagogy.

Estelle van Rensburg is an Education Consultant at the University of South Africa (Unisa). She is involved in curriculum transformation and learning development in Open Distance Learning (ODL). She holds an MA in Translation Studies and an MEd in Curriculum Studies, both from the University of the Witwatersrand. Her research interests include the design of ODL materials, work-integrated learning in higher education, and quality assurance in ODL.

Michele van Wyk is an education consultant in the Directorate Curriculum Development & Transformation at the University of South Africa. She is involved in curriculum transformation and the design and development of learning material in Open Distance Learning (ODL). She completed her MEd in Computer-Based Education at the University of Johannesburg. Her research interest is around issues in open distance learning, instructional design, educational technology, online education, training interventions for staff in the use of ICTs, and curriculum development.

Dr Anneke Venter is an Education Consultant at the University of South Africa (Unisa). She is involved in curriculum transformation and learning development in Open Distance Learning (ODL). Her research and publications focus on enhancing the student learning experience in ODL. She holds a DLitt et Phil in Sociology from the University of Johannesburg, South Africa.

Sakhiseni J. Yende is presently affiliated with the University of Cape Town in South Africa as a doctoral candidate. Mr Yende's research sits at the cutting edge of the field of performing arts, especially in opera. In 2016, Yende was appointed as a Junior Researcher at the Jive Media Africa, where he worked closely with young people and children who are socially and financially deprived in areas such as Carnarvon (Northern Cape), Rustenburg (North-West), Pietermaritzburg (KZN). In 2016, Yende joined J.D. Mosiah Primary School where he served as head of music and teacher. From the years 2017 to 2019, Mr Yende joined the Tshwane University of Technology (The Faculty of the Arts) where he served under the Department of Performing Arts as an Assistant Lecturer, Research Assistant, as well as Curriculum Development Assistant. Mr Yende has acquired extensive research skills, as he has also taught research methods courses and has researched and supervised both Honours and Master's students in a range of Performing Arts fields such as Dance, Vocal Arts (Opera), and Musical Theatre. His research interests are quite diverse but follow five lines: music education, African music, opera, music in political sciences, and education.

Editorial

Dolina Dowling

It is more than a year since COVID-19 was declared a pandemic. In that time, we have unfortunately grown accustomed to lockdowns with all that they entail, including stay-at-home education. Schools and tertiary institutions alike have scrambled to provide some form of online learning with varying degrees of success. It need hardly be said that worldwide the most privileged in a society have benefitted from online learning and the virtual classroom; the poorest in society have once again been further disadvantaged. The socioeconomic and digital divide have never been more obvious.

It has also, however, been a time for innovation in the delivery of education, particularly in higher education. Before the pandemic, higher education institutions (HEIs) in South Africa were offering some form of online learning, whether it be in courses within contact programmes or fully online certificated programmes. Indeed, on-time, anywhere learning has increasingly been gaining traction over the past decade in the academy. The pandemic has given it further impetus. But this is not without challenges.

Throughput rates in contact programmes are suboptimal for disadvantaged students and are even lower in online and distance programmes. This is despite the attempts by government and education leaders to improve the student learning experience and fostering access with success. Of course, there is no easy solution.

South Africa is a divided country in terms of access to resources, with infrastructure and technology being particularly poor in rural areas. Nevertheless, efforts continue to be made to address the inequalities in education outcomes. It is to be hoped that any innovations in delivery are translated into meeting the needs of disadvantaged children and the youth. This is more so given the fact that these are in the majority.

In this 16th volume of the *Journal of Independent Teaching and Learning* (IJTL), the introduction of *From the pen of…*, whereby a leading expert is invited to write on a topical education issue, further serves our mission to extend our reach in the education community.

It is timely that the first two articles of this volume deal with Online Distance Education (ODL) with both using Unisa as their lens. The first reports on a case study in which student perceptions and needs for success in their programme were explored. While students were found to be keen to engage in online learning, the importance of taking into account different students' access to ICT and capabilities were highlighted. These aspects need to be included in the design of a theoretical framework for ODL.

Course design at Unisa is carried out through a team approach with quality checks conducted throughout the development phase. The authors in the second article use a mixed methods research approach to

explore the extent to which the quality assurance mechanisms are fit for purpose from the often-forgotten user experience; the lecturer. The authors put forward a more inclusive model in course design.

The second cluster of articles deals with teacher education. The first explores the reception of a new hybrid teacher education programme using Affordances Theory; the extent to which students used the technology affordances available. Like the first article, the authors found that there were a number of factors that lead to poor student online participation. These range from a lack of access to technology through to insufficient academic support. A number of recommendations are made.

How pre-service teachers in Iran acquire professional identity is the topic of the next article. The authors, using a longitudinal qualitative method within the framework of social constructivism, identified that engagement in the classroom is a significant contributor to this process. Such activities could be used in the design of teacher education programmes.

The next three articles deal with different aspect of schooling. The first was a pilot to determine the feasibility of a full study on the challenges of equipping students with critical thinking and other skills so that they become Advanced Performers. Suggestions are made to enhance the questionnaire design. In the following article, using invitational educational theory, the challenges of learners from rural and township schools transitioning to Ex-Model C schools were investigated. Findings were that, while there are a number of positives (inviting), there were also disadvantages (uninviting) typically around culture and language. This can be addressed through the application of invitational educational theory. In the next article, the lack of status of art education in South African primary schools is explored through the lens of power, race and social justice in a low-income area in the Western Cape. Through deconstructing the assumptions that underpin the school experience, the authors suggest ways that schools could become spaces for transformation.

The article in the Practitioners' Corner presents a case whereby the curriculum in Performing Arts in an HEI has been reviewed to make it fit for current market needs. This includes students gaining competences and skills in business and entrepreneurship as well as artistic creativity.

The Doctoral Corner comprises abstracts of recently awarded doctoral degrees. These are concerned with leadership approaches of school principals, formative assessment in primary schools, developing students' critical thinking skills, as well as masculinity in the subculture of *ukukhothana*. The publication of abstracts alerts researchers and practitioners to new research in their areas of interest.

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From the Pen of...

Professor Sipho Seepe, Deputy Vice Chancellor – Institutional Support, University of Zululand, South Africa

The impact of COVID-19 and 4IR on educational practice

Now and again, we are confronted by developments whose impact can be either revolutionary or epoch making. These developments are revolutionary in the sense that they require a 'fundamental change in the way of thinking or visualizing something'. The advent of the severe respiratory coronavirus disease in 2019 (COVID-19) is such a development. The adjustments that had to be made were far-reaching to the extent that we can talk of life before and after COVID.

COVID-19 comes also within the context of rapid and unrelenting technological breakthroughs brought about by the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). Klaus Schwab, the business leader credited for introducing the idea of 4IR, argues that

> We stand on the brink of a technological revolution that will fundamentally alter the way we live, work, and relate to one another. In its scale, scope, and complexity, the transformation will be unlike anything humankind has experienced before.

COVID-19 and 4IR have altered how people live and work. Of interest is how both COVID-19 and 4IR impact on educational practice. COVID-19 has forced us to move quickly into the digital space. Universities and schools have had to quickly revamp their online and digital platforms in an effort to save the academic project and human lives. In doing so, they found themselves redefining what learning and teaching entails. Multimodal teaching and learning has become the 'new normal'. This calls for a redefinition of what constitutes a 'classroom', 'student', and/or a 'teacher'.

At the same time, the ongoing information explosion and the ubiquity of technological gadgets that characterise the 4IR is beginning to impact on the objectives of education. This is critical given that about 60% of the new school entrants will find themselves in jobs and/or occupations that currently do not exist. The fundamental concern facing policymakers and education designers is how one prepares the young people for a future whose characteristics is largely unknown.

This concern upends how the purpose of education has been defined for time immemorial. The purpose of education is aptly captured by Richard Shaull's foreword in Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Shaull[1] writes:

1 Foreword. In Freire, P. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Continuum International Publishing Group (NY)

> Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.

Hitherto education has tended to focus on integrating the younger generation into the logic of the prevailing system. Changes in the system were minimal and glacial in pace. The future was relatively predictable. The skills and knowledge required could easily be packaged.

The context of 4IR is very different. It is defined by volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA moment), to borrow a recent addition in the lexicon of business. This is the context of rapid and unrelenting technological breakthroughs that alter how we make sense of reality.

4IR upends almost everything. It demands new thinking and new visualisation. To appreciate what such a visualisation entails, a reflection of higher education in the past hundred odd years is instructive. This journey can arguably be defined by a period before and after 1994 (courtesy of Kirti Menon & Gloria Castrillón, 2017[2]). Prior to 1994, and in accordance with the dictates of apartheid, higher education was tailored and 'driven by parochial conceptions of labour market needs, premised directly on race, gender and class assumptions.'

Post 1994, the sector embarked on a number of systemic and structural shifts. The shifts were designed to give effect to the broader political transformation agenda, to ensuring equitable access to higher education, and to providing skills to students which would – it was assumed – inevitably lead to employment opportunities. The prevailing argument was that without employable and skilled graduates the 'South African economy would not succeed'. The broad policy thrust placed emphasis on the development of 'a skilled and capable workforce to support an inclusive growth path'.

Before and post 1994, education largely served as an instrument to integrate the younger generation into the dictates and logic of the prevalent system. Emphasis has been on linking education with skills development and the economy.

This conceptualisation of education is unlikely to equip students for a world as characterized by Schawb. The context of 4IR requires a rethink if education is to meet the future demands and challenges. The approach to education, which was suited for addressing the country's challenges at the dawn of South Africa's democracy is arguably ill-equipped to meet the demands of a future that is fast unfolding. As if to anticipate the future of work, some leading companies are recruiting people without degrees. Being 'book smart' is inadequate.

What is required is an approach that places emphasis on education being, to use the Freirean description, 'a practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.'

What is needed is that 'a disruption of the spaces of teaching and learning has to occur if universities are to contend with the needs of current society and future societies. In order to teach for an 'unknown future'[3]

2 Reimagining curricula for the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The Independent Journal of Teaching and Learning 14(2) pp.6-19.

3 Ibid

A way forward is to focus on 'human qualities and dispositions' to knowledge as opposed to simply possession of knowledge and skills. What matters is the student's own engagements with knowledge – in other words his or her knowing'.

Sir Albert Einstein was arguably prophetic when he observed that 'imagination is more important than knowledge. Imagination is everything. It is the preview of life's coming attractions.' And perhaps for that reason he argued that education should not be about 'learning of facts, but the training of the mind to think.'

We are not there yet!

Theoretical framework for Open Distance Learning: a South African case study[1]

Derica Alba Kotzé, University of South Africa, South Africa[2]

ABSTRACT

This paper outlines the elements of a theoretical framework for open distance learning (ODL) in a developing country through the application of the case study method. The theoretical tenets of transactional distance and connectivism have been applied to investigate the feelings, perceptions and expectations of Honours students in Development Studies at the University of South Africa (Unisa). With a special focus on students' access to and usage of the internet and web-based learning, the study contributes to developing a framework for distance education in a developing context. In addition to a literature study and theoretical framework, a quantitative research approach was followed and entailed an exploratory study based on survey research. The results show that the vast majority of students are willing to engage fully with e-learning and are active internet users considering it as an important source of learning and information. However, it is important to note that access and usage of the internet depend on the individual profile of a student. In conclusion, elements to inform the design of an ODL theoretical framework are outlined.

Keywords: connectivism, e-learning, open distance learning (ODL), teaching and learning framework, transactional distance, Unisa

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to outline the elements to be considered in an open distance learning (ODL) framework. In line with the emphasis on the relation between separation and technology in ODL, the accessibility to and the use of information and communication technology (ICT) is critical to opening avenues and removing the barriers of geographical and communication distances between the student, teacher, content, and the institution. Recent developments in the distance education field represent a swing from pedagogical to andragogical viewpoints, as well as changes in theoretical frameworks with student centredness, learning autonomy, dialogue, structure, and student interaction at its core.

This article presents transactional distance and connectivism as the theoretical foundation for the development of an ODL framework for the University of South Africa (Unisa). Distance learning, also

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2 ORCID: 0000-0002-3248-1561

referred to as e-learning, is seen as a form of education in which there is a separation between instructor and learner (Picciano, 2017). Özgür and Koçak (2016: 202) emphasise especially flexibility in terms of individual conditions and a shift from 'same for all education' towards 'just for me' education, which implies a more customised perspective. Unisa as an ODL institution has vast numbers of students from diverse backgrounds and any ODL framework should focus on the practical realities of the day-to-day life of the learners (Joubert & Snyman, 2018).

This paper starts by outlining the literature review and theoretical framework, followed by a brief summary of the research design, methodology, and findings. It is important to note that the focus of this article is not to present and interpret comprehensively the case study results, but to offer guidelines for a theoretical framework for ODL.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Globalisation, population movements and the ICT revolution (Özgür & Koçak, 2016) are impacting all aspects of life, including distance education, to meet the increasing needs of the historically underserved, and diverse race and gender student populations (Universities of SA, 2018). Conventional education did not lead to sustainable education for all, and ODL is seen as the most cost-effective, cost-efficient way of solving many of the endemic problems in education and training, especially in South Africa (Kaur, 2018). ODL philosophy is based on openness and flexibility in terms of time and student needs, removal of obstacles and a learner-centred approach (Özgür & Koçak, 2016). Gulati (2008), however, questions if ICT advances are addressing the educational gaps that are due to the challenges created by poverty, cultural issues, and lack of social and educational infrastructure. Trines (2018) also emphasises that although ODL is a cost-effective way of mass education, limited availability and access to modern technology can be a serious obstacle in developing countries. It can only be successful if it is governed by the socioeconomic and cultural characteristics of the students to ensure active and participatory learning, programme diversity, and ease of access for all individuals (Özgür & Koçak, 2016).

Trines (2018: 21) also emphasised that institutions need to understand the learning environment of the student and should, therefore, 'adopt a student-centred pedagogical methodology' (Universities of SA, 2018: 21). Some are even of the opinion that the current dominance of Western ODL models in developing countries smacks of the 're-colonialisation of the academic space' (Universities of SA, 2018: 1). Muhirwa (2009: 18) states that

> Sound Pedagogy instead of 'Technological Silver Bullets' is critical in designing ODL learning programmes, given the number of additional technological, socio-economical, political, and cultural challenges experienced in SA and should be situated in its systemic political and ideological landscape.

Extensive research is available on ODL practice, but the literature is mainly focused on developed, industrialised countries, and there exists 'little or no formal research emphasising the policies and practice of open and distance learning models in the sub-saharan African countries' (Onwe, 2013: 123). Furthermore, the application of ICTs is seriously hampered by lack of expertise, lack of infrastructure, and a largely technologically illiterate user group (Onwe, 2013), which increases the need to emphasise learner context to give insight on how ODL can address the impact and value of distance education. ODL programmes in Africa should focus on an African philosophy and the practical realities of students' day-to-day life.

Özgür and Koçak (2016) highlight that ODL in especially mega-universities (like Unisa, with more than 100 000 students) should follow a blended model based on student profile and equality principles in all aspects. Pallitt et al. (2018) reiterate that although blended and online learning are becoming a prominent

feature increasingly of higher education in Africa, theoretical frameworks are not readily available. Rapid and continuous change in technology requires development of theories and ODL frameworks that can respond to changing environments and societal needs especially in the light of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) aiming to leave no one behind. Aydemir, Özkeskin and Akkurt (2015: 1750) state: 'A theoretical framework specifies which key variables influence a phenomenon of interest. It alerts you to examine how those key variables might differ and under what circumstances'. ODL is a fast-growing field that is in need of research, theory, and application, and, according to Aydemir et al. (2015), there is a need to propose theoretical frameworks. Trines (2018: 1) states that future models will need to improve the delivery and content of ODL courses while making them more interactive and relevant to local contexts. A number of ODL theories exist, as will be discussed in the next section. The question is whether a single common theory of ODL is possible.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Distance education has been characterised by a lack of a solid theoretical foundation and mostly relied on a trial-and-error approach until the 1970s. The need for a sound theoretical basis has led to various interpretations of the concept and the need for a theory within the framework of distance education. According to Keegan (1988), a solid distance education theory should be able to provide a yardstick to measure the political, financial, educational and social decisions to be taken to prevent the ad hoc responses to problem-solving. Holmberg (1986: 3) claimed that 'distance education is a distinct field of education' and paved the way for the critical recognition of a reputable base theory of distance education. Keegan (1988) also expressed that the absence of an independent theory has weakened distance education and did groundbreaking work when he classified the various theoretical interpretations of distance education into four groups: (i) theories of independence and autonomy (Keegan, 2013; Moore, 1973); (ii) theories of industrialisation of teaching (Peters, 2006); (iii) theories of interaction and communication (Holmberg, 1986 & 2005); and (iv) a category pursuing clarification of distance education from the fusion of existing communication and diffusion theories and education philosophies (Aydemir et al., 2015).

For the purpose of this study, the theoretical point of departure is the framework of independence and autonomy – more specifically, Moore's (1973) theory of transactional distance. In contrast with the many theories that originated in the classroom environment, the theory of transactional distance offers an all-embracing pedagogical framework for distance education that developed from an inquiry of teaching and learning through technology in contrast with classroom-based theories. According to Tait (2017: 6), this theory is seen as one of the few distance education theories

> that can be used to test hypotheses and serves as a heuristic device, a means of identifying questions for research and also a very practical instrument to be used in making… difficult instructional design decisions. (para. 3)

Moore's theory accommodates analytical investigation of the interplay between course structure, teacher-learner communication, and students' inclination to regulate the learning process. In the words of Moore (1997: 22), transactional distance is 'a psychological and communication space to be crossed, a space of potential misunderstanding between the inputs of instructor and those of the learner'. The value of the theory lies in the fact that it gives direction to the designers on both the methodological and instructional design of the programme in order to decrease transactional separation, thereby exhausting learning outcomes. Consequently, this theory inspects the two main elements present in distance education, namely (i) learner autonomy and (ii) teacher-learner distance. Representing the pedagogical aspects of education, it comprises fixed principles and a model outlining the three sets of variables: (i) dialogue, (ii) structure and (iii) learner autonomy (Moore, 1973). Moore (as cited in Stirling, 1997: 1) explains it as follows:

> Dialogue… refers to the teacher-student interaction, specifically the communicative transaction of giving instruction and responding. Structure refers to how the instructional programme is designed. In this sense, structure reflects the programme's capacity to respond to a learner's individual needs. As dialogue increases, structure decreases. As the interaction between teacher and a learner increases, the existing programme's structure of objectives, activities, and assessment decreases to accommodate the learner's needs. Learner autonomy refers to the characteristic of self-direction.

In sum, on the one hand, as dialogue increases, structure decreases; on the other hand, transactional distance increases when dialogue decreases and structure increases. Geography does not determine distance; distance is determined by the relationship between dialogue and structure. According to Stirling (1997), the theory of transactional distance provides a theoretical framework for distance education instructors to create an operational learning environment and to design original models of instruction. In the context of this study, the variable of structure is critical to determine whether the Honours programme is responsive to the individual needs of learners, and to what extent future 'educational objectives, teaching strategies and evaluation methods can be adapted to the objectives, strategies, and evaluation methods of the learner' in light of the geographical distribution of students (Stirling, 1997: 2). Moore (as cited in Sher, 2009) focuses on three types of interaction (dialogue): (i) learner-instructor interaction, (ii) learner-content interaction and (iii) learner-learner interaction. The concept of interaction is probably the most fundamental element of successful distance education programmes. Learner-instructor interaction encompasses motivation, feedback and dialogue interaction, while learner-content interaction represents the mode of obtaining intellectual content and academic information from learning material such as context format, audio or video, online communication, CD-ROM and computer programs. Learner-learner (structured and/or non-structured) interaction refers to dialogue between students and exchange of informational material, ideological content, and ideas about the programme. Hillman, Hills and Gunawardena (as cited in Sher, 2009) expanded on the three types of interaction and added learner-technology interaction. They emphasise that technology as delivery mode of instruction is a critical element of the interaction model. This is especially the case in ODL and an important element of this research study. Learners without the necessary skills and/or ICT devices spend excessive time and energy interacting with the technology, the instructor, other learners, and content, which impacts negatively on effective engagement in learning and interaction. Thus, it is required from the instructional designers to accommodate 'learner-interface interaction' to facilitate appropriate interactions between the learner and technology (Baynton, 1992: 17-18).

In line with the notion of Hillman, Hills and Gunawardena (cited in Sher, 2009) to add learner-technology interaction, Garrison (1989) highlighted the significance of educational transaction between teacher and learner (reflecting the theory of communication and learner control). Garrison's (2000) conception of the learning process necessitates teacher-learner interaction in contrast with that of Moore (1973; 1997) and Holmberg (1986; 2005), who regard learning as an individual, internal process. Garrison argues that two-way communication in the form of technology is essential in a situation where the learner and teacher are separated by distance. In fact, technology has been identified as one of the three critical elements in distance education by Garrison (1989). He claimed that distance education theory and practice advanced because of the growing sophistication of instructional technology given the fact that technology and distance education are inseparable elements within transactional education. Garrison and Baynton (as cited in Garrison, 2000) emphasised that the concept of control by the learner is another conspicuous notion. Learner independence and control, based on the learner-interface interaction, was added to substitute the notion of independence (autonomy) as presented by Holmberg and Moore. Garrison and Baynton (1987) are of the opinion that these two concepts have been applied with diverse interpretations and thus do not echo the necessary interdependent teacher-learner relationship. Learner control (Garrison, 2000: 10) is concerned with

> the opportunity and ability to influence and direct a course of events… control within the educational setting, however, cannot be established by only one party when the direction of the course of events must inherently be collaborative.

Control is interpreted in terms of the relationship between teacher, learner and content, and this control is grounded in the interrelationship between independence (self-directed learner), proficiency (to learn independently), and support (characterised by the resources available to guide and facilitate the educational transaction). Baynton (1992) designed a factor model explaining that control does not equal independence but rather necessitates an equilibrium among the following three factors: (i) a learner's independence (the opportunity to make choices), (ii) competence (ability and skill), and (iii) support (both human and material). The analysis of the three factors implies that other variables may impact the concept of control and the multifaceted teacher-learner interaction.

Another theoretical construct that was added to distance education was the notion of social presence or the context in which distance learning takes place. ICT advancement has modernised the learning process. Siemens (2005) brings together the social and cultural environment, on the one hand, and the use of technology in distance education, on the other, in an alternative theory known as 'connectivism'. Technology determines how we learn, how we connect and how we communicate, and, in this sense, connectivism offers

> a model of learning that acknowledges the tectonic shifts in society where learning is no longer an internal, individualistic activity. How people work and function is altered when new tools are utilised. Connectivism provides insight into learning skills and tasks needed for learners to flourish in a digital era. (Siemens, 2005: 7)

This theoretical construct is reflective of the underlying hypothesis of learning which emphasises the role of social environments and cultural contexts. Bates (2015) explains that learning has changed in the following ways: (i) the way we learn and what we learn, (ii) how we learn and (iii) where we learn. Learners are no longer impassive users of knowledge; they are driven by a dynamic flow of information to create content (Picciano, 2017). Learning takes place in collaboration and through interaction with other learners outside the classroom in virtual venues any time of the day. Stephenson (quoted in Picciano, 2017: 175) refers to this as 'What Knowledge Tears Apart, Networks Make Whole'. According to Siemens (2005: 3), most distance education theories do not acknowledge learning that takes place 'outside of people', whereas connectivism focuses on developing and creating knowledge and learning rather than disseminating it (Picciano, 2017).

Choosing what to learn as well as the meaning and elucidation of data are seen through the lens of a fluid reality within the technology development. Due to changes in the information climate and environment, answers to questions change accordingly, thus impacting on decision-making which is in itself a learning process. Within this continuously changing environment, (i) creating an accommodating social context in which learning and human relationships are promoted, (ii) developing group cohesiveness – maintaining the group as a unit, and (iii) helping members to work together for a mutual cause are critical for successful ODL. The social context impacts on motivation, attitudes, teaching and learning. Consequently, the local culture and living reality of a learner should receive attention to ensure that technology-based learning activities do not impact negatively on the local social environment and widen the gap between the privileged and deprived groups (Gulati, 2008). As technology is not culturally neutral, the design of instructional modes is crucial to prevent the inappropriate use and transfer of media, materials, and services. McIsaac and Gunawardena (1996: 9) express it as follows:

> Technology based learning activities are frequently used without attention to the impact on the local social environment. Computer-mediated communication attempts to reduce patterns of discrimination by providing equality of social interaction among participants who may be anonymous in terms of gender, race, and physical features. However, there is evidence that the social equality factor may not extend, for example, to participants who are not good writers but who must communicate primarily in a text-based format. It is particularly important to examine social factors in distance learning environments where the communication process is mediated and where social climates are created that are very different from traditional settings.

The theoretical construct of social presence relates directly to this study as the participants are from different social contexts. We can conclude that '[c]onnectivist pedagogy stresses the development of social presence and social capital through the creation and sustenance of networks of current and past learners and of those with knowledge relevant to the learning goals' (Anderson & Dron, 2011, n.p.). Closely related to the social context is the framework of adult learning, that is, andragogy.

Knowles (as cited in Pappas, 2013: 2-3) introduced the term 'andragogy' to describe the education and learning of adults. Knowles also distinguished between the characteristics of adult versus child learners and identified the following five assumptions about adult learners: (i) self-concept (self-directed human being), (ii) adult learner experience (increasing resources for learning), (iii) readiness to learn (developmental tasks of his/her social roles), (iv) orientation to learning (learning orientation shifts from subject-centredness to problem-centredness), and (v) motivation to learn (internal). More importantly, however, are the following principles of andragogy as highlighted by Knowles (1984) and Pappas (2013) that should be applied to adult learning:

1. Involvement of adults in the planning and evaluation of their own learning and tuition is critical.
2. The action of learning is based on experience.
3. Adults are more attracted to studying subjects that can be applied instantly to their jobs or personal life.
4. Adults are more oriented towards problem-solving learning than content.
5. The starting point for adult learning programmes should be the needs and interests of the specific learner.

In light of the above, we can deduce that, for adult learning to be effective, teaching and instruction design should accommodate the different contexts, experiences, and backgrounds of learners. The design of learning programmes should specifically address and fulfil the needs of learners that are spatially separated, from both the institution and lecturers, and remove all unnecessary barriers to learning. Within distance education, ICTs should increase the variety of methods available, provide more appropriate methods of communication, and promote increased access to higher education and lifelong learning. It is, however, critical that such technologies enhance the intended purpose of learning as well as consider the technology profile of both students and staff. Furthermore, ICTs should be informed by the geographic location of students and measures should be put in place by providing appropriate structure, dialogue and support to bridge the transactional and epistemic distance involved in e-learning and teaching. The ultimate role of digital technology is to create an enabling setting for students to access education at a distance. Higher education institutions are required to redesign their teaching and learning strategies and models to be pertinent and viable, preparing students for a rapidly advancing technological society. The remarkable development and improvements in ICTs and multimedia in the last decade brought plenty of opportunities to learning and teaching environments and offer a tremendous range of education tools to learners and educators in different social settings (Özgür & Koçak, 2016).

SOUTH AFRICAN CASE STUDY

Unisa as an ODL institution

Unisa is an example of a traditional distance education institution that has developed and transformed from the first generation of correspondence education to an ODL institution with a blended model of teaching and learning. Although ODL opens new horizons and is a cost-effective way of mass education, the increasing digital divide is causing larger disparities. ODL can only be successful if it is governed by the socioeconomic and sociocultural characteristics of the students, and if it ensures active and participatory learning, programme diversity and ease of access for all individuals (Özgür & Koçak, 2016). Careful measures must be taken to ensure that the use of ICTs do not broaden the divide between the rich and the poor.

In a study by Lephalala and Makoe (2012) about the impact of sociocultural issues on African students in distance education, it was found that environmental, social, cultural and economic aspects impact negatively on students' learning experience. They criticise ODL as a linear process that *isolates and marginalises learners* because of the lack of personal interaction between both students and lecturers. The study also showed that students experience restricted access to crucial and fundamental facilities necessary to study effectively in an ODL environment. The cycle of knowledge as identified by Siemens, i.e., from personal to network to organisation, is thus not achieved. Lephalala and Makoe (2012) especially stress the importance both of taking into consideration the vast contextual differences between students and of the need for programmes to be responsive to the individual and to specific needs of students. This viewpoint demonstrates the relevancy of connectivism as a distance education framework for an ODL institution since this learning theory is founded in the digital age and has the individual student as its point of departure. Siemens (2005: 6) explains it as follows:

> The starting point of connectivism is the individual. Personal knowledge is comprised of a network, which feeds into organizations and institutions, which in turn feed back into the network, and then continue to provide learning to individual.

The question is whether Unisa students have the means, skills and knowledge to engage effectively with this network in their learning process. Although it is the opinion that distance learning methods are more cost effective in delivering more training to a wider range of people, it presents serious challenges and disadvantages compared to the traditional learning environment (Ayden & Tirkes, 2010). To achieve Unisa's commitment to advance social justice by addressing inequalities and empowering previously disadvantaged groups (Unisa, 2015), funding and cost structures should take into consideration programme objectives, the profile of students, local conditions, and specific target groups' needs and circumstances to prevent an adverse effect on the quality of teaching and learning as well as on economic and social justice. Although technological advancements increase opportunities and accessibility, many developing countries are still constrained by technological infrastructure barriers, commonly called the digital divide (Trines, 2018).

Research design

A quantitative research design was followed and involved an exploratory study based on controlled survey research. The sample frame consisted of the total population of 260 elements (204 South African and 56 foreign students registered for the Honours degree in Development Studies in 2013). The students were contacted via email to inform them about the proposed research project and to confirm whether they were willing to participate. Data collection methods included a literature review of the theoretical frameworks of distance education and a self-administered electronic survey questionnaire consisting of 51 open- and close-ended questions. 47 questions covered the feelings, perceptions and expectations of students, as well as their access to and usage of the internet and web-based learning. The remaining four

questions represented personal and geographical details (Babbie, 2011). Questionnaires were sent to students via their *mylife* Unisa email. A total of 34 students responded to the questionnaire, representing a return rate of just over 13% of the study population. According to Babbie (2011), a return rate of 10% is acceptable. However, in light of the special focus of this research project on students' access to and usage of the internet, the researcher randomly selected and telephonically contacted 10 students who did not participate in the survey to find out the reasons for their non-participation. All 10 indicated that they did not receive the survey, of which eight explained that they do not access to or use the *mylife* Unisa email account because of either time constraints or system access problems. This is a critical factor in light of the central role that ICTs play in ODL and student support.

The study abided by the Unisa guidelines for conducting research involving Unisa students and the necessary ethics clearance and consent were obtained from Unisa and the participants respectively. Data gathering and analysis were subject to the requirements set for accurate, reliable, and valid data collection techniques and interpretation. A combination of coding, memoing and concept mapping was applied in data analysis. Results were summarised in terms of descriptive statistics with limited tables to illustrate.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The respondents consisted of 18 female and 16 male students. The majority (71%) resided in urban areas, 21% in rural areas, and the balance of 8% in peri-urban areas. A total of 19 South African compared to 15 foreign students from different countries participated in the survey. It is interesting to note that the response rate from foreign students (27%) is higher than that of South African students (9%), which is indicative of the fact that geographical separation can be overcome through digital technology. However, the fact that only 13% of the total student population participated is alarming, given the ODL context. Most of the respondents (19) fall within the age group of 26-35, reflecting a relatively young student population. This can have a positive impact on the future and success of e-learning as this age group is more exposed to and might be readier and more willing to engage with ICTs.

Students' knowledge of ODL: A large number of students (19) indicated that they know the meaning of ODL. It is, however, clear from the responses to a specific question on their understanding of online learning and teaching that students do not have an all-inclusive comprehension of the concept and method. No mention was made of either the basic theoretical principles underlying ODL or students' central role, position, and responsibilities as learners within the ODL model.

Access to and use of ICT: Results revealed that fewer than 50% of students have access to the full range of services consisting of a personal computer, printer and internet facilities where they live. The majority of students lack one or more of the essentials at home and 24% have no access to the internet at home. This can have a negative impact on their learning experience and readiness to engage effectively with e-learning programmes. Furthermore, no student makes use of facilities at a cybercafe and the reasons for this must be investigated as such facilities are often promoted to increase access to ICTs within an ODL framework. Quite interestingly, 29% accessed and completed the survey between 17h00 and 07h00, which is indicative of the time that students engage with *my*Unisa and activities related to their studies compared to 71% who completed the survey during work hours. One can thus conclude that the majority of the students access and use the internet for their studies during working hours. Another important finding is that 68% of students use employers' computers and internet facilities and 80% of students use printing services at their place of work. This finding is indicative of the non-specified crucial role that employers play in, and their indirect financial contribution to, e-learning in distance education.

Only 21 students print study material. 80% of these students use printing services at their workplace and the balance of 20% use facilities at a cybercafe. Students also indicated that they have challenges

because of printing costs, difficulties with access to and downloading of study material, and lack of access to required technologies. Regarding the submission of online assignments, the majority of the students complained about compatibility issues relating to web browsers and unreliable functioning of sites. Almost 46% of students never participate in discussion forums on *my*Unisa and 33% participated fewer than once a month. This finding and the reasons thereof should be investigated to ensure that Unisa's ODL model and e-learning programmes increase student participation, proactive learning, and responsiveness (Unisa, 2015). 73% of students indicated that they never make use of Unisa facilities to access the internet. 32% of these students gave as reason that facilities are too distant and not easily accessible. Students indicated that the institution should establish more computer and study centres closer to students and include low-cost equipment in tuition fees. The finding that 91% and 9% of students (a total of 100%) regard the provision of computers and facilities by Unisa as 'very important' and 'quite important' respectively is an indication of the expectations of students. Furthermore, 94% of respondents feel that it is essential that Unisa provide 'free' computer and internet facilities. In line with this finding, Unisa will have to increase regional infrastructure and decentralised services, especially since Unisa dedicates itself to becoming 'the African university in service of humanity' with emphasis on access, open learning, equity, and empowerment (Unisa, 2015).

Although 64% of students regard online learning and tuition as 'a vital and important method', almost a quarter of the students expressed that it is 'to the disadvantage of students without computer and internet facilities' while 12% felt that it is 'an add-on service, secondary to other tuition methods and services'. Another factor that should be considered is the fact that 36% of students indicated that they require training in 'how to study online', while 15% require training in 'the use of computers'. In addition, 61% expressed that they prefer 'printed tutorial letters and study material' in comparison to 33% who prefer 'online study materials'.

ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS

It is evident that some students lack the necessary skills and competence to engage fully and efficiently with online learning. Further research is required to determine the specific circumstances and needs of such students. This will also contribute towards the design and effective delivery of ODL support structures and services, removing barriers to access learning, and, more specifically, student-centred interventions. The fact that the majority of the students are active internet users and regard it as an important source of learning and information is a significant finding. It relates specifically to Moore's (1973) theory of transactional distance which emphasises teaching and learning through technology to overcome the 'psychological and communication space' in distance education. It also informs educators about how to design the course in terms of the pedagogical aspects of education. The case study clearly reflects the need for ICT skills, knowledge and competency programmes, which are crucial to the removal of barriers to enable learners to engage fully with the learning process, content, other learners, and technology. The ultimate role of digital technology is to create an enabling setting for students to access education at a distance; thus, HEIs are required to redesign their teaching and learning strategies and models to stay pertinent and viable to prepare learners for a rapidly advancing technological society.

The findings have direct implications for the ODL framework of Unisa as well as for the design and implementation of efficient delivery methods and channels of e-learning to accommodate the diverse needs of students and to facilitate full access, dialogue, and interaction for effective teaching, learning, and research in distance education. The concept of separation is central to ODL frameworks, and Unisa needs to place emphasis on the meaning of the concept 'distance' in (i) the learning experience and expectations of students and (ii) the teaching role and instructional methods. Any e-learning programme should secure the right of all students to have equal opportunity for social and educational advancement. Priority must therefore be given to learner autonomy, participation and empowerment of students with

the recognition of students as key change agents in their individual learning experience: an equilibrium between structure and dialogue to prevent a 'one-for-all recipe'. The living reality, and not the ideal context of each student, is the point of departure, thus accommodating each learner's individual needs and preferences. This is the essential principle, in addition to the elements, that should guide the design and implementation of an ODL framework.

ELEMENTS OF A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR ODL

In light of the findings, and against the background of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks, the following elements have to be incorporated into the framework.

In establishing a sound theoretical ODL framework, institutions need to guide learners to an understanding of ODL philosophy, principles, and methodology to enrich their intended learning experience. Understanding the concepts of separation, dialogue, structure, content, the role of learner and teacher, and interaction are critical elements. Learners need to be capacitated to exercise control over (i) the learning process and self-direction to increase learner-content interaction, (ii) learner-learner interaction to exchange informational material, ideological content and ideas about the programme, and (iii) learner-technology interaction (see Garrison, 1989). Skills, knowledge and competency programmes in ICTs should be available to learners.

ODL initiatives should be based on dialogue and deeper engagement with students to establish a more interactive relationship with them, thereby addressing the main elements present in distance education, namely learner autonomy (expressed by Garrison and Baynton (1987) as 'learner control') and teacher-learner distance, as well as dialogue (teacher-student interaction and communicative transaction of giving instruction and responding). The relationship between technology and distance education are inseparable (Garriso, 1985) and transactional distances in terms of access and usage of ICTs must be minimised. In light of this, access to ICTs, and the application and use of ICTs, plays a critical role in increasing student participation, proactive learning, and responsiveness.

Instructional design has to reflect the capability of the programme to accommodate a learner's individual needs and to determine to what extent future teaching and learning programmes can be adapted to the aims, approaches, and assessment methods of the learner. Equilibrium of (i) the opportunity to make choices; (ii) competence (ability and skill); and (iii) human and material support is necessary to create a functioning learning environment and to design original models of instruction.

Other critical elements that should underlie the theoretical framework are the social context and cultural environment of the learner. Technology-based learning activities should accommodate learners' local cultural environment and designers should guard against discrimination because of their personal characteristics in terms of gender, race, physical features, and technological skills, by providing equal access and quality of social network interaction among learners. New learning tools impact on the way people work and function, and they require a change in learning skills and tasks. Although technology is central in stimulating relationships and developing group cohesiveness to achieve a mutual goal, care should be taken that technology not be detrimental to those learners without computer and internet facilities. Furthermore, technology is not culturally neutral; therefore, the design of the instructional mode is crucial to prevent the inappropriate use and transfer of media, materials, and services. This is substantiated by the fact that respondents originate from different countries and cultural contexts.

Lastly, the following principles of andragogy should be applied to adult learning in an ODL context: (i) the focus should be on self-directed adults; (ii) the experience of learners is an important resource for learning; (iii) the developmental tasks of learners' social roles determine readiness to learn; (iv) learning orientation should change from subject-oriented to problem-oriented; and (v) internal motivation to learn is critical (Knowles, 1984).

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to outline the elements of a theoretical framework for ODL in a developing country through the application of the case study method. The literature review showed that although the ICT revolution in combination with ODL has the potential to meet the increasing needs of learner populations (Universities of SA, 2018), it can only be effective if it is governed by the socioeconomic and sociocultural characteristics of the learners. Distance learning should have as a point of departure the actual needs of the target population, and ODL institutions need to understand the learning context of its learners. ODL institutions should therefore 'adopt a student-centred pedagogical methodology' (Özgür & Koçak, 2016: 208; Trines, 2018: 21). It is clear from the literature review that there is a need for ODL theoretical frameworks. However, ODL institutions should follow a blended model based on student profile and equality principles in all aspects. Fast-changing technology requires ODL theories that can respond to changing environments, making them more interactive and relevant to local contexts. The COVID-19 pandemic reiterates the notion that a blended model is critical. Unisa's ODL framework should be able to adapt to changing environments and guarantee that the individual needs and contexts of learners are accommodated. The unequal access to ICTs in this global crisis has proven to be detrimental to teaching, learning and equality principles.

The theory of transactional distance was applied to explore the feelings, perceptions, and expectations of Unisa students, and to identify the elements of an ODL framework. This theory presents an all-embracing pedagogical framework for distance education that developed from an inquiry of teaching and learning through technology and gives direction to decrease transactional separation in terms of learner-instructor, learner-content, and learner-learner interaction. Added to these constructs were learner-technology interaction and the notion of social context (interaction between the social and cultural environment and technology) as captured by the theory of connectivism.

In analysing the dominant notions and principal foci of the different theoretical frameworks of distance education, it is significant to acknowledge that the learner is the primary role player in any distance learning programme. Other significant elements are communication, separation of teacher and learner, and learner autonomy. A single theory of ODL is, however, not possible. In designing an ODL framework, it is necessary to take into consideration the concern, as expressed by Keegan (as cited in Garrison 1989: 7), that the 'effects of distance or separation create a situation which must be restored to resemble more closely the interpersonal aspects of traditional teaching and learning'. This is where dialogue, structure and interpersonalisation play a critical role in overcoming separation. Good practice in ODL offers resolutions for the intrinsic complications of transactional distance. The role that ICTs might play in addressing this distance depends on suitable and well-functioning structure, dialogue, interaction, and support. It is, however, critical that such technologies enhance the intended purpose of learning as well as consider the technology profile of both students and staff.

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Evaluating quality mechanisms in collaborative open distance learning (ODL) course development using lecturers' perspectives[1 2]

Estelle van Rensburg, University of South Africa, South Africa
Anneke Venter, University of South Africa, South Africa
Michele van Wyk, University of South Africa, South Africa
Jane Ndinisa, University of South Africa, South Africa
Albert Michau, University of South Africa, South Africa

ABSTRACT

Course development at online distance learning (ODL) universities is frequently undertaken as a formalised collaborative process. In line with this, the University of South Africa (Unisa) has adopted a framework for a 'team approach' to course development, to which lecturers are key contributors, and who are supported by other specialists. The course development process has several embedded quality assurance mechanisms, which were derived from relevant literature on collaborative course development practices and quality standards. At Unisa, there has been no systematic research into the effectiveness of the quality mechanisms from lecturers' perspective. An exploratory study was conceptualised to obtain feedback from lecturers on the value of different quality mechanisms. The research posed the question: Which quality mechanisms promote successful course development, in the Unisa context, from a lecturer's perspective? A mixed-method approach was used. It involved a survey among lecturers to gauge the relative value attached to different quality mechanisms. Follow-up focus group sessions were conducted to further explore emerging issues. The results of the study highlighted the importance of formative feedback, including feedback from knowledgeable peers inside and outside the university. Furthermore, the allocation of sufficient resources was regarded as critical. On the basis of the findings, a model for quality assurance in collaborative course development that integrates the lecturers' perspectives is suggested.

Keywords: collaborative course development, quality assurance in higher education, distance education, lecturers' perceptions

INTRODUCTION

In traditional higher education institutions, the task of preparing course notes or course materials is the responsibility of the lecturer, who may complete the task without significant consultation or support from peers or other experts. On the other hand, in online distance learning (ODL) institutions, the design of materials is typically undertaken as a collaborative process, using input from a range of experts such as curriculum developers, instructional designers, graphic designers and educational technologists. A large-scale collaborative development process of this nature requires a systematic and integrated approach to

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achieve overall strategic goals such as the development of student-centred learning environments, which are mediated through appropriate technologies. An effective application of the collaborative development model needs to include quality mechanisms to ensure that quality courses are produced on a consistent and scalable basis (Chao, Saj & Hamilton, 2010).

In line with this approach, South Africa's largest ODL provider, the University of South Africa (Unisa), has adopted a cross-functional course development process, undertaken by selected design and development teams. At Unisa, the teams typically include education consultants (ECs), who manage the development process and advise on curriculum and instructional design matters. The teams that work on the preparation of the learning materials also include lecturers, graphic artists, electronic originators, subject librarians and language practitioners. Lecturers (in the literature often referred to as 'faculty' or 'course developers') are considered to be critical role players in the development process since they are responsible for authoring the teaching text and facilitating the learning process.

In an attempt to ensure quality in a complicated course development process, several quality assurance mechanisms have been embedded at Unisa. The mechanisms are aligned with relevant literature on collaborative course development practices and quality standards (Chao, Saj & Hamilton, 2010; Sankey et al., 2014). However, to date, there has been no formal research to establish the lecturers' perspectives on the value added by the existing quality mechanisms. A group of ECs, who are responsible for assisting lecturers as part of the collaborative course development process, conceptualised a small-scale study to gain feedback from lecturers who participated in the cross-functional course development process. This small group of lecturers was purposively sampled from a larger group who had worked with the ECs in the year leading up to the study. The aim of this study was to explore lecturers' experiences and perspectives in order to evaluate the relevance and effectiveness of existing quality mechanisms, with a view to ultimately improving the overall quality of the course development process. The results of such a study could potentially benefit other ODL institutions that undertake collaborative course development.

The article provides the background to the study by describing the Unisa context in order to clarify the scale and complexity of the environment in which the study is located, with the concomitant need for effective quality assurance mechanisms. Subsequently, a literature review is provided to explore and motivate the implementation and evaluation of critical quality assurance mechanisms in the development process. Against this background, the article continues to explain how an appropriate explorative methodology was applied to gain an understanding of the lecturers' perspectives on the usefulness of the quality assurance mechanisms in an ODL context. A combination of a survey and follow-up focus group sessions was used to elicit feedback from the participating lecturers. The data were analysed and interpreted to derive key themes for insight and inform a suggested model for quality assurance in collaborative course development.

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Unisa is a mega-university, serving more than 350 000 students worldwide, the majority of which are from southern Africa. It has traditionally provided distance education, mainly via print-based delivery, and is currently transitioning to an online delivery mode. The curriculum and course materials are carefully designed, developed and pre-packaged by a team of experts to provide for timeous delivery.

The collaborative course design and development process at Unisa is facilitated according to procedures contained in an institutional document entitled 'Framework for the implementation of a team approach to curriculum and learning development at Unisa' (FTA), which was approved by the Executive Committee of Senate on 11 April 2013. The process described in this document is highly complex, involving multiple role players and cross-departmental sub-processes that extend across internal departmental boundaries.

The main contributors to the creative process are the lecturers, who author academic content and design assessment strategies. Their writing process is supported by specialists from auxiliary departments such as ECs from the Directorate for Curriculum Development and Transformation (DCDT). The ECs provide a range of supportive functions, including just-in-time and hands-on training, a project management function and the coordination of critical support services such as graphic design, language editing and electronic origination functions. The collaborative nature of the team approach implies that different role players need to commit to the project and attach value to a quality end product.

The process described in the document involves an initial phase of curriculum planning – undertaken collaboratively by the lecturer, the EC and other relevant role players – during which a 'module form' (course blueprint), with learning outcomes, assessment criteria and other information, is produced for every module (course). This is followed by planning the learning and assessment strategies for a module. Once these are in place, a development phase starts, during which authors generate any necessary materials, while graphic designers, multimedia experts and other role players contribute relevant elements of the course. Critical readers (academic peers) and DCDT ECs provide feedback on the various course components. The planning and development processes are not strictly linear and may follow an iterative process until the team is satisfied with the product. Subsequently, the materials are language edited and formatted for print or online delivery.

A variety of mechanisms is applied to promote the quality of the development process as well as the final product. For the purposes of this study, these aspects were called 'quality mechanisms', which are defined as regulating or evaluation procedures. They are conducted during or after the development process to assess whether the materials produced meet expected requirements or standards. The aim of quality mechanisms is to ensure that the development teams support the creation of meaningful learning experiences. In the Unisa context, these quality mechanisms include:

- The implementation of policies and standards for the design and development process
- The initialisation and conclusion of the course development process through the signing of a 'certificate of due diligence' (CDD) by the main parties involved
- The use of a project management system to coordinate and monitor the design and development process
- The dissemination of guideline documents or templates
- The use of critical readers and ECs to provide constructive feedback on curricula and materials
- The use of language practitioners to edit the learning materials
- The voluntary completion of an evaluation form ('service satisfaction survey') at the end of the process
- The implementation of an annual institutional evaluation based on feedback by students and other role players.

A literature review was undertaken to compare the Unisa quality assurance mechanisms against those currently used in other collaborative course development contexts. This provided more insight into how the Unisa quality assurance system for collaborative course development compares with international practice.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON QUALITY MECHANISMS IN THE COLLABORATIVE COURSE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

In their seminal work on the nature of distance education, scholars like Peters (1993), Moore (1993, 1996), Keegan (1996) and Holmberg (2005) argued that distance education requires 'new forms of organization that are based on the application of principles of systems management' (Moore, 1993: 2). This would involve the design and development of courses, not by individual lecturers but rather by teams of specialist role players (Holmberg, 2005). A review of relevant literature indicated that higher education institutions, especially ODL institutions, have commonly adopted this approach and use a highly skilled team, consisting of members with different areas of expertise, to design and develop curricula and learning materials (Abdous, 2009; Bawa & Watson, 2017; Bronson, 2016; Butcher & Wilson-Strydom, 2013; Chao, Saj & Hamilton, 2010; Guri-Rosenblit, 2009; Herron et al., 2012; Holsombach-Ebner, 2013; Kalantzi et al., 2016; Mills, 2006; Puzziferro & Shelton, 2008; Thurab-Nkhosi & Marshall, 2009; Venable et al., 2009). They typically follow a process consisting of distinctive phases such as planning, curriculum development, learning design, generation of materials and media, production, and evaluation (Bawa & Watson, 2017; Chao, Saj & Hamilton, 2010; Herron et al., 2012; Holsombach-Ebner, 2013; Kalantzi et al., 2016; Mills, 2006; Puzziferro & Shelton, 2008; Thurab-Nkhosi & Marshall, 2009; Venable et al., 2009).

During this process, a number of quality mechanisms is usually involved. The mechanisms identified in the literature can be clustered into different categories, namely (i) management and resource allocation processes, (ii) good practice guidelines and (iii) evaluation processes.

Management and resource allocation processes

The institutional allocation of sufficient resources to ensure the quality of courseware design and development is generally highlighted as essential (Hansson, 2008; Butcher & Wilson-Strydom, 2013; Sankey et al., 2014). Furthermore, the organised and systematic nature of project management, typically consisting of five phases – (i) initiation, (ii) planning, (iii) execution, (iv) monitoring and control, and (iv) closure – is seen as promoting quality through its inbuilt emphasis of monitoring, control and meaningful collaboration (Da Silva, Diana & Catapan 2015; Bawa & Wilson, 2017).

A clear delineation of the various team members' roles and responsibilities during the early stages of a project ensures that everyone understands what is expected and supports the efficient implementation of the process (Abdous, 2009; Puzziferro & Shelton, 2008; Venable et al., 2009). Allocating resources for the training of staff in course development and other required skills is equally essential as this is a key element of achieving quality improvement (Herron et al., 2012; Mills, 2006). This is particularly true in online learning environments where staff systematically need to update their knowledge and strategies (Lenert & James, 2017; Sankey et al., 2014; Hansson, 2008).

Determination of a course lifecycle by specifying at which intervals a course should be revised – for example, every three years – encourages ongoing attention to quality and provides a basis for continuous improvement (Holsombach-Ebner, 2013).

Good practice guidelines

Numerous authors highlight the importance of implementing predetermined guidelines, standards, criteria, checklists or rubrics to assure the quality of the design and development process. Such guidelines are frequently based on international, regional or national standards for distance education or e-learning, for example, in Europe (Hansson, 2008; ENQA, 2015), Australasia (Sankey et al., 2014), the United States (Keil & Brown, 2014), and South Africa (CHE, 2014). Subscription-based rubrics are also widely used, particularly the University of Maryland's 'Quality Matters' (Rucker, Edwards & Frass, 2015; Debattista,

2017), but a study by Lenert and Janes (2017) suggested that many institutions use internally compiled rubrics. Standards should ideally (i) be compiled for the entire design and development process (Thurab-Nkosi & Marshall, 2009; Chao, Saj & Hamilton, 2010), (ii) clearly communicate what is expected of all the team members (Puzziferro & Shelton 2008), and (iii) be easy to use (Baldwin & Ching 2019).

Templates are another form of good practice identified by several authors. A template is a document that has been preformatted with a certain structure, layout or look, which can then be populated with content. Learning design templates typically specify the various elements that should form part of the learning experience as required by quality standards, for example, introductions, learning outcomes, activities, and online discussion questions (Herron et al., 2012). Abdous (2009: 287-288) proposes a quality assurance process for e-learning development that is centred around a combination of templates and checklists to ensure the 'appropriateness, comprehensiveness and consistency' of courses. Herron et al. (2012) and Holsombach-Ebner (2013) report that comprehensive templates increased consistency and learning effectiveness in their distance learning courses, while Albashiry et al. (2015: 408) indicate that templates provided 'structure and support'.

Actual examples of good practice can further improve the quality of course development. They facilitate the work process (Albashiry et al., 2016) and promote pedagogically sound designs by providing concrete models to work from (Sankey et al., 2014; Bower & Vlachopoulos, 2018).

Evaluation processes

Evaluation is considered an integral part of the traditional instructional design process (Briggs, 1991). In their well-known model for instructional design, Dick and Carey (1985, quoted in Obizoba, 2015) advocated the use both of formative evaluation – evaluation during the development process – and summative evaluation. Summative evaluation can be done by the course team itself at the end of the project or after its implementation by means of student and lecturer feedback on the course.

The literature suggests that reviewing is one of the most common forms of formative evaluation. Most sources consulted describe the involvement of academic peer reviewers, also called 'critical readers', 'subject matter experts' or 'moderators'. Academic reviewers evaluate the text generated by the course author, paying particular attention to its correctness, appropriateness for the context and level, and its currency and alignment between outcomes and assessment (Heron et al., 2012; Holsombach-Ebner, 2013; Ahmad Zabidi et al., 2017). In addition, ECs commonly give feedback on draft course materials from an educational perspective (Puzziferro & Shelton, 2008; Thurab-Nkhosi & Marshall, 2009; Holsombach-Ebner, 2013; Bawa & Watson, 2017).

In course piloting, another formative mechanism, prospective students are asked to complete a part of the course and to give feedback on it, which is then used to make improvements (Herron et al., 2012; Kartunnen & Juusola, 2019). This can be done with a prototype unit in the initial stages or at the end of development before the course is implemented (Bronson, 2016).

Formative evaluation of the process by the development team itself is not frequently described in the context of quality assurance in course development, but, in literature relating to reflection and action research (e.g., Boud et al., 2013; Zuber-Skerritt, 2001), evaluative reflection by the team on work-in-process is said to enhance the quality of the process and product as well as professional development. Taylor et al. (2016: 2) argue that reflective evaluation results in team members gaining greater ownership of the project, and enables them to 'adapt the way they work in an iterative manner throughout the life cycle of the project'. Reflective strategies can also be applied by the team at the end of the development process as a form of summative evaluation on both process and product (McKenney & Reeves, 2014). Furthermore,

support departments typically conduct satisfaction surveys among their internal clients (Ahmad Zabidi et al., 2017).

Feedback by students on how they experienced a course is seen as an important form of summative evaluation (Thurab-Nkosi & Marshall, 2009; Holsombach-Ebner, 2013; Young & Hoerig, 2013; Nichols Hess & Greer, 2016; Ahmad Zabidi et al., 2017). Students can comment on factors such as tutoring and course interaction, but also on the structure of the course, and its 'learning outcomes, content (including background materials), teaching and learning methodologies, and online materials' (Butcher & Wilson-Strydom, 2013: 8).

Quality assurance in course development is typically regarded as a cycle, and summative evaluation results are used to inform future revisions of a course (Hansson, 2008; Abdous, 2009; Sankey et al., 2014; Ahmad Zabidi et al., 2017; Lenert & Janes, 2017).

An examination of the course development process at Unisa indicated that most of these mechanisms were used in one form or another. The only exception was formal course piloting, which was generally not undertaken owing to time constraints. However, the relative value of these quality mechanisms in the collaborative process needed to be explored from the perspective of the lecturers as key contributors to the development process.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework underlying this study is twofold. Firstly, the researchers' understanding of the course design and development process at distance institutions is grounded in a systems model, as described by Peters (1993) and Moore (1993). In this process, delivery of teaching and learning experiences is seen not as a function of a few simple elements only, but rather as a complex system constituted by the collective action of many role players, including institutional management, lecturers, instructional designers, media specialists and instructional technologists. The contributions of these individuals and technologies merge to create an integrated network '… of media specialists, knowledge specialists, instructional design specialists, and learning specialists. … this process requires… large budgets, and long periods of design time' (Moore, 1993: 4). In such a complex system, quality assurance becomes essential to ensure that a course will be fit for its purpose and will effectively integrate the various role players' contributions.

The second theoretical perspective adopted in this study is an understanding of quality assurance as a cyclical process in which iterative, reflective evaluation promotes continuous quality enhancement, which is inherent in the Unisa context. This approach is rooted in a tradition of conceptualising human learning and activity as a cycle of experience and reflection, which has been proposed by several theorists (e.g., Dewey, 1986 (1938); Lewin, 1946; Freire, 1972; Kolb, 1984; Schön, 1987; Ford & Profetto-McGrath, 1994; Boud, Keogh & Walker, 2013; Brookfield, 2017). In the context of higher education, Biggs refers to such a cyclical conception of quality assurance as 'prospective'. 'Prospective QA is concerned with assuring that teaching and learning does now, and in future will continue, to fit the purpose of the institution' (Biggs, 2001: 222). This is a process in which both evaluation and reflection play an important part: 'The institution needs… to establish built-in *mechanisms* that allow it, like the individual reflective teacher, to continually review and improve current practice' (Biggs 2001: 223, our italics). In the collaborative design and development process, the entire development team has a stake in the enhancement of quality through the application of such quality mechanisms. Exploring the perspectives of a key role player in the team – i.e., the lecturer – may assist in ensuring that these mechanisms are an effective tool in successfully implementing the reflective quality assurance cycle.

RESEARCH QUESTION

A research question was formulated to explore the lecturers' perspectives and experiences of the value of the quality mechanisms embedded in the course development process at Unisa. The main research question was phrased as follows:

Which quality mechanisms promote successful course development in the Unisa context, from a lecturer's perspective?

The following sub-questions were formulated:

- Which quality mechanisms, used in the Unisa process of course development, do lecturers experience as adding a great deal of value to the process, and why?
- Which quality mechanisms do lecturers experience as adding little or no value to the process, and why?
- Which additional quality mechanisms do lecturers recommend, and why?
- How do the quality mechanisms used in the Unisa process of course development, and those recommended by lecturers, compare with those recommended in literature?
- How should quality mechanisms be amended or extended in order to establish an improved quality assurance process for course development at Unisa?

A suitable research methodology to address these questions needed to provide for an overall view of the relative value that lecturers attach to the different mechanisms, together with an in-depth exploration of their perceptions and of their authentic experiences.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Lecturers' perspectives on and experience of the way quality is assured in course development is a complex phenomenon. While there is relevant research available, none of the previous studies focused directly on the lecturers' perceptions of the relative value attached to quality assurance mechanisms in the overall course development process. The researchers therefore considered that such a study could yield valuable information in an ODL context. Unisa is regarded as a good case study for such research as it is a large ODL institution and has been employing collaborative course team development for many years. A study of this nature needed to include an overall view of the relative value that lecturers attach to the different mechanisms, together with an in-depth exploration of their experiences and perceptions thereof.

The relevant Ethics Review Committee at Unisa granted ethics approval for the research project on 22 July 2016. The research project was aligned to the values and principles expressed in the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics. Care was taken to protect participants from any harm and all participants consented to participate in the research. Participants were also allowed to participate anonymously, and their identities were concealed throughout the research project. Permission to conduct the research at Unisa was granted by the Senate Research, Innovation, Postgraduate Degrees and Commercialisation Committee on 8 September 2016.

A qualitative explorative study was undertaken to gain an overview of the perceptions and experiences of lecturers involved in course development. A mixed-method data collection process (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) was deemed suitable to gain an overview of such views and practices. The mixed methods included the use of a survey, follow-up focus group sessions and individual interviews.

The study started with an online survey, comprising both closed- and open-ended questions, about the value the participants attached to the different quality mechanisms. The survey was followed up with a combination of qualitative methods, namely focus groups and individual interviews, to gather in-depth information about the perceptions and experiences of lecturers.

The data collection process thus included a two-tiered approach. Details about the methods and samples are

- **The survey:** A survey was distributed among all the lecturers who had participated in a collaborative course development process during a specific development cycle (265 lecturers). Qualtrics software was used to run the survey. The survey was developed by the research team, approved by the ethics committee, and piloted among a group of colleagues. As part of the survey, participants were given information about the study and asked to indicate their informed consent online. The responses were submitted anonymously. There were 63 respondents (a response rate of 23.7%).
- **Focus group and individual interviews:** Information emerging from the analysis of the survey data was validated and explored in more depth and detail by means of focus group sessions and individual interviews. The research team prepared the questions. The interview schedule was part of the ethics clearance process. The lecturers who were invited to participate in the focus group sessions and interviewees were recruited from the same larger group of lecturers surveyed.

Using a purposive sampling method, the survey was sent to all the lecturers who had worked with DCDT ECs according to the team approach in the year leading up to the study, and who would, therefore, have had relevant experience of the quality mechanisms in the process. These participants can be considered knowledgeable as they were actively involved in the course development process (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011). For the focus group interviews, a combination of voluntary and purposive sampling was applied: volunteers from the survey group were requested to take part, and, where there was an insufficient number of participants for a focus group, additional participants from the survey group were personally invited to participate. These sessions involved 14 participants.

The data obtained from the closed-ended survey questions were quantified to determine the relative value that lecturers attached to specific quality mechanisms. The data from the open-ended questions were subjected to a thematic analysis to obtain insight into lecturers' motivations for their various selections.

Pertinent information emerging from the analysis of the survey data was used as a basis for compiling follow-up questions in the focus group sessions and individual interviews. The research team did a manual thematic analysis of the content of the survey results and interview transcripts. The team compared and re-examined the analysis to identify main themes.

FINDINGS

The results of the survey question on the relative importance of listed quality mechanisms are shown in Table 1 below. In the survey, respondents were asked to identify what they considered to be the 'most important' and 'second most important' quality mechanisms. In analysing the results, these two categories were grouped into a single category, designated 'more important'. The same was done for the quality mechanisms considered to be 'least important' and 'second least important', which together were designated 'less important'. For every mechanism, the total for 'more important' was converted into a percentage to reflect the number of participants who had considered that mechanism as 'more important'. The same was done for mechanisms identified as 'less important'. The respondents were also asked to motivate their selection of the more and less important mechanisms.

Table 1:
Relative importance of quality mechanisms

Quality mechanisms	Number of respondents who indicated this was more important	Number of respondents who indicated this was less important
Feedback on the **learning materials** by DCDT's Education Consultant or Curriculum and Learning Development Specialist	46%	2%
Feedback on materials by a critical reader (academic peer)	37%	5%
Feedback on the **module form** by DCDT's Education Consultant or Curriculum and Learning Development Specialist	17%	0%
Templates (e.g. templates for learning units or module forms)	17%	17%
Proofreading of print materials by Pre-press, or checking of the site by Pre-press, in the case of online materials	11%	3%
Institutional quality evaluation (the evaluation of some modules conducted annually by the Directorate: Quality Assurance and Promotion)	11%	13%
Policies and standards that inform the process	11%	5%
Language editing by Unisa's Language Services	10%	5%
Project management and project plans	5%	10%
Signing of the Certificate of Due Diligence (CDD)	2%	19%
DCDT's 'Service Satisfaction' form that team members complete after the end of a project	2%	25%

The largest number of survey respondents indicated that they regarded the two most useful quality mechanisms as feedback on the learning materials by a DCDT EC and feedback on the materials by an academic peer (46% and 37%, respectively). Two other mechanisms that also received a fair amount of support were feedback on the course blueprint ('module form') by the EC and templates for writing (17% in both cases). Interestingly, an exactly equal number of respondents (17%) indicated that they regarded templates as *not* being important. A smaller number of respondents (10% or fewer) regarded some of the other listed quality mechanisms as more important.

Responding to the question on which of the quality mechanisms were seen as less important, 25% selected the option of the 'service satisfaction form' (evaluation form) used at the conclusion of projects while 19% chose the option referring to the 'certificate of due diligence'. As already mentioned, 17% indicated that templates were of little importance to them. The institutional evaluation of modules was regarded as less important by 13% of the respondents, with 8% or fewer of the respondents selecting the other listed options as less important.

The survey respondents were asked to motivate their selections. Relevant comments most frequently made in response to these open-ended questions referred to the following:

- The contribution of the EC was seen as enhancing quality, owing to the expertise of this role player in the field of teaching and learning, and materials development. (One respondent did, however, indicate that the EC he or she worked with, was 'not suited for her role'.)

- Similarly, feedback by an academic peer ('critical reader') was highlighted as valuable, owing to this person's academic expertise and ability to 'provide a different perspective and insight' into the content
- Templates were cited by several respondents as a means of providing guidelines for writing and promoting consistency between courses. On the other hand, a number of respondents criticised the use of templates, mainly for the reason as summarised by one respondent: 'templates kill creativity'
- A number of respondents mentioned that, in addition to templates, sharing of best practices such as good examples of course materials was of great assistance in enhancing quality
- The evaluation form, used at the end of the process, was considered of little use in promoting quality. More than one respondent indicated that they felt constrained in their responses, owing to a lack of anonymity. Furthermore, they felt that the fact that the form was completed *after* rather than *during* the development process did little to enhance the quality of that particular project, even though it could conceivably play a role in future projects
- The CDD was indicated by several respondents to be of no value in addressing quality as it was deemed as purely 'administrative' or as a 'rubber stamp'
- The institutional quality evaluation, conducted among students, was not considered helpful by most respondents, because the data gathered in this way reflected students' general impressions, with no specific recommendations for improvements
- With regard to the university's quality system in general, several respondents indicated that their workload and the timeframe imposed on the module development process were problematic issues that compromised the time they could spend on projects, and, hence, the projects' quality. A number of other respondents also mentioned that they saw limitations in the university's learning management system ('*my*Unisa') as an obstacle to creating good quality learning experiences, with one respondent commenting that '*my*Unisa currently places a major damper on quality and creativity'.

The findings from the data obtained in the focus group and interview sessions largely corroborated those from the survey, while also providing further details that shed more light on many of the issues raised. In general, participants indicated that Unisa's procedure for course development, described in the FTA, did much to facilitate the process of module design and development and to enhance the quality of the end product as well as in building capacity among the participating lecturers. Lecturers who participated in the process also indicated, more than once, that they especially gained valuable skills related to module design and development.

Focus group participants concurred that they saw feedback by experienced specialists, both in the academic field concerned and in learning and teaching generally, as the most important contribution to the quality of learning material. The ECs' assistance in designing curricula by contributing to the formulation and institutional approval of the 'module forms' was also seen as particularly helpful, and the sentiment was that ECs with some experience in the subject field could add even more value. The participants nevertheless pointed out that the usefulness of the feedback varied among individuals, especially in the case of ECs. Some ECs provided extensive guidance and useful documents such as templates and exemplars, while there were a few whose feedback and assistance with the module form and module development were less helpful, and not all were equally experienced.

The participants noted that, in fact, the observation about inconsistency of service applied in general to the FTA: while the team approach definitely promoted quality, as opposed to developers working individually, the different departments involved and the different individuals within the departments tended to provide

varying levels of service to the lecturers. Furthermore, some participants also confirmed the view of survey respondents that the timeframe and deadlines of the FTA process were problematic in terms of academic workload and allocation of resources.

Variability of feedback also applied to critical readers, but, in this case, it was determined to a greater extent by whether they were internal or external lecturing staff. While internal lecturing staff were familiar with the university's internal standards and conventions, and provided useful feedback from this point of view, external lecturing staff could frequently provide additional subject-related insights.

Focus group participants were as divided on the issue of templates as the survey respondents had been. Some regarded them as crucial, while others felt them unnecessary and involving a 'danger of boxing one in'. In general, more value was attached to good examples of materials and the participants were unanimous in their view that seeing good examples was one of the best means of enhancing quality and that it could be 'really inspiring'.

The focus group participants generally attached more value to project management and project plans than the survey respondents had done, pertaining specifically to the ECs' role in guiding the process, which was described by one participant as 'outstanding'. Several commented that such project management mechanisms provided good coordination, structure and guidance for projects, as well as a recordkeeping and document management system, which they argued played a valuable role in promoting quality. On the other hand, some commented that it should be ensured that all ECs clearly communicate boundaries and role definitions. There should also be more in-depth constructive feedback and reflection by the team at the end of a project. Furthermore, the results of this reflection should be shared within the university to contribute to the development of best practice.

The view that the evaluation form used at the conclusion of projects and the CDD were of little value in promoting quality was echoed by the focus group participants. They explained that the form was sent directly to the lecturer by the EC and had to be returned to both the EC and his or her manager. The fact that the EC would see the lecturers' feedback meant that most lecturers would be reluctant to include negative comments about the performance of the EC and that shortcomings would, therefore, not be addressed by this measure. The CDD, in turn, was a simple, standardised form, whose purpose was not explained on the form itself, and, as such, served no direct purpose in enhancing quality.

Another issue raised in the focus group and interview sessions was the value of academic peers in promoting quality during the writing process. One participant described how materials in her department were written collaboratively by a group of lecturers, with a 'team leader' serving to collate and check all contributions and round off the final product. In their view, this process significantly contributed to the good quality of materials and assisted lecturers to complete the material within the required timeframe.

Several respondents and participants in the focus groups suggested additional quality mechanisms that could be introduced. These included

- providing opportunities for participants to raise any problematic issues with team members *during* rather than only at the *end* of projects
- arranging training interventions to ensure that ECs and other role players are at the same level, and that ECs and other role players work consistently and professionally with lecturers
- involving more critical readers
- piloting of materials among students

- providing more training interventions for academics, specifically on module design and writing skills
- introducing 'author writing weeks' where academics may go off campus with ECs and other experts to write part of their materials
- making a set of resources available to lecturers on an interactive online site
- allocating dedicated writing time or other writing incentives for lecturers
- providing academic peer support during the writing process, for instance, a second lecturer to moderate the materials, more than one critical reader or an academic team to undertake the writing, with the final product collated and refined by a team leader
- setting up module form repositories held by academic departments (on the institutional database).

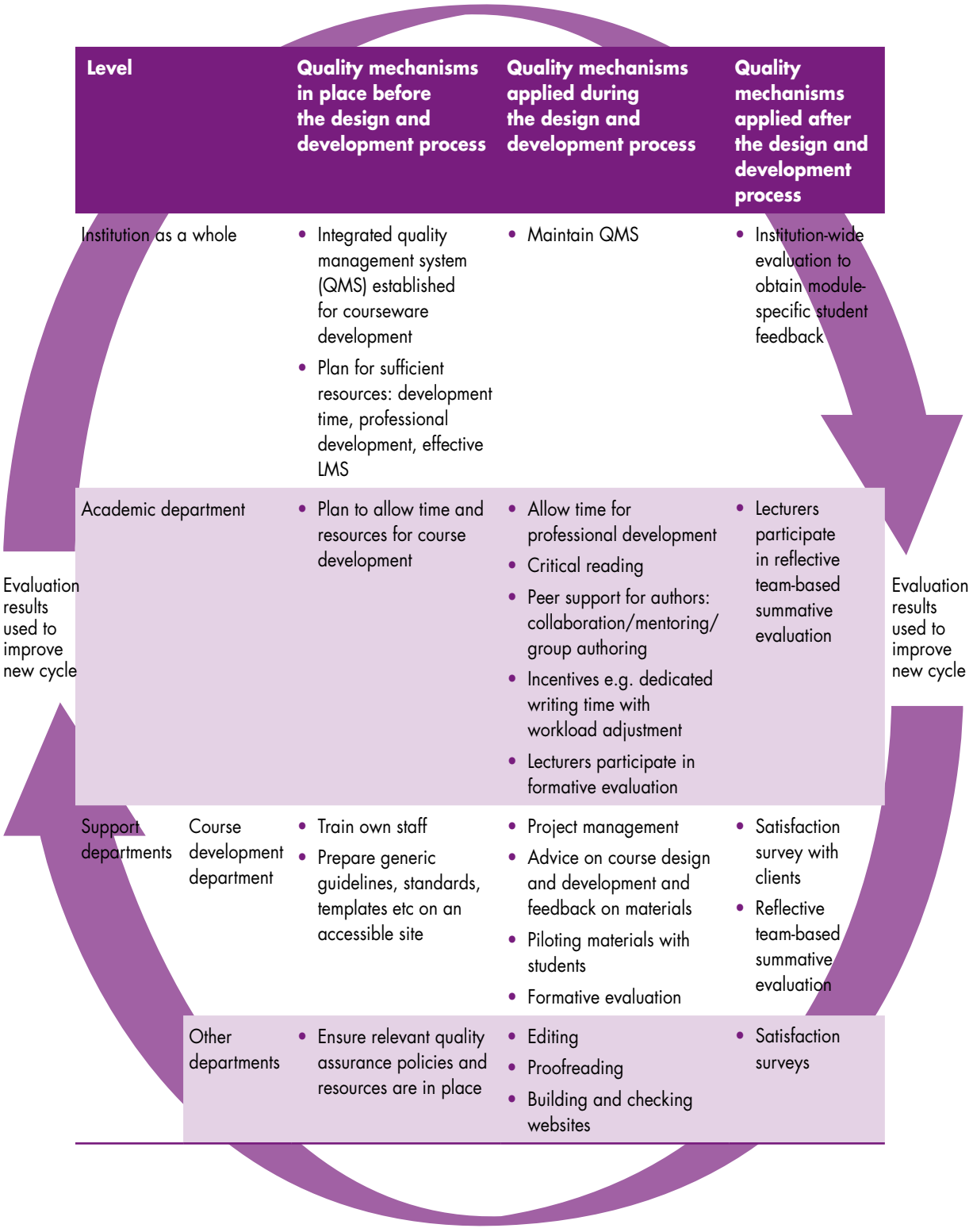
The findings corresponded to a large extent with elements of quality assurance that were highlighted in the literature reviewed. For example, the allocation of sufficient resources for course development (Hansson, 2008; Butcher & Wilson-Strydom, 2013; Sankey et al., 2014) was considered essential for the success of development projects. The central role of the EC or instructional designer in assuring quality (Chao, Saj & Hamilton, 2010; Bawa & Watson, 2017) was identified, while the importance of peer reviewers (Holsombach-Ebner, 2013; Ahmad Zabidi et al., 2017) was emphasised. The same does not apply to standardised templates: frequently considered crucial in literature, survey respondents regarded them as somewhat less important, although it was indicated that they did have a role to play. While it was recognised that summative evaluation was essential in the quality cycle, it was recommended that the way it is implemented be improved. Formative reflective evaluation, seen as significant in one strand of the literature (e.g., Taylor et al., 2016), was a suggested in addition to the quality assurance process.

A SUGGESTED MODEL FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN COLLABORATIVE COURSE DEVELOPMENT

Based on the findings of the study, a model for quality assurance in collaborative course development is suggested that integrates the lecturers' perspectives.

The model distinguishes three levels at which quality assurance mechanisms should be implemented: (i) institutional management level, (ii) the level of the academic department, and (iii) the level of the courseware development department that provides educational consultancy or instructional design services (DCDT, in Unisa's case) together with support departments offering services such as language editing, graphic design, and web uploading. It also distinguishes three phases in which quality mechanisms are applied, namely (i) before, (ii) during and (iii) after the actual development process. A summary of the model is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1:
A quality assurance model for collaborative course development



At **institutional management level**, attention should be paid to formulating an integrated quality management system for courseware design and development that cuts across departments and sections. While every department will have its own internal quality management system and arrangements, higher-level management should ensure that the standards for product and processes are consistent and

consistently implemented among all the departments, and that work flows seamlessly from one department to the next. These measures should be integrated into the institution's quality assurance policies and procedures.

Institutional management should also ensure that sufficient resources are allocated in terms of

- **Time** – The courseware development timeframe should be long enough for role players to dedicate sufficient time to the development of materials of high quality.
- **Professional development** – Institutional arrangements should be in place to offer lecturers professional development opportunities in course development and ODL.
- **Technology** – The institutional learning management system should be sufficiently advanced to allow for flexibility and innovation in online course design and development.

Finally, the institutional quality management system should make provision for an evaluation of modules that will generate student feedback that is specific enough to inform the improved redesign of individual modules. This could be done centrally by the institution or by the lecturers themselves in specific modules. Providing feedback can be done anonymously.

At the level of the **academic department**, all possible measures should be taken to support lecturers in the courseware design and development process in order to improve the quality of courses. The department should ensure that lecturer workload is of such a nature that it allows the lecturers sufficient time to attend available training opportunities in writing and other ODL-related skills. Academics should serve as critical readers for their colleagues, but, in addition, further academic peer support should be offered for writing, for example, by using a second lecturer as a collaborator or mentor for every project, or having materials written by a group of authors with a team leader. Ideally, incentives should also be provided for lecturers to produce good quality writing, for example, allowing them dedicated writing time with a corresponding reduction of workload in other areas, or conducting writing workshops extending over several days. Academics who are part of the development team should also participate in the development team's formative and summative evaluation processes.

At the level of **support departments**, all the following mechanisms should be implemented: (i) project management for each development project, unless this is provided by the academic department; (ii) support with the course design and development process by ECs, including constructive feedback on materials; (iii) language editing; (iv) proofreading; and (iv) support with building and checking the module websites. All the service providers should have specific quality policies and standards guiding their activities and should conduct satisfaction surveys at the end of their processes.

The courseware development department should play a key role in developing and implementing quality mechanisms. Its contribution should include:

- A project management service, if this is not provided by the academic department. As part of the project management process, it should be ensured that work boundaries and the role definitions of the different role players are clearly communicated
- Providing training for their own staff members to ensure that all are at the same level and their work with academics is consistent
- In collaboration with lecturers, where possible, compiling internal standards for course design and development, as well as any further guideline documents, checklists, and templates; and making all these resources accessible for lecturers online, as well as real examples of good course materials and module forms (course blueprints)

- Apart from providing advice on the curriculum and course design and development process, also giving extensive feedback on draft module forms and course materials
- Providing opportunities for team members to evaluate the design and development process both during the process and at its end (i.e., conducting formative and summative evaluation)
- Conducting a satisfaction survey with lecturer 'clients' and ensure confidentiality of lecturer feedback, where this is required
- Where possible, involving students during course design and development, for example, by piloting materials with students
- Facilitating a process of reflective feedback by teams at the end of projects and sharing the results of the reflection to promote good practices.

In summary, the most important recommendations for a quality assurance model in the collaborative course development process, based on lecturers' needs and perceptions, are that the institution should (i) make sufficient resources available for the process, particularly in terms of time, human resources, training, availability of resource documents and technological infrastructure; (ii) ensure that collaboration with academic peers and education consultants is maximised; (iii) obtain feedback from a range of role players, including students; and (iv) conduct evaluation and reflection both during and after the process.

CONCLUSION

The study supports the positive contribution of the collaborative course development process and highlights key quality mechanisms in the development process. Input and feedback from knowledgeable peers, inside and outside the university, are regarded as significant evaluative factors in ensuring that quality learning experiences are provided to the student. Such evaluations are to take place both during and after the process. The allocation of necessary resources is critical to the overall functioning of the design team, particularly to support the lecturers through effective collaborative procedures. The study confirms that careful consideration needs to be given to the implementation of relevant quality mechanisms in a collaborative course development process.

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Access for success: Exploring affordances theory in a new hybrid model teacher education programme[1] [2]

Folake Ruth Aluko, University of Pretoria, South Africa[3]

ABSTRACT

Situated within the ambit of Affordances Theory, this paper reports on an empirical and descriptive investigation into a newly introduced hybrid-model teacher education programme in a developing context. The purpose of the study was to examine the extent to which the first two student cohorts availed themselves of the ICT affordances provided by the institution, which could favourably compare to those found in a developed context. The study adopted the sequential explanatory mixed-methods research design. This study involved two phases in which the quantitative data were first collected through surveys, followed by the collection of qualitative data that involved individual interviews, focus group discussions and documents. The participants included students, online tutors and an instructional designer. Findings from both cohorts show students rarely participated online due to diverse reasons, which included limited access to the internet, the cost of bandwidth, technophobia, and inadequate online and academic support. The findings reaffirmed the interdependent relationship between both individuals and the affordances that exist in an environment. If institutions paid adequate attention to the findings, it would help to stem the tide of poor retention rates in this mode of delivery. Further recommendations for research and practice include the need for institutions to provide relevant technology affordances, adequate and relevant student support, and ongoing monitoring of the quality of their programmes to encourage access for success.

Keywords: access, success, affordances, hybrid model, teacher education

BACKGROUND

Although a contact university, the institution under study has been involved in distance education (DE) through its Faculty of Education for almost two decades. Its DE programmes are geared towards teachers' qualification upgrades and were paper-based when they started with mirror replicas of some learning material on the university website. However, in its Vision 2025, the University adopted web-supported learning for all its programmes, irrespective of the delivery mode. In October 2016, it introduced a hybrid-model BEd Honours in Teacher Education and Professional Development (TEPD). On-campus students can

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3 ORCID: 0000-0003-0499-042X

take advantage of the technology affordances provided by the University because their technology profile could favourably compare to other institutions in the developed world. However, the same could not be said for its DE students due to their diverse profiles.

Technology affordances made available to the TEPD hybrid-model programme

The University has adopted the Blackboard learning management system (LMS). Given the technology profile of the students registered for the new programme, the University developed three contact sessions targeted to meet three different purposes. The first one is to train students in the use of the LMS, while the second and the third target module orientation and module consolidation in preparation for examinations, respectively. In addition, printed copies of core readings are made available to students for offline engagement with weekly online activities combined with tutor support and access to e-library resources. To provide quality programmes, the institution also provides continual support to module coordinators, presenters, and tutors on how to navigate the LMS. Due to the baseline data collected before the commencement of the programme, DE students had access to only three of the available repositories on the LMS. These are (i) online digital resources, (ii) discussion forums and (iii) wiki summaries.

AFFORDANCES THEORY AND ACCESS FOR SUCCESS

Scholars aver the term 'affordance' was coined by James Gibson in 1977 and was later developed by Norman in 1988 (Bankole & Venter, 2017; Blewett & Hugo, 2016; Ingold, 2018). In the words of Gibson (1979: 127), 'The affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes… It implies the complementarity of the animal and the environment'. Norman (2002: 9), on the other hand, defines it as 'the perceived and actual properties of the thing, primarily those fundamental properties that determine just how the thing could possibly be used'. Commenting on the differences that exist between the two authors, Blewett and Hugo (2016) explain that, while the focus of Gibson was on the affordances that are latent in the environment, Norman's was rather on what people saw, which would necessitate their action. Thus, if people could not perceive it, they could not act on it (Norman, 1999). Further commenting on the difference, McGrenere and Ho (2000: 2) assert, 'The frame of reference for Gibson is the action capabilities of the actor, whereas for Norman it is the mental and perceptual capabilities of the actor', which, according to Norman, is susceptible to, for instance, the culture and/or the experience of the actor (Blewett & Hugo, 2016). Therefore, 'an affordance is… an opportunity for action' (Volkoff & Strong, 2013: 822) and, at the same time, the 'complementarity of the acting organism and the acted-upon environment' (Gaver, 1991: 2). Although many scholars have attempted to probe the difference further, Soegaard (2003), cited in Blewett and Hugo (2016: 59), 'suggested a simpler understanding, that Gibson's affordances are more about the utility/usefulness of an object whereas Norman's affordances are more about the usability of the object'.

The latter assertion by Soegaard resonates with this paper because, to move on with the rest of the world, DE institutions in the developing-economy context are striving to provide information and communications technology (ICT) affordances for their programmes. However, it appears that there is a gap between what they make available and the extent to which the target audience avails themselves of the opportunity (Mao, 2014; Smale & Regalado, 2017) due to diverse reasons. The target audience, in this case, include staff (both administrative and academic) members, part-time presenters, and tutors and students. Therefore, one could agree with Latour (2005), cited in Blewett and Hugo (2016), that both the objects and the actors are of equal importance. The attempt made by this paper was to assess to what extent an institution in the developing context has provided relevant ICT affordances (objects) to its target audience and how far the latter (actors) has taken advantage of these.

The capability of ICT affordances for education access, if well implemented, is well documented in the literature (Dlamini & Coleman, 2017). According to Holmberg (2001), 'access' refers to opening

opportunities for people, who were once excluded, to attend college, or giving a second chance to intending students. The first World Access to Higher Education Day took place on the 28th of November 2018 to raise awareness regarding access into this level of study (World Access to Higher Education, 2019). According to the organisation, in every country in the world (with evidence from over 90% of countries), participation in higher education (HE) is unequal, while 'across 76 of the lowest-income countries, the poorest people are 20 times less likely to complete a HE course than the richest'. Almost all countries in the world are prioritising access to HE, due especially to the value it brings to the economy. Although authors are diverse in their understanding and explanation of the value of HE to economic development in general (Mollar & Cuthbert, 2015; Tomlinson, 2018), there is a consensus that there are both market and non-market benefits inherent in it (Kruss et al., 2015).

The South African context is no exception, especially given its transformation goal due to its dismal political past. For instance, access to high-quality, post-school education and training, which is responsive to the needs of society and the economy, remains the country's focus (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET], 2018). In the same vein, the country recognises DE as a precursor for opening the doors of opportunities for many disadvantaged students (DHET, 2014).

Although providing access to HE is a laudable idea, and it is often the argument for encouraging DE to thrive, scholars have argued that access without success is a proverbial 'revolving door' through which as many students as are provided access eventually exit without actually completing their studies (Aluko, 2015). Irrespective of the mode of delivery, success should be of concern not just to HE institutions, but also to every stakeholder, including students. The reasons for lack of success in this mode are multifaceted (Aluko, 2015; Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014; Tinto, 1975). One could group these into institutional, faculty and student factors. Tait (2015) stresses that the risks of student incompletion in DE are higher due to the emphasis on access and inclusion, which is not the focus of elite institutions that appear to record better success rates. Therefore, student access to and success in the university continue to be an area of considerable research interest and has been the subject of a great deal of research over the past 30 years (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014). In South Africa, there has been an enormous improvement in student enrolment rates in HE. For instance, they have increased by 23% from 2008 (799 490) to 2013 (983 698) with a target of 1.6 million in 2030 (DHET, 2018), according to the National Development Plan. Nonetheless, access goes beyond quantity. The question should rather move to the quality of the access provided to students because access may not necessarily mirror quality (Aluko, n.d.). Voigt and Hundrieser (2008) have argued that students persisting to the completion of their educational goals is a key gauge of student success, and, therefore, institutional success. If completion rates are to be improved, DE institutions need to be continually dynamic and pragmatic in their approach, which technological affordances make possible if well implemented.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The study took place within an HE institution context that offers DE programmes through its Faculty of Education. Participants included DE students, module presenters at contact sessions, online tutors, an instructional designer and administrative staff members. The paper adopted the sequential explanatory mixed-methods research design that involved two phases in which the quantitative data were first collected through surveys followed by the collection of qualitative data that involved individual interviews and focus group discussions. The purpose of the quantitative instrument was to generate data that would guide the questions for the interview schedules while the qualitative data also helped explain and interpret the quantitative data (Center for Research and Innovation in Teaching, n.d.).

Quantitative data

The sampling technique adopted for the quantitative approach of the study for both the first and the second student cohorts was the Total Population Sampling technique, a type of non-random, purposive sampling

(Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016) because of the relatively small numbers of both cohorts (1st cohort: 250; 2nd cohort: 230). Other reasons were that each population met the benchmarks set for the student-participants (that is, they had to be registered for the new hybrid programme, because the programme was in its beginning phase). Data collection for the survey included both online and paper-based techniques to increase the number of respondents. Data analysis was done by the Statistics Department of the University using SPSS. Participants' responses to the few open questions were read several times to identify codes and themes from them. Lastly, data were also collected from the data analytics feature available on the LMS.

Qualitative data

To generate qualitative data, the researcher also purposively selected participants for the focus group discussions and the individual interview. Regarding the students, the researcher, with the help of the Student Call Centre, called students who would be attending classes at the contact sessions at the five contact session centres – Durban, Nelspruit, Polokwane, Pretoria and Richards Bay. The purpose was to identify willing student-participants. The focus group discussions took place at the five centres with a total of 30 students in attendance, although a higher number was expected per venue. Table 1 reflects the participants' distribution.

Other participants for the focus group discussions included six tutors, while a separate group interview was conducted with the instructional designer. The latter took place over many short meetings. Documents perused by the researcher included research reports from the unit responsible for the management of DE programmes. The researcher applied inductive thematic analysis that emphasises identifying patterns of themes generating initial codes, searching for themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report to the qualitative data (Mortensen, 2020). Table 1 reflects the participants' distribution.

Table 1:
The distribution of the participants in relation to the instruments (2019)

Instrument	Participants	Codes	Number of participants
Survey	Students	SS	126
Focus group (FG) discussion	Students	FGSDB (Durban, 6) FGSNS (Nelspruit, 5) FGSPK (Polokwane, 7) FGSPT (Pretoria, 7) FGSRB (Richards Bay, 5)	30
FG discussion	Tutors	FGT	6
Interview schedule (individual)	Instructional designer	ID	1
Total participants			**163**

FINDINGS

The findings in this section have been presented based on the developed themes from the qualitative and quantitative data collected. These are linked to the purpose of the study, which is to examine to what extent students in the new programme availed themselves of the technology affordances available to them. The implications of these findings, in light of the Affordances Theory adopted for this study, is discussed later.

Results from quantitative analysis

Changes in student demography

In 2015, the unit collected baseline data to ascertain the likely profile of DE students that would be coming into the new hybrid model programme. The purpose was to determine the kind of support they would need in the new programme. As reflected in Table 2, findings showed that the majority of the first-cohort students that participated in the study in 2015 were between the ages of 41 to 50 (62.3%), followed by ages 51+ (17.3%) and ages 31 to 40 (15.7%). In contrast to these, the lowest number of students fell within the bracket of ages 21 to 30. This picture depicts the previous age groups of students that have been enrolling for the previously paper-based DE programmes at the institution.

Table 2:
Age brackets comparison (2015, 2018, 2019)

Age brackets	2015	2018 (1st cohort)	2019 (2nd cohort)
21 – 30	4.6%	27.2%	35.2%
31 – 40	15.7%	31.2%	27.7%
41 – 50	62.3%	32.4%	28.9%
51+	17.3%	8.7%	8.2%
Missing frequency	0.5%	0.6%	0
Total	**100.4%**	**100.1%**	**100.0%**

However, within this current study (as reflected in Table 2), the data collected on the first cohort showed a different picture in which there was a sharp increase in younger generation students (21-30, 27.2%; 31-40, 31.2%). This pattern was also repeated with the second cohort, however, with an increase in the 21-to-30 age brackets (35.2%) in comparison to ages 31 to 40 (27.7%). The comparison of both cohorts showed a decline in the age profile of older students (ages 41 to 50 and 51+).

Student visit to the university website and the frequency of their LMS access

As earlier indicated, one of the major changes in the new programme was that students could only submit assignments online, which necessitates their online visit to the LMS. This ruling is in contrast with the previous programme in which it was not compulsory for students to go online. As reflected in Table 3, a comparison was made between student visits to the university website in both 2015 and 2018. This comparison showed less than a third (19.0%) of the student-participants in 2015 ever visited the university website in comparison to 92.6% in 2018.

Table 3:
Visit to the university website (2015 and 2018) – student website visits

Response	Year	
	2015	2018
Yes	326	237
%	25.7%	92.6%
No	942	19
%	74.3%	7.4%

Response	Year	
	2015	2018
Total	**1 268**	**256**
%	**100%**	**100**

Table 4 shows the frequency of the first cohort LMS login.

Table 4:
Frequency of LMS login 2018 (1st cohort)

Frequency	Response	%
Once a day	70	27.3%
Once a week	119	46.5%
Once a month	35	13.7%
3 times per block	13	5.1%
2 times per block	4	1.6%
Never	16	6.3%
Total	**255**	**100.5%**

In addition, Table 4 shows the majority of the student-participants (46.5%) logged in once a week followed by those that logged in once a day (27.3%), once a month (13.7%), and those who rarely logged in (three times and two times per block respectively). A block is made up of a six-month cycle. The unit was surprised at the fact that some students (16 or 6.3%) claimed to have never logged into the LMS. Although this appeared to be a scant number, in a DE programme, the number counts, because the percentage of a given cohort could refer to a large number of students in programmes where more students are enrolled. In addition, it also signifies inactive students with the tendency to drop out of the programme if they do not get the right support at the right time.

Student use of online digital resources, discussion forums and wiki summaries

The data reflecting student use of online digital resources, discussion forums and wiki summaries are from 2018 and 2019 because, prior to these periods, students did not make use of these repositories.

Table 5:
Student use of online digital resources, discussion forums and wiki summaries (2018)

	Online digital resources		Discussion forums		Wiki summaries	
	Response	%	Response	%	Response	%
Yes	99	57.3	75	43.4	36	20.8
No	74	42.7	98	56.6	137	79.2
Total	**173**	**100**	**173**	**100**	**173**	**100**
Paper responses	**164**					
Online responses	**27**					
Total	**173**					

Table 5 shows that from the first cohort in 2018, 99 (57.3%) participants confirmed that they had made use of the online resources attached to their modules, while 74 (42.7%) answered in the negative. Regarding wiki summaries, the responses showed that a minimal number of participants (36, 20.8%) availed themselves of this technology. Although the institution chose to limit student activity to only the discussion board, due to the reasons they gave for low online participation rates (which are discussed later), the study conducted in 2019 showed a repetition of the same trend based on data analytics from the LMS. This trend is shown in Table 6, which reflects a sample of five active modules.

Table 6:
A sample of the discussion board analysis of five active modules

Module	Number of registered students	Highest number of participants in discussion board	Percentage of registered students
Module 1	967	16	1.65
Module 2	925	5	0.54
Module 3	847	32	3.77
Module 4	770	12	1.55
Module 5	656	17	2.59
Total	**4 165**	**82**	**2.02**

In all five active modules, of the 4165 registrations, only 82 (2.02%) of the registered students availed themselves of this technology (Fourie, 2019).

Results from qualitative analysis

The researcher followed up all the responses reflected above with the second-cohort participants of students during focus group discussions that took place at all the contact session venues. These are highlighted under two broad themes: (i) perceptions of the participants regarding the usage of online learning and (ii) reasons for student low participation rates in the use of online digital resources, discussion forums and wiki summaries. The explanation of each theme is supported with some comments from the tutors and the instructional designer that participated in the study.

Perceptions of the participants regarding the usage of online learning

The student-participants' perceptions regarding the usage of online learning were positive; however, this was punctuated by unhappiness from some participants. Firstly, most of them felt the University has taken a step in the right direction, especially in line with the government's directives that all teacher education graduates exhibit basic ICT skills (DHET, 2015) coupled with the digital advancement of the century. Buttressing this, some participants indicated the programme has added value to their lives, which they lacked before their registration. This includes their ability, for instance, to 'have access to their emails and use the facility', and 'an exposure to the LMS with its online components'. As expressed by one of the participants,

> I wanted to add… the technical skills of this programme. It's a bit done online and by doing so we have gained a lot in terms of digitally… the world is changing at a rapid rate. (FGSNS4)

Nonetheless, some of them still yearned for the old programme that had no online component as expressed by a participant,

> It is difficult to do most of the activities online. They are not informative as like face-to-face discussions or in contact. Yeah, a lot is missing when we go online. (FGSRB4)

Another participant lamented,

> For me, it's difficult because… places where we live. We have a problem of networks. [I] am not promoting the online because if you have no data or Wi-Fi on your phone it's difficult… (FGSRB6)

Although the tutors and the instructional designer sympathised with the students' plight and hoped that, with more support, things would improve, the comment below by a tutor showed that students in general have no choice but to adapt to online learning:

> Students expected something like the old programme; content driven and long contact sessions. Many do not understand. (FGT1)

Reasons for student low participation rates in the use of online digital resources, discussion forums and wiki summaries

According to the student-participants, they rarely participated online due to diverse reasons, which included limited access to the internet, the cost of bandwidth, technophobia and inadequate online support. For instance, lamenting limited access to the internet, a participant said,

> I've got [a] problem with especially the internet. It's easy to submit [an] assignment online. It's easy, but to discuss with other students. (FGSRB5)

Due to

> sometimes the unavailability of resources like data. (FGSNS5)

> The online system puts us at a disadvantage because it comes out of our pockets also. (FGSNS2)

Another lamented,

> Sometimes, the schools like mine do not have the access to internet. So, it means you need to have more money for data. (FGSNS5)

On technophobia, a tutor said,

> It is very easy for students who are computer literate to cope, but it's a challenge to elderly students.

Buttressing this, two participants from Pretoria (FGSPT1 and FGSPT2) indicated they were supporting older students with technical assistance and advised that more support should be provided for older students.

Another participant, citing lack of technical skills, said,

> I think the reason why [the majority] didn't participate, is because some of us don't understand technical skills. We don't understand how to use computers. (FGSNS4)

Although computer ownership and ICT training are compulsory aspects of the programme, one of the tutors felt the LMS training provided for students was inadequate. According to her,

> we put them through a one-day, 4-hour intensive training process, but it's so brief. It is so quick that, it's almost like a hit and run.

To alleviate the situation, a student said,

> The ICT [guys] was supposed to do a follow up… remember you are teaching me something I haven't yet done practically. (FGSRB2)

In addition, the complaints from students regarding available technical assistance they received when they ran into trouble with their studies were buttressed by the instructional designer, who said

> more staff would be needed to assist students adequately with their studies. (ID)

As, at the time of collecting data from this study, there was evidence that the dedicated call centre for students was also understaffed. To further compound the problem, students complained about slow or nonresponse of tutors to their postings. A student-participant lamented

> Sometimes, the tutor may come with late clarity on assignment, and we have already submitted our assignments by then. (FGSPT5)

Generally, regarding online activities, a student from Pretoria (FGSPT3) said the online discussion group was not working because students also have a way of managing their studies. According to her,

> because we can form our group. For example, [I] am doing it with my friends and colleagues in Free State… a WhatsApp group.

When the student's attention was drawn to the presence of an online tutor, she responded,

> It's working fine without the tutors.

Nonetheless, it appeared these comments tied in with an inadequate number of tutors because many resigned due to poor payment. In addition, students expressed their frustration regarding the lack of feedback, marks or comments on their assignments. However, tutors complained that questions often posted by students were not scholarly. A tutor commented:

> I think most students use the discussion board to ask questions. They are definitely not engaging at all. (FGT3)

Also, most of the few students who participated were frustrated because many others that did not contribute to the discussions only wanted to see what others had posted. The data analytics gathered on the second cohort from the university LMS also indicated students' questions were limited mostly to clarification on assignments, study material and contact sessions (Fourie, 2019).

Discussion of the findings in the light of affordances theory

As earlier discussed, the crux of affordances theory in relation to this study is that affordances cannot be properties, or even features, of the environment alone, but are relations between the abilities of organisms and features of the environment (Chemero, 2003). This implies that 'affordances do not disappear when there is no local animal to perceive and take advantage of them' (Chemero 2003: 193).

Therefore, the discussion in this section revolves around three major questions, which are:

1. To what extent has the institution under study provided technological affordances to its students and other related stakeholders in relation to students' studies?
2. To what extent have the stakeholders availed themselves of available affordances?
3. To what extent have prevailing conditions aided or discouraged stakeholders from availing themselves of such affordances?

The extent to which the institution has provided technological affordances to its students and other related stakeholders

From all indications from this study, the institution has made technology affordances available to its stakeholders. For instance, the Blackboard LMS that it has provided, like other similar information systems, 'facilitate e-learning by supporting teaching and learning, and performs administrative tasks and facilitates communication between instructors and students' (Holmes & Prieto-Rodriguez, 2018: 21). According to these authors, its 'interactive tools such as blogs, wikis, chat rooms and discussion tools all have the potential to facilitate constructivist approaches to learning in contrast to traditional transmission models.' Even though contact programmes often use most of the available tools on the LMS, the DE programmes did not use the same due to the technology profile of the students. In addition, the institution provided other affordances to support the users of the LMS further. These included initial and continuous refresher courses for both permanent and part-time staff on the use of the LMS, compulsory ICT training for students on how to use the LMS, and the availability of a call centre and support staff, such as presenters and online tutors, to assist student module coordinators in their task. Pozzi, Pigni and Vitari (2014: 6) in their work grouped all these affordances as 'affordance existence', which differs from affordance perception, affordance actualisation, and affordance effect. According to the authors, 'Affordances exist whether the actor cares about them or not, whether they are perceived or not, and even whether there is perceptual information for them or not.' In their later work, Wang, Wang and Tang (2018) explained that, for this to happen, institutions need to recognise affordances, and adopt and actualise them in support of their goals before they could expect any effect. Nonetheless, Markus and Silver (2008) have warned the affordances must be functional for them to be regarded as goal oriented. In effect, this means DE institutions need to seriously consider the context of their students before expending money on ICT affordances. This is because the 'organisational level journey' totally differs from the 'individual journey' (Markus & Silver, 2008: 64), which is discussed in the next section.

The extent to which stakeholders availed themselves of available affordances

As earlier asserted by Kordt (2018), although affordances may be present, they only offer opportunities for action; they do not force the individual to follow a certain course of action. This means students need to go through their own 'individual journey'. Evidence from this study showed that very few students (2.02%) avail themselves of the opportunity provided by the University. Most students enrolled on the programme hardly participate online. In addition, some students failed to attend the ICT training meant to assist them in the use of LMS. This failure caused such students to struggle with their studies and, sometimes, to eventually drop out of the programme. Although situated in an American context, Smale and Regalado (2017: 1) in a study earlier warned that

> despite a widely held view of college students as 'digital natives' proficient in the use of digital technology, undergraduates do not all share the same technology background or own and use technology to the same extent.

Since the affordance lens helps us understand the relationship between technology and the human actor (Wang et al., 2018), for students to make use of available affordances, they need to perceive and actualise the affordances. Both processes are important because users may encounter problems regarding

how to actualise them; thus, identifying and solving them become critical, which would translate into providing adequate support for them.

The extent to which prevailing conditions have aided or discouraged stakeholders from availing themselves of such affordances

Findings from this study showed that students were sometimes confronted with situations beyond their control. Examples of these were internet penetration and the cost of bandwidth. The data available at the inception of the new hybrid programme (2016) reflected that 30% of students have regular access to ICTs and connectivity; another 30% have irregular access, while about 40% have little or no access. These statistics are not unconnected with the country's internet penetration profile that has only recently moved up 2% from 52% in January 2017 with 29.2 million of the population having access to the internet on their mobile phones (My BroadBand, 2018). This is even though the country is one of the largest ICT markets in Africa by value with the number of internet users as a percentage of the total population in the country nearing 60% (Kemp, 2018). Other prevailing conditions, as at the time of this study, included inadequate technical assistance and an inadequate number of online tutors provided to students. Smale and Regalado (2017: 73) in their recommendations for the use of technology in HE advised,

> it is critically important to consider commuter and non-traditional undergraduates, who may have less access to the internet or other digital technology and more pressure on the time available for their academic work.

This is the case with most DE students in the developing context. Institutions in such a context need to be innovative by, for example, training academics in their use of LMS platforms, which will provide the right conditions that were referred to earlier by Chemero (2003).

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Although technological affordances are adding great value to DE programmes and increasing access for success, the fact remains that certain conditions must be met for these to be maximised. Apart from DE institutions providing a renowned LMS, they need to monitor the students' technology profile continually to support them adequately and to aid programme design. It is necessary to tailor the compulsory ICT training to students' needs in this instance. For students to maximise the benefits of the training, it should be divided into smaller modules, and not just be a one-off programme. Institutions, as well, need to improve the provision of adequate technical and online support staff to students. More regular and updated training is also recommended for both part-time and full-time staff members to enable them to provide the needed support to students.

Nonetheless, students also have a role to play by seizing every opportunity they are given. All these become important given increasing technology affordances that keep influencing academic offerings in the field. Scholars have argued that access goes beyond the quantitative to the quality of access given. Gidleya et al. (2010), cited in Aluko (n.d.), advised that social inclusion should not only focus on neoliberal ideas such as numbers and percentages, because those do not necessarily reflect student participation or success, nor do they reveal anything about the quality of the education that is accessed. Student success rates in DE is a sore point because of the often-reported lower rates in comparison to full-time students (Tait, 2015). Therefore, it is important to improve these for the sake of the students' self-esteem and the reputation of the institutions offering such programmes.

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Engagement as an Ice-Breaking Stage in Teacher Identity Construction: A Case of Iranian Pre-service Teachers[1]

Fariba Haghighi Irani, Department of English, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran
Azizeh Chalak, Department of English, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran
Hossein Heidari Tabrizi, Department of English, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran[2]

ABSTRACT

This paper explored the process of professional identity construction of eight pre-service teachers through engagement during their practicum in a higher education institute in Tehran, Iran. By means of a longitudinal qualitative design within the social constructivist approach, data were collected by one semi-structured interview, one reflective essay, and five personal narratives embedded as the first phase of a teacher education programme, namely (i) engage, (ii) study, and (iii) activate (ESA). Thematic analysis at two levels (within-case and cross-case) resulted in three themes: (i) the mentor teacher's role as an engagement facilitator, (ii) online and offline activities as effective prompts, and (iii) the engage phase as a motivator. Data analysis revealed that negotiations on classroom activities contributed to student teachers' self-confidence, self-awareness and self-image. The findings suggested that successful engagement requires a variety of systematic activities. Furthermore, the findings support the significant role of engagement at the initial stage of pre-service teacher education that open new directions to design local training programmes. Focus on engagement could produce a deeper understanding of pre-service teachers' professional identity construction.

Keywords: community of practice, engagement, pre-service teacher, teacher education programme, teacher professional identity

INTRODUCTION

A community of practice (COP) is defined through mutual engagement and the negotiation of meanings by its participants (Wenger, 1998). Wenger (1998) believes that, in such a community, meanings are negotiated by means of activities. For Wenger, engagement is not simply membership in a community, but it is a sort of belonging that requires being included in a COP meaningfully. The student teachers in a community such as a teacher education (TE) programme mutually engage with classroom activities when they share their interpretations and experiences of reflective practices through competitions, challenges and disagreements. The active participation associated with commitment and motivation leads them to the negotiation of meanings, and effective interaction among and understanding of themselves (Hanna et al., 2020). This indicates that a strong relationship between identity formation and engagement can be

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2 ORCID: 0000-0002-9360-1555

gained while members of a social community communicate meaningfully with each other through activities (Trent, 2010; Tsui, 2007).

Scholars claim that there is a gap between what teachers learn and what they experience in the real context (Izadinia, 2013; Kanno & Stuart, 2011; Pedler et al., 2020; Safinas & Harun, 2020). They state that practitioners have focused more on language teaching theories than the practical side of teaching skills, overlooking the challenging realities of the classroom such as complicated individual and contextual factors. Accordingly, a shift has occurred in traditional TE programmes guiding them to more reflective-oriented programmes that were concentrated on collaboration and situated learning practices (Bukor, 2015; Lee, 2005; Varghese et al., 2005). In this trend, attention has also been given to the role of engagement as a dominant factor in identity construction (Bigelow & Walker, 2003; Hsiu-ting, 2008; Pennington & Richards, 2016). From a different perspective, Pedler et al. (2020) review the multidimensional aspect of student engagement and believe that a holistic dimension of engagement, namely behavioural, emotional, and cognitive, can help learners overcome the contextual changes.

Identity is a state of one's self and identity construction is a maturity process that occurs across time in a specific context. Varghese et al. (2005) believe that positioning oneself in a context is an everlasting process that happens through interaction, negotiation and engagement. In a TE community, positioning oneself happens when getting involved in learning and teaching skills as well as an understanding of themselves as teachers to develop a new professional identity (PI). This procedure highlights the necessity of the contribution of mutual engagement during the practicum and the consideration of engagement as an ice-breaking stage in TE. According to the literature, despite the significance of engagement in identity construction, the stages of incorporating negotiations into TE programmes are not clear (Abednia, 2018; Cheng & Lee, 2014). Moreover, not much has been done on the sequence of materials in TE programmes and their contributions to identity formation, nor has there been adequate research that takes engagement as an initial stage of a TE procedure. In most of the mentioned studies, this factor has been taken as a pedagogical tool to encourage the emergence of identity construction in pre-service teachers. This highlights the necessity of investigating the engagement as a pedagogical and ice-breaking stage in the process of PI construction, and, consequently, the significance of the present research.

Overall, the above-mentioned literature suggests three fundamentally noticeable gaps that the present research attempts to focus on: (i) a dearth of investigations on the process of pre-service teacher identity focusing on *engagement* as an introductory and ice-breaking sequence of TE; (ii) lack of systematic, consistent and integrated activities facilitating the negotiation of meanings and thus engagement in pre-service teachers; and (iii) the scarcity of adequate time taken to report the changes in student teachers. Furthermore, most of the studies reported in the literature are on the part of in-service teachers (e.g., Pinho & Andrade, 2015; Yazdanpanah, 2011) within a short duration, typically over a one-semester practicum or at the exit time of the course (e.g., Abbasian & Karbalaee Esmailee, 2018; Chong, Low & Goh, 2011). To address the gaps mentioned above, the present research attempted to explore the contribution of engagement as the initial phase (*engage*) of a three-phase TE programme – i.e., (i) *engage*, (ii) *study*, and (iii) *activate* (ESA) – to Iranian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) pre-service teachers' PI construction.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Wenger (1998) draws scholars' attention to three interrelated modes of identification, i.e., (i) *engagement*, (ii) *imagination* and (iii) *alignment*, and the ways that student teachers negotiate their identities during practicum. He argues that these modes are significantly strengthened by each other in that any improvement in one of them may lead to growth in the others. Drawing special attention to the central role of 'engagement', Farrell (2011) states that engaging in reflective activities makes the prospective teachers aware of their own role identity. This guides researchers and teacher educators to take these three modes, especially engagement, as determining interventions to foster pre-service teachers' identity development.

'Engagement' has been conceptualised as the first and most fundamental mode of the process of self-identification and an underlying component in the negotiation of meaning (Wenger, 1998; Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). This indicates the active role of 'engagement' in the TE community that occurs during mutual activities. In order to experience successfully negotiated identities, Wenger (1998) suggests that identities be correlated with social activities that are negotiated meaningfully among community members. He also mentions that, to engage in social practices, negotiations should be reified. Focusing on the centrality of reification, he means going beyond understanding and discussing concepts by materialising them. In other words, pre-service teachers learn how to become teachers by doing and practising rather than merely negotiating.

Engagement in TE contexts

In a more recent review, Abednia (2018) highlighted 'trust' as a prerequisite factor to interactions among student teachers for fostering mutuality. He found trust, mutuality, diversity of perspectives and recognition of participants' multi-membership to be fundamental factors for achieving effective engagement in a COP. This reveals that, to perform meaningful actions, pre-service teachers need help from their mentors to make meaningful negotiations to practise a successful process of identification. He also argued that there has not been adequate research to inform teacher educators about how interactions take place in the process of teacher identity formation.

Conversely, Cheng and Lee (2014) underestimate the power of teacher educators' role in schools. They contend that mutual engagement cannot be regulated by school leaders, but that it can be actuated by incorporating more reflective activities in collaborative interactions. Regarding the practical side of engagement, Lin and Beyerlein (2015) point to mutual engagement as a critical factor to support the coherence of a TE community, and they believe that successful engagement is rarely achieved in multiple communities. They value mutual engagement as they believe that community members can negotiate with each other on the same activity when they engage in them mutually and meaningfully. In a similar line, Cheng and Lee (2014) argue that, for mutual engagement to be facilitated, teacher educators need to include more reflective activities in TE courses. The place and significance of 'engagement' are considered in a paper by Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015: 7) as follows:

> This is the most immediate relation to a landscape of practice – engaging in the practice, doing things, working on issues, talking, using and producing artefacts, debating, and reflecting together... Still, there is no substitute for direct engagement in practice as a vehicle for learning the competence of a community.

Considering 'engagement' as a central theme in a teacher education COP, there has only been a handful of studies investigating the changes in EFL pre-service teachers' PI over a long term (Kanno & Stuart, 2011). Among reviewed studies in recent years (e.g., Liu & Xu, 2013; Wedell, 2017), a number of papers that focus on 'engagement' as an effective factor in the development of pre-service teachers' identities were found (e.g., Fajardo Catañeda, 2014; Trent, 2012; Trent & Shroff, 2013); yet none of the studies addressed engagement as the initial sequence of a TE course.

For instance, Fajardo Catañeda's (2014) study highlighted the role of TE as a community in forming, sustaining and transforming the PI of six pre-service teachers. In this research, the researcher found that focus on interconnected domains such as a community of teachers and the relationship between beliefs and classroom practices can guide researchers to a clear understanding of the process of transforming identities in student teachers. However, Fajardo Catañeda (2014) presented two areas of concern. One is the dependency of the pre-service teachers on their mentor due to the mentors' constant supervision and support; the other is the overlap between trainees' previous identities with which they enter the practicum

and their new identities as teachers. Although Fajardo Catañeda's (2014) research has offered new insight into the pre-service teachers' identity construction, the data were gathered during the final year of a five-year programme and the paper does not report the tensions that pre-service teachers encountered at the emergence of their identities at the beginning and during the process of engagement.

In terms of a relationship between identity construction and practice, a strong mutual relationship has been reported by Kanno and Stuart (2011). The researchers explored the challenges of two novice teachers and believed that changes in teachers occur in an intertwined relationship between identity and practice. Theoretically, adopting identity-in-practice and learning-in-practice as two aspects of the situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991), the scholars collected narrated data through interviews, teaching journals, stimulated recalls, classroom observations, video recordings of classes, and documents. One of their findings suggested that two novice teachers could identify themselves as teachers through negotiations with their English as a Second Language (ESL) students in one academic year. A possible explanation for this finding may be the lack of adequate reports on the changes that the trainees underwent before the identification stage.

Out of the most relevant studies, Trent and Shroff (2013) examined pre-service teachers' engagement and the development of their identity as teachers by incorporating the technology of an e-portfolio with an eight-week TE course. In the same vein with Wenger (1998), Trent and Shroff (2013) and Thom and Thuy (2019) supported engagement as a critical factor in the identification of pre-service teachers by allowing them to present their sense of self. They found that such engagement can lead the findings to display the participants' competence through planning, practice and decision-making. Similarly, these researchers recommended more studies on the interplay of identity construction and engagement as well as the replication of their research to discover deeper results on the issue.

PI construction in TE in the context of Iran

Within the Iranian context, despite the improvements that have occurred in the methodology and the content, scholars have criticised TE programmes for their lack of practicality, their motivation and their evaluation system, and their focus on teacher trainers' preferences rather than learners' needs. They insist that TE programmes need serious reforms in terms of planning and practicality (Motallebzadeh, 2012; Nezakat-Alhossaini & Ketabi, 2013).

Regarding themes such as TE as a community, teacher identity formation, pre-service teachers, and the time duration taken for the identification process in the last decade in Iran (e.g., Abbasian & Karbalaee Esmailee, 2018; Hesamoddini, 2013), only two studies (Biria & Haghighi Irani, 2015; Zare-ee & Ghasedi, 2014) have explored teacher PI construction of pre-service teachers focusing on TE programme as a context. However, neither foregrounded the importance of 'engagement' as a critical factor in identity formation or as a sequence of the content in TE. For example, Zare-ee and Ghasedi (2014) reported on Iranian student teachers' expectations of some of the issues in teachers' PI construction, including historical, sociological, psychological and cultural factors. Their analyses of a questionnaire and a focus group interview revealed that prospective teachers expected more support from authorities and believed that these factors may affect their PI construction. Although the researchers attempted to categorise the factors influencing teachers' PI through the literature, the study has not illuminated the process of its formation over time.

In terms of the duration of the studies, only one of the papers collected data on pre-service student teachers over one year while the others were conducted mostly on in-service teachers over one semester or over just a few weeks. Biria and Haghighi Irani (2015) examined the identity formation of 10 pre-service teachers over one year and concluded that utilising systematic reflective discussions may facilitate the construction of teacher identity. Despite the study's significant insights, some criticisms are directed towards it. One

of the limitations concerns the pedagogical perspective that considers reflective discussions simply as a tool for facilitating teacher PI construction while ignoring its powerful efficacy as an engagement factor. A further criticism is on the unclear illustration of identity formation and how pre-service teachers engaged in the process of learning to become teachers.

Collectively, given the studies cited above, one may infer that almost all of the scholars have agreed upon incorporating reflective activities in TE programmes to engage trainees meaningfully in teaching practices. According to the literature, most of these studies have collected quantitative data over a short time that mainly provide general results (Kanno & Stuart, 2011; Naseri Karimvand, Hessamy & Hemmati, 2014). These kinds of studies lack sufficient depth to offer teacher educators a clear understanding of the process of discovering new identities by pre-service teachers. Furthermore, they ignore the sequence of the curriculum materials, the time period pre-service teachers need to negotiate their identity, and the meaningful engagement in the process of becoming to acquire new identities as teachers. This echoes some researchers' plea for more studies on student teachers' identity and on planning local programmes in developing and underdeveloped countries (Izadinia, 2013; Kennedy, 2015; Kumaravadivelu, 2012).

With the above-mentioned gaps in mind, the current research findings are important because this study attempted to bridge these gaps by shedding light on the student teachers' mutual engagement while becoming teachers over a longer period. Moreover, the findings let the pre-service teachers understand themselves as language teachers before commencing the field training and real practicum. Thus, this study examined the process of PI in Iranian EFL pre-service teachers focusing on the engage phase as a fundamental stage of a three-phase TE programme – that is, ESA. Accordingly, the following research questions were formulated:

1. How does engagement contribute to the PI construction of Iranian EFL pre-service teachers in the engage phase of the ESA TE programme?
2. How do Iranian EFL pre-service teachers perceive the importance of engagement in interactive activities to negotiate their PIs in the engage phase of ESA TE programme?

METHODOLOGY

Design of the study

In line with the nature of the research objectives, in this study, a longitudinal qualitative design with a social constructivist approach was employed because social constructivists view knowledge as a gradual, social process performed through cumulating experiences during TE. In the present research, this knowledge was summed up through negotiations among participants and meaningful engagement. To provide an in-depth description of identity construction in individual cases of pre-service teachers, the study progressed through a case study design during the engagement process (Mackey & Gass, 2005; Riazi, 2016). Thus, attempts were made to explore the emergence and development of the PI in a TE programme in a higher education institute in Tehran.

In a nutshell, the ESA curriculum is a non-compulsory TE programme designed locally in three circular and interrelated phases, namely (i) *engage*, (ii) *study*, and (iii) *activate*. The programme was planned specifically for institutional purposes aimed at training qualified teachers over one year in 2014. It was planned for the courses offered by the Iranian Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology (MSRT) to certify professional teachers to start English language teaching in institutions. The context of the present study indicates that the ESA TE programme took advantage of being conducted in a natural setting rather than a developed setting for the sake of the research. This advantage could prevent the participants from providing the information the researcher sought or changing their behaviour, namely the Halo and Hawthorne effects (Mackay & Gass, 2005).

The ESA programme started in February 2017 and ended in March 2018. The present phase, *engage*, started in February 2017 and lasted for 20 weeks (100 hours) as the first phase of this programme. The participants attended the training classes once a week for five hours. It is worth noting that the researcher had a dual role in this research conducting both classroom activities and the research steps concurrently. The specifications of each phase in ESA TE are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1:
Specifications of each phase in an ESA Teacher Education

Items	Phase 1 (Engage)	Phase 2 (Study)	Phase 3 (Activate)
Purpose	- Motivating learners - Preparing trainees to start practice teaching - Establishing engagement conceptually and emotionally - Negotiating teacher professional identity	- Integrating theory and practice - Putting the known knowledge into practice - Starting to practise teaching in front of the class and discuss	- Activating the known knowledge of Phases 1 and 2 - Practising application and production - Creating tasks and tests - Providing feedback
Content and activities	- Learning knowledge about language and teaching - Doing systematic and reflective discussions and written reports in pairs and groups - Reading texts, watching videos and webinars, joining online international teaching groups	- Presenting knowledge of teaching in practice - Doing simulations & role plays - Doing field training as observations of in-service teachers' classes and providing notes and comment	- Focusing on the assessment for developing tests - Focusing on learning theories for developing tasks - Developing tests for language skills and components
Assessment	- Taking the final test (Teaching Knowledge Test '*TKT*' Mock), 50% - Trainees' Portfolio, 50%	- Presenting mini and long teaching practices and a final demonstration, 50% - Trainees' portfolio, 50%	- Taking a written open-ended test, 50% - Trainees' portfolio, 50%
Time Duration (hrs.)	95	120	25

Participants

Eight females in the age range of 18 to 38, all Farsi speakers, were enrolled for the above-mentioned programme through the institute's practicum office. Purposive sampling was selected because the researchers intended to select unique cases: mainly those who were considered as pre-service teachers with a high proficiency level of English. Therefore, the consequence of such a selection was that the findings could not be generalised (Riazi, 2016). All of the participants came from different majors, but, in the middle of the course, Zari and Mina decided to change their majors and continued with their Master's degrees in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). Seven of them learned English as a second language at school or at an institute for two to three years, and only Neda had acquired English since her early childhood at a private English-medium school. According to the initial interview by the official staff of the institute, the participants were at upper-intermediate to advanced level of English proficiency, i.e., at levels C1 and C2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL) descriptors.

They were at a similar level of interest and had the goal to teach English as their future career. The candidates had not participated in any training sessions and did not have any teaching experience before commencing their participation in the research as they claimed in the pre-course interview. Although the participants were of different majors, ages, and the same gender, it was not the purpose of the study to include such features in their teacher identity development. As the ethical side of the study and to obtain the informed consent, all of the enrolled candidates were informed that (i) their activities during the programme would be employed as research data, (ii) any identifiable information would be removed from the data, and (iii) their names would be replaced by pseudonyms. Table 2 represents the participants' specifications with their pseudonyms.

Table 2:
Configuration of the participants with their pseudonyms

Participants	Age	Degree	Major
Neda	24	BS	mechatronics engineering
Ayda	38	BA	natural sciences
Shina	20	BS	computer engineering
Pari	21	BS	medical engineering
Mina	28	BA	business management
Saba	26	MS	business management
Ziba	18	BS	business management
Zari	23	BA	business management

Instruments

To ensure that the research findings were credible, transferable, dependable and conformable to satisfy the trustworthiness of the research, the triangulation method was employed in a way that data were collected in both written and spoken modes. A pre-course semi-structured interview and one reflective essay were the main data collection instruments used to explore the changes in the PI formation in pre-service teachers. To keep track of the progress and changes in the process of identity construction of pre-service teachers and a crosscheck to provide an in-depth description, the researcher wrote five reflective journals during the course. Therefore, every four weeks, one journal was written about the observed changes in the participants.

In addition, to establish the credibility of findings, both interview questions and statements of the reflective essay were applied to a similar group at the same institute. Then, some minor changes were made on the structure of the sentences (Ary et al., 2019). The details of each instrument are provided below upon the sequence of their application during the practicum.

The pre-course semi-structured interview was planned to obtain general information about the participants' particulars and experiences, their background knowledge about teaching, and their perceptions about the first session. The questions were designed in English and based on Kelchtermans' (1993) conceptualisation of teachers' PI characterising these as task perception, self-esteem, job motivation, self-image and future perspective. Moreover, using a reflective essay at the end of the 20th week could assist the researchers in crosschecking the participants' responses and thus the extent of the growth of their PIs. The reflective essay comprised six prompts to direct the participants' responses and to avoid disorganised modes. The

prompts guided the participants to write about their motivation to become language teachers, to compare their feelings to that of the first day, to write about the effectiveness of the in-class activities and weekly assignments in their engagement in negotiations and their changes, and to evaluate phase one as the starting stage of the teacher education.

Data collection procedure

As mentioned before, the engage phase lasted for a period of 20 weeks as an ice-breaking stage of the ESA TE programme. To examine the initial state of the participants' PIs, the pre-course interview was carried out in English in the first session. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed. To allow the researchers to identify any inaccuracy, the first draught of transcribed data was sent to the participants for member checking, and their input was incorporated into the final version.

The classroom activities and weekly assignments comprised, but were not limited to, three Cambridge textbooks, six classroom videos, four online videos from different websites – such as *Faculty Focus and Teaching Channel* (in Magma Publications) – that support teacher development articles and videos – and three webinars from teaching experts (see Table 1). After each activity, student teachers were required to submit their reports as their assignments to the educator according to their systematic instructions. Moreover, they were instructed to negotiate their shared viewpoints in systematic and reflective discussions to come to an agreement or disagreement through collaboration and interaction in pairs and groups in the classroom. Before the first discussion session, the trainer instructed the trainees on how to conduct systematic and structured discussions in groups or pairs. Consistent, systematic and structured activities could assist student teachers to believe in themselves as teachers, and to discuss with their pairs and group members and comment on videos, webinars and textbook contents purposefully and professionally, and to engage meaningfully in activities (Biria & Haghighi Irani, 2015).

In the last week of this phase, the participants were asked to complete a reflective essay comprising six prompts. To avoid the biasedness, all the participants were assured that their reflective ideas would not have any influence on their final grade.

Data analysis procedure

Addressing the changes in the participants' PI and reporting their identity formation, the researchers compared the data collected from the pre-course interview and the reflective essay at the end of this phase. Additionally, to ensure credibility of the findings, the participants' responses in the interview and reflective essay were compared and crosschecked with the researchers' journals during the practicum.

Within-case analysis

The data were analysed at two different levels: (i) within-case analysis and (ii) cross-case analysis (Merriam, 1998). At the first level, attempts were made to examine each participant's changes in their identities as teachers separately to discover recurring themes and group them. Therefore, as it is believed that identity and language are mutually constitutive (Trent, 2011), each participant's interview transcript and reflective essay were read repeatedly, then compared and analysed independently to build a profile of each trainee's changes over time. To interpret the data, the most frequent clauses and phrases were coded and classified regarding the main objective of the research and Kelchtermans' (1993) conceptualisation of teacher PI.

Cross-case analysis

Employing the categories obtained from the first level, at the cross-case analysis level, 10 themes were identified and compared across other cases to discover the shifts of identities as well as their similarities and differences among all pre-service teachers. Running the two levels of analysis enabled the researcher

to focus on the main purpose of the study: how pre-service teachers' PIs are influenced by their negotiations of meanings to identify themselves as teachers. Finally, the themes were classified, and the three most frequently recurring ones were discovered: (i) mentor teacher's role as an engagement facilitator, (ii) classroom-based activities and assignments as effective prompts, and (iii) engage phase as a motivator.

RESULTS

Shedding light on the engagement in teachers' community practice, the themes focused on the repeated patterns and those that were influential in shaping the participants' teacher identity, their feelings as members of teachers' communities, and their perception of the course as an encouraging factor for moving to the second phase of the programme. These themes were framed in three main categories: (i) mentor teacher's role as an engagement facilitator, (ii) classroom-based activities and assignments as effective prompts, and (iii) engage phase as a motivator.

Mentor teacher's role as an engagement facilitator

In the pre-course interview, the last question was about the participants' impressions of the first session. They claimed that their mentor surpassed their expectations and made them feel comfortable when she provided a friendly, energetic and encouraging atmosphere. In addition, they mentioned the mentor's role as a significant role model. For instance, Mina expressed that she was eager to know 'how to be a good teacher like our mentor'.

Job motivation is one of the identity concepts that was realised in almost all participants' responses to the question as to why they selected this course and what motivated them to learn how to teach. For example, Ziba mentioned that

> I love teaching because it makes me engaged in the English language and learning new methods in teaching.

The fourth and sixth prompts of the reflective essay were guided by the factors influencing the construction of participants' identity as teachers during the engage phase. Similar sentiments were expressed by almost all of the participants when they declared their gratifications in changing their attitudes about the teaching profession in light of the mentor's positive relationship with them and her behaviour. Saba's remarks capture the ideas of most of the trainees:

> *Excerpt 1*: The mentor's role was very significant in encouraging us to do the activities, our weekly assignments, creating student-student and teacher-student rapport, and taking part in discussions. Our mentor was not just a teacher, she was the one who could change my opinion about teaching. She gave me a new insight into teaching how a teacher should behave. The mentor's behaviour could boost our self-confidence and it was the most encouraging factor for us to be excited to continue to the second phase of the program. (Saba)

Regarding the pre-service teachers' present feeling as a teacher compared to the first session, the trainees named some identity concepts that were not identified in the pre-course interview excerpts. Neda and Pari could identify concepts such as self-image and task perception when Neda expressed that 'mostly, the mentor's encouragements made me improve my knowledge of language and teaching in Phase One.' Likewise, Ziba believed that she gained plenty of information about teaching and teachers' roles while she showed a type of self-confidence in one of her statements:

> I think I can apply those things I learned in my classes.

This presented a sign of task perception, job motivation, self-image and self-esteem in most of the pre-service teachers at the end of the first stage of teacher development. As Vygotsky (1986) highlights the teachers' roles in guiding learning, it is legitimate to attribute the findings of this theme to both the mentor's behaviour as a role model and course activities as parts of the context of the practicum during the engage phase.

Online and offline activities as effective prompts

This theme emerged from the participants' responses to three of the prompts on the reflective essay. They were designed with almost the same focal point so that the researcher could be provided with the same issue from different lenses completing each other. The participants were asked to write about the impact of reflective class discussions on their feeling of becoming teachers after watching sample videos, and 'the efficacy of the online and offline assignments and rapport in shaping their identities as teachers'. As expressed by the pre-service teachers, every activity in this phase played a critical role in the development and maturity of their becoming teachers.

Overall, eight participants agreed that peer- and self-evaluation in systematic reflective discussions made them aware of their strengths and weaknesses and helped them to avoid making common mistakes. Additionally, they claimed that their sense of feeling like a teacher was promoted by a variety of collaborative activities, online and offline weekly assignments, pair and group negotiations, joining international communities of teachers and engaging in varieties of online discussions, and classroom rapport.

For instance, Zari's use of positive evaluation and emphatic words like 'really effective' legitimises her support for a future perspective of her real teaching practices when she wrote,

> in my opinion, the excellent rapport between the teacher and the students were influential.

This highlighted the role of the negotiations of their identities as prospective teachers and the discussions on their commitments and responsibilities. For Zari, systematic reflective discussions in groups were a means to becoming self-confident as a teacher when she asserted that

> if we didn't discuss the strong points and weak points of the teaching samples in groups, we might have lost our self-confidence.

As a global characteristic of a teacher, self-image and the prospective dimension of the professional self were revealed in the self-descriptive statements of the participants, Shina and Ayda, for instance, referred to the online assignments and joining international teachers' COPs as a catalyst for their engagement in the teaching profession. Shina expressed:

> *Excerpt 2*: … Online assignments helped me to keep updating and be in contact with the world of teachers… Discussions helped me to find the advantages and disadvantages of each teaching method. So, I could learn how to apply the positive points in my classes… it also made me aware of my probable problems in future classes. (Shina)

> *Excerpt 3*: … watching sample classes and discussing them was great because I knew nothing about a teacher's roles, materials, and planning for a classroom before. Each of the activities during this term had a new idea for teaching. Collaborative practices helped me to develop my language and teaching skills. (Ayda)

In these excerpts, other teacher identity representations such as the participants' motives to continue with the teaching job, their concern about their future and the result of the practicum were also realised.

The engage phase as a motivator

Student teachers were asked to write about the strengths and weaknesses of phase one, that is, *engage* in the last prompt of the reflective essay. The analysis and interpretation of this part revealed that all the participants were gratified to find this stage of the programme effective in learning about teaching and becoming a teacher. The participants conceived their active participation in different aspects of language teaching and varieties of negotiations through reflective practices as a valuable and inspiring tool for acquiring knowledge about teaching and feeling more confident to continue to the second phase (*study*).

A consistent finding was that all participants evaluated the engage phase as a facilitator and a promising concept to reflect on conceptual changes in their attitude and knowledge about the teaching profession. Moreover, at the end of this phase, they displayed emotional engagement that emerged from participating in COP activities. This was reflected in their gratified statements supporting Izadinia's (2015: 4) conceptualisation of *emotion* as a two-fold concept: 'a dimension of the self and a factor that has a bearing on the expression of identity and the shaping of it.' Pari, Ziba and Mina similarly indexed emotion concerning the course materials.

> *Excerpt 4*: Now, I'm very happy and satisfied that I could pass this phase. I feel that I have improved a lot in terms of my knowledge. This phase was nice encouragement. It was wonderful and I loved it. I also loved my classmates and classes. (Pari)

Mina also shared a similar feeling and showed her commitment to teaching and her future profession regarding the strong points of the first phase by using emphatic adjectives such as 'wonderful', 'great' and 'special'. She stated that 'This course was a wonderful motivator. Now, I feel I can do something special for my students in the future and can be a great teacher.'

The participants also considered reading the up-to-date materials and resources, putting everything into discussions reflectively, engaging students in all aspects of teaching during the practicum, assigning varieties of online websites, and teaching webinars as the major factors in their engagement. Regarding the encouraging points of the engage phase, they referred to the presentation of the real world of teaching combined with new knowledge and skills as a great opportunity to create a new identity (Yildirim, 2008). The contribution of the engage phase to the emergence of the teacher identity was evidenced by Saba's statement. Highlighting as strong points of the present phase, Saba identified identity categories such as self-confidence, task perception and future perspectives as determinations of teacher identity and teaching skills and the assets of the course:

> *Excerpt 5*: … teaching materials not in the order of the book, but the order of our needs, being a motivational mentor and caring friend at the same time were the advantages of this phase. One of the points that I loved the most was the seriousness of the mentor while almost always smiling and her genuine charisma that was being transferred to me as a role model positively. Being a teacher doesn't mean to transfer just the knowledge. A teacher should be a psychologist and be able to create a good relationship with their students and support them. (Saba)

The pre-service teachers' viewpoints of what was perceived as weak points of the engage phase and the link between the engage and study phases of the newly developed ESA TE curriculum were also reported. For instance, Pari, Shina, Zari and Neda stated that, despite the strong commitments of the course to their learning to teach, they needed more presentations, teaching practices, discussions and scaffolding that were planned to contribute to the second and third phases of the programme, namely the study and activate phases. This was evidenced by Neda's claim that

> more frequent use of videos and teaching aids are needed during the classes.

Pari personalised the weak points and expressed that

> I feel I need more teaching practice.

Table 3 summarises the emergence of the participants' PIs according to Kelchtermans' (1993) conceptualisation compared between the pre-course interview and the reflective essay based on the frequencies of the identity concepts, namely self-confidence, self-image, self-esteem, job motivation, task perception and future perspective. In Table 3, the columns of each research instrument represent the total percentage of the contribution of each identity concept in the identity formation of individual participants (cases) in within-case analysis and the rows show the total percentage of the occurrence of each identity concept for all participants in the cross-case analysis explained above. It is worth mentioning that the item 'self-confidence' as a significant shift of pre-service teachers' identities (Beijaard et al., 2005) was added to the list. In this regard, for instance, coded statements such as 'now, I feel that I can be a great teacher' were considered as a manifestation of self-confidence, and clauses such as 'put myself in that situation' were considered as a representative of both self-image and future perspective, respectively.

Table 3:
A comparison of the frequencies of teacher identity concepts in pre-course interview and reflective essay

Identity Concepts	**Pre-Course Interview**									**Reflective Essay**								
Participants	Mina	Zari	Saba	Ziba	Neda	Shina	Ayda	Pari	**Total**	Mina	Zari	Saba	Ziba	Neda	Shina	Ayda	Pari	**Total**
Self-confidence (%)	☐	☐	√	☐	☐	☐	√	√	*37.5*	√	☐	√	√	√	√	☐	√	*75*
Self-image (%)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	√	*12.5*	√	☐	√	√	√	√	√	√	*87.5*
Self-esteem (%)	☐	√	√	☐	☐	☐	☐	√	*37.5*	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	*100*
Job motivation (%)	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	*100*	√	√	√	☐	√	√	√	√	*87.5*
Task perception (%)	☐	☐	√	√	☐	☐	☐	☐	*25*	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	*100*
Future perspective (%)	☐	√	√	☐	√	√	☐	☐	*50*	√	☐	√	√	√	√	√	√	*87.5*
TOTAL (%)	16	50	83	33	33	33	33	66		100	50	100	83	100	100	83	100	

As illustrated in Table 3, in the pre-course interview, the changes of PI concepts were identified to ranges between 12.5% in presenting the self-image to 100% in job motivation. Compared with the findings of the reflective essay, the same rate grew to 87.5% in self-image while job motivation decreased to 87.5%. Generally, the cross-case analysis (rows) of two data collection tools yielded an enhancement in almost all of the PI concepts in the participants. Likewise, a within-case analysis (columns) illuminated a noticeable shift in individual student teachers' identity items in terms of self-confidence, self-image, self-esteem, task perception and future perspective. The only declining item identified was job motivation and the only inconsistent case among the participants was the case of Zari represented at the end of the first phase of the ESA curriculum. This discrepancy is discussed in the following section.

DISCUSSION

Analysis of the data in the current study suggested that the engagement in structured activities and materials as well as systematic reflective practices could assist the participants in developing a sense of belonging to the teacher community and in transitioning from a student to a teacher PI.

Addressing research question 1

The first research question aimed at examining how eight Iranian pre-service teachers could identify and develop their PIs through a variety of negotiations of meaningful activities and reflective discussions in the engage phase of an ESA TE programme.

The within-case thematic analysis of individual participants' oral and written data revealed a significant improvement in almost all the pre-service trainees concerning six PI terms reported in Table 3. The pre-service teachers' PI formation can be more explicitly understood in terms of Lave and Wenger's (1991) conceptualisation of learning as social practice and learners as individual, social members who learn through integration of meaning, practice, community and identity components. For individual participants, engagement in the teaching process was partly reflected in their written statements, the reflective essay, activities such as watching sample classes, discussions after watching videos, presentations, reading texts, collaborative practices, and online assignments in a COP (excerpts 2 and 3). This echoes the significant role of engagement in the identification of the pre-service teachers highlighted by Trent and Shroff (2013); however, their study did not focus on engagement stages as an initial part of the TE course. This finding also confirms Hsiu-ting's (2005) claim in terms of applying reflective practice to grow PI in an online learning community.

Comparatively, for instance, Saba was the one who came out to present a clear identification of her PI at the earlier stage of the practicum. In her case, the degree of identity concepts appeared to be 83% in the pre-course interview and those were promoted to 100% at the end of phase one. Cross-checking with the mentor's reflective journals indicated a degree of congruence in terms of self-confidence emerged from the very beginning of engage phase in Saba. She attributed her identification to the classroom rapport and course assignments which were sent to the participants via email. These assignments were in the form of webinars and videos that they were required to discuss in groups at the beginning of the following week. The engagement process for Saba was influenced by the role of the teacher educator's behaviour when she felt a change in her attitude at the end of the course.

Emergence of inconsistent cases

The participants entered this programme relying on their personal identity. Accordingly, the emergence of some inconsistent cases is inevitable as scholars believe that the practice of becoming a teacher is a complex phenomenon involving many dimensions, such as the student teachers' background experience, previous identity, and personal and cultural characteristics (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Korthagen, 2004; Wedell, 2017).

Despite the constant changes in seven participants, the findings revealed a different chain of shifts for Zari corroborated by the pre-course interview, the reflective essay and the teacher educator's personal narratives. Before initiating the programme, Zari presented a positive feeling towards being a teacher, teaching English and gaining new knowledge (representatives of job motivation, self-esteem and task perception), while perceiving the mentor's role as a significant part at the first session. However, Zari's record indicated limited changes over the concepts of identity formation, which is indicative of the constant range of 50% in both data collection tools. Unlike the other participants, Zari was the last volunteer to present in front of the class during the early weeks of the study phase. She claimed that she learned much about teaching and felt her own improvement, even though no sign of her solidifying self-confidence, self-image and future perspective was visible at the end of the engage phase. In response to the prompt indicating the efficacy of the classroom activities in her feeling as a teacher, she attributed it to activities such as systematic discussions, peer- and self-corrections, asking and answering questions, and watching sample teaching videos. Zari's lack of confidence is revealed from her statements, her anxiety about volunteering for the simulation of teaching methods and participating hesitatingly in discussions. Her

comments on the need for more presentations and discussions revealed her strong reliance upon the mentor's assistance and the decline of her autonomy.

Addressing research question 2

This research question aimed to discover the participants' perception of their engagement sources and identity changes. The prompts in the reflective essay were planned to motivate the pre-service teachers to write about the same focal point from a variety of lenses assuring the credibility of the findings. The first two prompts in the reflective essay guided the participants in writing about their changes as compared to the first session. The following three prompts were designed to focus the student teachers' attention on the activities and types of groupings during the practicum. As the analysis of data reveals, all eight pre-service teachers agreed upon the effectiveness of watching videos of sample classes and webinars, joining online international communities, and the systematic reflective discussions. The participants also mentioned that their group discussions after classroom activities in a collaborative framework were influential in shaping their PI.

For instance, Zari highlighted the role of the mentor, reflective discussions, and peer- and self-corrections in shaping her identity during the programme. Despite her claims of the valuable changes, Zari did not appear to undergo any significant changes as profound as the other members over 20 weeks. Regarding the inconsistency mentioned above, this implies a conflict between what Zari perceived as a student teacher and what occurred in reality. This is in line with Pennington and Richards' (2016) claim on assuming a sort of conflict between teachers' particular roles and what they perceive of their own identities. Abednia (2012) defines this type of conflict as a 'sense of change agency', which is proven to be an indispensable part of a COP (Varghese et al., 2005; Wenger, 1998). Surprisingly, none of the participants mentioned the variability of materials as one of the efficient factors in their engagement and thus the construction of their PIs. This indicates that pre-service teachers' perception of their identity formation may be different from reality, at least at the initial stages.

The findings also revealed that the mentor's role should be highlighted with active pre-, within- and post-programme support and scaffolding to encourage the emergence and growth of PI. This can be encouraged by a social constructivist perspective that sees knowledge formation as primarily a social activity when student teachers are involved in reflective practices in a pedagogical environment. The mentor's role is highlighted when student teachers are more dependent on mentors in such a learning context modelled as a Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The engagement stage in TE allows pre-service teachers to gradually pass through the ZPD of learning, which helps them develop their thinking skills. Consequently, they can transit from the area of dependency on their mentors to independency at the end of the practicum when they feel more confident and autonomous (Vygotsky, 1986).

Considering teacher identity construction as being in a state of flux and engagement as a primary step in TE curriculum, the findings of the current research can solve Fajardo Catañeda's (2014) two concerns over the dependency of trainees on mentors and the overlap of student teachers' previous and current identities. In the process of engagement in teacher learning, mentors support student teachers to enhance their intellectual state to enable them to act independently when they start their teaching career. This process allows them to negotiate themselves, which is seen as a crucial stage in the development of their PI (Ivanova, 2019).

Implications of this research suggest that teacher educators and curriculum designers invest more time and rigour in selecting, sequencing and evaluating materials. The flexibility of the reflective activities can also be projected to help curriculum designers plan global TE programmes in different contexts and among diverse COPs. To prepare qualified and practising teachers for prospective contexts, teacher educators

should focus on the complexities and conflicts involved in becoming a teacher during the practicum. Furthermore, when they design a TE curriculum, educators should take engagement as the initial step to provide appropriate time for pre-service teachers to overcome tensions and negotiate their new selves. A significant implication of the current research advocates for the critical role of mentors during the practicum. It indicates that qualified mentors should be trained to implement negotiations leading the student teachers to successful engagement in meaning, and, ultimately, the formation of their PIs. Consequently, this can encourage stakeholders and educators to design mentor preparation programmes.

Although the study has successfully demonstrated the identification of the pre-service teachers' PIs in light of the engagement, the findings were limited in two ways. The first was the paucity of incorporating adequate teaching practices that can be referred to as the nature and design of the ESA TE programme. Because the second phase focused on the integration between theory and practice and included a plethora of macro- and micro-teaching practices, it was not planned to put pressure on the participants to perform teaching practices at this stage. The second source of the caveat was the small number of the participants, which could affect the results of the research. This means that caution must be applied, as the findings might not be transferrable to other, similar contexts. It is recommended that a further study be undertaken to explore the contribution of the voice of other groups of pre-service teachers in different contexts while considering additional factors such as gender, age and qualifications as well as different educational contexts, cultures, and linguistic backgrounds, all of which may play a role in the engagement of pre-service teachers.

CONCLUSION

The present study was undertaken to report the process in which Iranian pre-service teachers came to identify themselves as EFL teachers through engagement in classroom activities. The findings of the current research are valuable as they could convince teacher educators and curriculum designers to devote more time to the pre-service teachers' need to both engage in the components of the new social community and negotiate their PIs at the primary stage of a training programme. The findings indicate that the relevance of the engagement can be supported by the results of this research and that curriculum designers and teacher educators should take engagement as a centre of their consideration when designing TE programmes. However, to understand the steps of PI formation in pre-service teachers, it is necessary to move beyond engagement to experience the second and third modes of Wenger's (1998) belonging concepts.

The findings advocate for the establishment of successful negotiations. Accordingly, there is a need to encourage pre-service teachers to participate actively in activities and to engage emotionally in teaching knowledge and practices. In doing so, the establishment of modes of belonging and identity through engagement must happen in a systematic and circular mode. In addition to these, it was also shown that the activities should be selected from varieties of reading, writing, speaking and listening to capture all types of student teachers' motives and intelligence. For these materials to be efficient, they need to be structured, specialised, consistent and meaningful in the primary stages of becoming a teacher. Moreover, the findings revealed that, generally, pre-service teachers learn through watching, listening and doing practical activities. And, last but not least, in order to apply a successful negotiation leading to the engagement of pre-service teachers, teacher educators are required to establish a swift trust. This kind of trust should be employed at the beginning of the practicum and requires carefully planned TE programmes as well as mentor teachers' suitable teaching styles, insightful behaviour, and their interaction with student teachers.

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Teacher readiness towards nurturing Advanced Performance among all students: A pilot study[1]

Mary Grosser, North-West University, South Africa[2]
Mirna Nel, North-West University, South Africa[3]
Magdalena Kloppers, North-West University, South Africa[4]
Stefanie-Marié Esterhuizen, North-West University, South Africa[5]

ABSTRACT

Equipping students with well-developed thinking skills and dispositions to become Advanced Performers appears to remain a daunting task for teachers. To this end, the research foregrounded two feasibility objectives for a pilot study that, firstly, obtained information based on teachers' perceptions about the strengths and weaknesses in relation to the factors that influence the nurturing of Advanced Performance, and, secondly, established the suitability of the questionnaire items to ascertain teachers' perceptions about their readiness towards nurturing Advanced Performance. Quantitative, non-experimental, descriptive survey research with a heterogeneous group of Grade R and Foundation Phase teachers from two public primary schools and one pre-school (n = 26) in South Africa was employed. Findings revealed that a main study would be feasible and should continue with modification to the questionnaire to streamline data collection. Perceptions about teaching practice as well as competence in teaching thinking skills and dispositions seem to strongly influence teaching for Advanced Performance. Questionnaire items could be selected and grouped more meaningfully to focus attention to these two constructs. Moreover, exploring additional contextual factors, such as curriculum overload and a content-driven approach to teaching, could extend the present identification of factors that hamper the nurturing of Advanced Performance.

Keywords: Advanced Performance (AP), advanced cognitive performance characteristics, values, attitudes and attributes

INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

In South Africa, concerns are raised about the effectiveness and quality of education in general (Engelbrecht et al., 2016; Pretorius, 2014; Schoeman 2012; Taylor, 2011; Van der Berg et al., 2011; Wildeman & Nomdo, 2007). It is argued that schools are not preparing students to become Advanced Performers, that is, students who are adequately equipped with thinking skills and dispositions to cope with life challenges,

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2 ORCID: 0000-0001-9198-521X
3 ORCID: 0000-0003-0170-3296
4 ORCID: 0000-0003-2435-0809
5 ORCID: 0000-0002-5321-9570

and challenges posed by the world of work and study in the 21st century (Booyse, 2016; Eyre, 2016; Jansen, 2012). Evidence of this is noticed in the poor results of systemic evaluations such as the Annual National Assessments (ANA) (standardised national assessments for Languages and Mathematics to measure students' progress and to establish their performance levels to design school improvement plans), as well as poor Grade 12 results, and poor performance in core subjects such as Mathematics and the Natural Sciences (Jansen, 2017).

Initial, emerging research findings documenting the effects of teaching to nurture Advanced Performance (AP) in 30 premium international schools of Nord Anglia Education, across the Americas, Asia, the Middle East and Europe since 2010, revealed inspiring results in relation to progressive academic achievement (Eyre, 2015). Teaching to nurture AP has, however, not yet been applied to students in the South African context (Eyre, 2015). Research in South Africa with its diverse socioeconomic contexts could fill a contextual gap in the current research base. An initial baseline assessment of the status quo in relation to the development of AP among students in South Africa may single out certain areas for special and focused attention and remediation, specifically in relation to the personal, school- and classroom-related factors that influence the nurturing of AP (Eyre 2016). Developing AP competencies among students could be regarded as a global phenomenon (Eyre, 2016; Kerr et al., 2016). Consequently, the findings of the research could extend existing theory on nurturing AP and promote a broader investigation into personal, school- and classroom-related factors that could influence how teachers conduct teaching nationally and internationally.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This initial exploratory, pilot study with a diverse group of South African primary school and pre-school teachers aimed to achieve two feasibility objectives, namely (i) to obtain rich and practical information revealing teacher perceptions about the strengths and weaknesses in relation to the factors that influence the nurturing of AP, and (ii) to establish the suitability of the questionnaire as a data collection instrument to ascertain teacher perceptions about their readiness to nurture AP. Achieving the objectives could inform, guide and direct follow-up research in further, larger studies (Eldrige et al., 2016; Johanson & Brooks, 2009; Schader, 2015; Strydom, 2011; Thabane et al., 2010).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Background

Since 1994, developing the potential of all students as well as equipping them to deal with the challenges of the 21st century were placed at the top of the South African education agenda (Department of Basic Education, 2011; Department of Education, 1997, 2001, 2002). However, these ideals seem difficult to achieve and are consequently not operationalised effectively during teaching. The curriculum seems to be overly focused on content-driven learning and achieving grades as opposed to nurturing AP (Booyse 2016; Jansen, 2012). Not only in South Africa, but globally, 21st-century students will be challenged to solve diverse problems in a competitive society for which they will require the characteristics of Advanced Performers (Eyre, 2016; Miri, David & Uri, 2007).

AP conceptualised

Achieving AP is conceptualised according to the work of Eyre (2016), and involves scaffolded learning, where all students receive support to become Advanced Performers[6] who master learning outcomes

6 The concepts 'Advanced Performance' and 'Advanced Performers' are used interchangeably as they cannot be separated. Teaching that displays the characteristics of Advanced Performance is a prerequisite for students to become Advanced Performers.

and are academically successful because they possess advanced cognitive performance characteristics (ACPs) (thinking skills or competencies to think), as well as values, attitudes and attributes (VAAs) (thinking dispositions or competencies to behave) to cope with the challenges and demands of the 21st century (Eyre, 2016; Felner, 2000; Felner et al., 2001; Felner et al., 2007; Kerr et al., 2016).

Numerous pathways to achieve AP have been identified in the literature (Felner et al., 2001, 2007; Kerr, et al., 2016). The authors of this article focused on the pathways suggested by Eyre (2016) (see Figure 1 below) as the pathways identified by Felner et al. (2007) and Kerr et al. (2016) do not adequately describe the practical, classroom-based component as pathway to achieve AP, which was of importance for the pilot study.

Figure 1:
Teaching for Advanced Performance (Adapted from Eyre, 2016: 32)

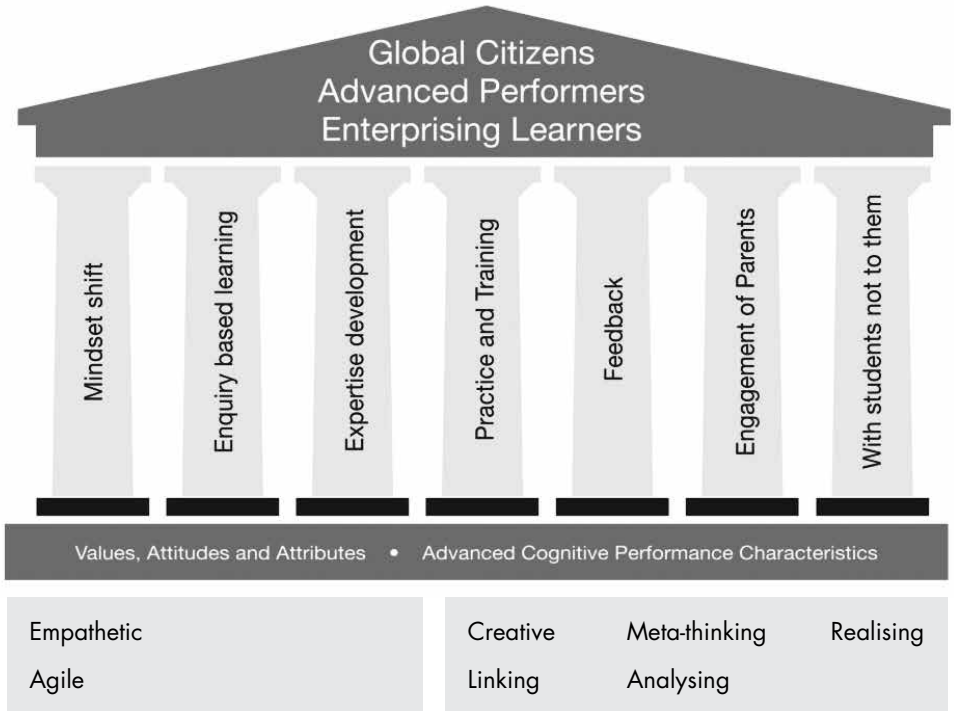


Figure 1 indicates that ACPs and VAAs form the foundation of teaching that aims to nurture AP. ACPs refer to the ways of thinking that students need to develop, which can be grouped into five categories (Eyre, 2016). Firstly, students need to become *creative*, fluent and original thinkers. Secondly, *meta-thinking* involves a continuous awareness of one's own thinking and regulating one's thought processes. Thirdly, students should not view learning as a series of isolated events, but rather as a process of *linking* different sets of information. Fourthly, *analysing* information in a precise, critical and logical way characterizes the way in which an Advanced Performer thinks. Finally, *realising* enables a student to acknowledge that other characteristics such as working with speed and accuracy contribute to effective learning (Eyre, 2016).

Teaching for AP emphasises the joint development of learning dispositions or VAAs in conjunction with the ACPs. The VAAs can be grouped into three categories, namely '*Empathetic, Agile and Hard-working*' (Eyre, 2016: 67). The VAAs that form part of the empathetic category involve working both independently and in collaboration with others to achieve outcomes, displaying concern for society and having confidence in dealing with new challenges. Agile students are curious and keen to learn in both familiar and unfamiliar contexts and are open-minded and flexible in their thinking. Hard workers embrace practice, persistence and resilience, irrespective of the obstacles one is confronted with.

The seven pillars or pathways (see Figure 1) that, among others, encompass various personal, school and classroom factors that strengthen the development of AP (Eyre, 2016) informed the purpose of the study as well as the construction of the questionnaire items, and guided the data analysis, are explained below.

Factors that strengthen the development of AP

Personal factors

Teachers' attitudes, beliefs and perceptions about teaching and education. Teachers' attitudes and beliefs about the malleability of the brain, and how to exploit and manage inherited predispositions towards success, are critical attributes in developing Advanced Performers (Devine, 2011; Dweck, 2000; Dympna, Declan & McGillicuddy, 2015; Eyre, 2016; Hopkins et al., 2011; Lin-Siegler, Dweck & Cohen, 2016).

The role of self-efficacy and competence. Self-efficacy is important to prompt and motivate teachers to persist in enabling students to be successful in AP (Deemer, 2004; Eyre, 2016; Tompkins, 2013; Wyatt, 2014).

School factors

The role of effective school management and professional development. School managers should lead curriculum development (Ediger, 2014) and direct ways for preparing staff to make a difference to classroom practice (Creemers, Kyriakides & Sammons, 2010; Eyre, 2016; Hallinger & Lu, 2014; Newton & Wallin, 2013; Sammons, Davis & Gray, 2016). Additionally, teachers need to strive to improve their practice and expertise through continuous professional development initiatives (Reynolds et al., 2016) and by collaborating with other teachers to share ideas about best classroom practices (Danielson, 2016; Eyre, 2016).

The role of parents and the community. In support of Eyre (2016), Felner et al. (2001) and Kerr et al. (2016) also argue for a reengagement of families, parents and communities in education. Eyre (2016) contends that parents should collaborate with teachers and students to understand the building blocks of advanced thinking and learning, and that they should reinforce what is done at school (Eyre, 2016).

Classroom factors

Teaching and assessment strategies. Enquiry-based learning can be regarded as an effective teaching and learning approach to provide focused practice and training to students in applying the ACPs and VAAs (Eyre, 2016; Green & Murris, 2014; Wegerif, 2013). Different enquiry-based strategies, such as play and cooperative learning, help students (i) develop flexible knowledge, effective problem-solving and social-emotional skills, and (ii) promote self-directed learning (Bodrova & Leong, 2012; Diamond & Lee, 2011). Using stories is a suitable tool to convey messages, contextualise an argument, model behaviour (Van Aswegen, 2015) and advance conceptual development (Loukia, 2006). The 'Six Thinking Hats' strategy prompts the flexible use of different ACPs (factual, critical and creative thinking, synthesis, and argumentation) (De Bono, 1992). Dialogic education enables students to engage respectfully with others in meaningful dialogue, argumentation and reasoning about various knowledge claims, and to communicate their own views (Costa & Kallick, 2009; Van den Berg, 2010). Thinking Maps involves the visual application of eight important cognitive processes that are required for effective learning across any subject field (Hyerle, 2014).

Feedback. Frequent formative feedback that feeds learning forward, and does not focus on students' shortcomings, instils in students the confidence that growth and progress are attainable (Eyre, 2016), and indicates to students when and whether they use and apply the ACPs and VAAs that they have acquired (Earl, 2013).

Student responsibility. Students should take responsibility for their own learning, be actively involved, and continuously reflect on the growth and development of their ACPs and VAAs (Eyre, 2016; Felner et al., 2001).

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research framework and approach

The pilot study employed non-experimental, quantitative, descriptive survey research, which, according to McMillan and Schumacher (2014), is suitable to obtain an objective, numerical description of perceptions about a current phenomenon (Maree & Van der Westhuizen, 2010). A positivist research paradigm guided the surveying of teachers' perceptions, as data collection and interpretation took place in an objective way.

Sample and biographical characteristics of the participants

Data were collected from a heterogeneous group of female Grade R and Foundation Phase teachers (n = 44) who teach in average to poor socioeconomic environments. One full-service primary school (ordinary schools turned into inclusive schools accommodating the full range of learning needs) in the Sedibeng East District, and one primary school in the Sedibeng West District of the Gauteng Department of Basic Education, took part in the research. One preschool situated on a farm in the Oudtshoorn district, Cape Town, also took part in the research. By means of non-probability sampling, the schools were conveniently selected based on their willingness to become involved in the research (Creswell, 2012). Given the voluntary nature of the research, only 26 participants returned completed questionnaires. According to Isaac and Michael (1995) and Hill (1998), 10 to 30 participants could be regarded as sufficient for exploratory pilot studies in the social sciences, and Hertzog (2008) recommends 25 to 40 participants for instrument development.

Demographic information about the research participants is summarised by means of frequency counts in Table 1 below.

Table 1:
Frequency distribution: Demographic information of research participants

1	**Gender**	**Male**	**Female**				
		0	26				
2	**Age (in years)**	**21-25**	**26-30**	**31-35**	**36-40**	**41-50**	**51+**
		0	8	0	0	7	11
3	**Cultural group**	**Black**	**White**	**Asian**	**Coloured**	**Other**	
		17	7	0	2	0	
4	**Qualifications**	**M + 2**	**M + 3**	**M + 4**	**M + 5**	**M + 6**	**M + 7**
		8	13	5	0	0	0
5	**Years of teaching experience**	**0-5**	**6-10**	**11-15**	**16-20**	**21+**	
		5	5	4	2	10	

Data collection methods

A researcher-constructed, ordinal, descriptive Likert-scale questionnaire with 168 closed and six open items was administered. The open questions explored the teachers' understanding of AP and how it could be nurtured. The closed questions focused on a number of constructs in the literature (Eyre, 2016; Teddlie et al., 2006) that could be regarded as prerequisite personal, school- and classroom-related factors for nurturing AP according to which strengths and weaknesses in relation to the teachers' perceptions could be deduced. Table 2 below clarifies the questionnaire constructs and the descriptive Likert scales used to classify the teacher responses.

Table 2:
Questionnaire constructs and Likert-scale descriptors

Questionnaire constructs	Likert scale
Attitudes and beliefs about education	1. Strongly disagree: It is never the case or possible. 2. Disagree: There are very few cases where this is possible. 3. Agree: There are many cases where this is possible. 4. Strongly agree: This is definitely almost always the case or possible.
Perceptions about current teaching practice Self-confidence in application of teaching and assessment strategies	1. Seldom, in less than half of my lessons: In less than half of my lessons I have no self-confidence to let students do this. 2. In about half of my lessons: In about half of the lessons I present I feel confident to let students do this. 3. In about three quarters of my lessons: In about three quarters of the lessons I present I feel confident to let students do this. 4. In almost every lesson: In about all of the lessons I present I feel confident to let students do this.
Perceptions about management and support of teaching and learning	1. Almost never: once per school term. 2. Seldom: three times per school term. 3. Frequently: four times per school term. 4. Very often: more than four times per school term.
Perceptions about professional development	1. Hardly ever/never: once per school term. 2. Occasionally: twice per school term. 3. Frequently: three times per school term. 4. Almost always: more than three times per school term.

Questionnaire constructs	Likert scale
Competency in application of teaching and assessment strategies Rating competence in teaching ACPs and VAAs	1. Not competent: I know about the strategy but do not know how to apply the strategy/I do not understand and I do not know how to teach it to students. 2. Somewhat competent: I have some knowledge about the strategy but lack the skill to apply it/I have some understanding but lack the skill to teach it to students. 3. Competent: I know how to apply the strategy but need more practice/I understand it and have an idea of how to teach it, but need more practice to teach it well. 4. Highly competent: I am good at applying the strategy and can teach others how to apply it/I understand it well, can teach it, and can explain and demonstrate to others how to teach it well to students.
Self-efficacy beliefs	1 = none at all; 9 = a great deal

Acceptable Cronbach's alpha coefficients between 0.695-0.976 (Maree & Pietersen, 2008) were calculated. Knowledgeable co-researchers as well as an expert in the field of AP assisted in identifying the dimensionality of factors influencing AP and provided their opinions on the questionnaire format, as well as on the face value of the open and closed questionnaire items (Tsang, Royse & Terkawi, 2017).

Data analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to summarise the questionnaire data reported with means and standard deviations in the results section (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). According to Lancaster, Dodd and Williamson (2004), a descriptive analysis could be regarded as suitable for pilot studies. The data did not indicate severe deviations from normality; therefore, parametric inferential statistics were employed to compare the perceptions of the participants in relation to the different constructs in the questionnaire (Creswell, 2009). In this regard, a t-test was used to establish statistically significant differences between the means of constructs ($p < 0.05$). Cohen's d was calculated to determine the effect or magnitude of the statistically significant differences between the means of two constructs in order to conclude whether an effect is meaningful in real life (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). A multiple regression analysis was performed to examine the relationship between the different independent contextual variables. More than one independent variable was used to predict the dependent variable, and the partial effect of each independent variable on the dependent variable was calculated (Pietersen & Maree, 2016). The small sample size did not allow for statistical analyses that control for the influence of biographical variables.

Ethical considerations

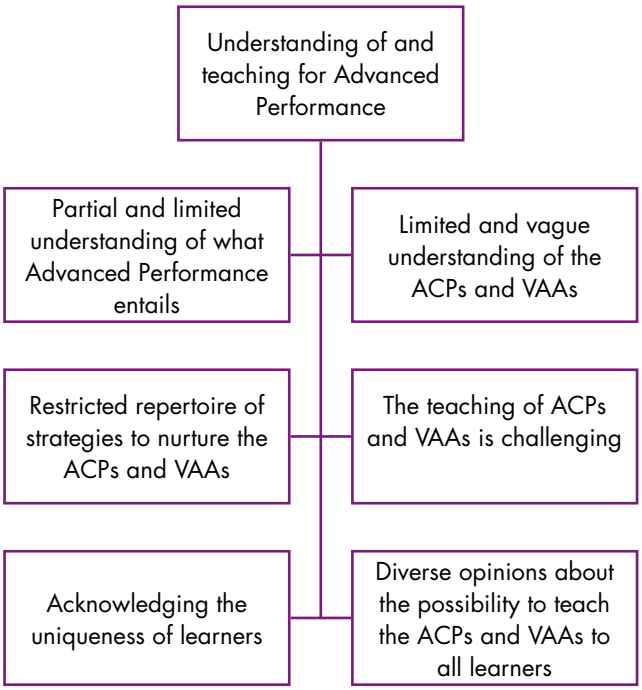
The Ethics Committee of the university where the research was conducted approved the research. Informed consent was obtained from all the participants. Participation in the research was anonymous and voluntary, and assurance was given that responses would be treated confidentially.

RESULTS

Responses to open questions

The responses to the open questions were wide ranging, which complicated the determination of themes. Consequently, it was decided to establish trends (Figure 2) in relation to strengths and weaknesses (feasibility objective 1) about how the participants understand AP and its development.

Figure 2:
Trends in understanding of and teaching for Advanced Performance



Three basic trends were identified for the participants' understanding of AP. Firstly, the following responses portray the partial understanding trend: 'Performance planned for students to achieve high'; 'All students with and without challenges are accommodated during teaching'; and 'learning that accommodates all students at different learning levels'. Secondly, according to the limited understanding trend, a few participants focused on critical and creative thinking as well as problem-solving: 'the opportunity given to students where they are trained to focus on critical and creative thinking as well as problem solving'. Thirdly, a lack of understanding is illustrated by responses such as 'carried out action in time, ahead of time'; 'performance according to ability'; and 'performance that students achieve that aligns with their talents and abilities'. None of the responses indicated that becoming an Advanced Performer requires the acquisition of ACPs and VAAs comprehensively and in an integrated manner. The ACPs mentioned included (i) language skills and (ii) thinking skills (analysing; evaluating; synthesising; comparing; making decisions; reasoning; creative, flexible and critical thinking; and metacognition).

Relevant comments about VAAs included (i) attitudes towards learning, namely a 'positive attitude towards learning', 'willingness to learn', and 'attentiveness'; (ii) behavioural traits such as 'respect', 'good discipline', 'accepting authority' and 'good manners and self-image'; (iii) personal traits, which included 'inquisitiveness', 'self-discipline', 'perseverance', 'open-mindedness', 'self-regulation', 'understanding why learning is important', 'being creative', 'being innovative', and 'prepared to deal with the unexpected and what the future holds'. Various unrelated responses included 'Bloom's taxonomy strategy is the best'; 'knowledge and skills gap that exist in their content knowledge'; and 'through understanding why learning/teaching is important in the lifetime'.

The responses revealed an apparent restricted repertoire of strategies to develop ACPs and VAAs as the participants mainly cited questioning and problem-solving as strategies. Disturbingly, participants mentioned a number of teacher-centred teaching strategies, such as 'demonstrations', 'explanations', 'reading' and 'counting', which could be regarded as strategies that develop the ACPs. A lack of understanding of the strategies to nurture AP was evident in responses such as 'baseline assessment',

'rewards', 'feedback', 'self-discipline', 'self-confidence', 'effective classroom management', 'structure in the classroom', and 'good lesson introductions'.

A prominent trend in the responses was that 13 teachers acknowledged the 'uniqueness' of students and affirmed that students 'learn differently, (and) all are capable of significant academic success'. The majority of the participants (69%) viewed the teaching of ACPs and VAAs as challenging and was divided in their opinions about the possibility to teach ACPs and VAAs. In support of a growth mindset, about half of the teachers mentioned that the ACPs and VAAs can be nurtured through 'mediation', 'with motivation and rewards, and 'stimulate[d] and improve[d] [through] self-confidence'. The other half of the teachers displayed a fixed mindset by noting that the teaching of the ACPs and VAAs are not always possible due to 'overcrowding'; that it is 'not possible for grade 1'; that 'students' circumstances' impact negatively on the effectiveness of teaching ACPs and VAAs, and that teaching them is problematic for 'students with concentration problems'. These teachers seem to acknowledge that high levels of achievement are only possible for some students.

Surprisingly, and in contrast to the previous response, 20 of the 26 teachers perceived the development of student potential or ability as possible through various teaching methods and one-on-one interventions. Only six of the teachers perceived the development of potential or ability not always being possible as the 'home environment does not allow this'; teachers 'need support from [a student's] home'; the teaching of thinking skills is 'influenced by [the] attitude of [a] student'; and 'students need to cooperate'.

Responses to closed questions

Although all questionnaire items were analysed, given the large volumes of data, the analysis focuses on responses that could be regarded as strengths and limitations regarding the factors that influence the nurturing of AP (feasibility objective 1).

The results below report the standard deviations (in brackets) as well as the means that were calculated in accordance with the four-point Likert scale. The responses obtained from each participant in relation to the four-point Likert scale for each questionnaire item were totalled and divided by the number of participants who responded in order to obtain a mean per item. Similarly, section means were calculated by totalling the means per question linked to the four-point Likert scale for each of the participants and dividing the total by the number of the participants.

Attitudes and beliefs about teaching and education. The mean obtained for this section indicated that most of the participants agreed ($\bar{x}$ = 3.155 (0.334)) and that their attitudes and beliefs about teaching and education support the nurturing of AP. Teachers agreed that feedback should tell students what to achieve next ($\bar{x}$ = 3.730 (0.452)); that students need to understand the ACPs and VAAs they need to achieve, respectively ($\bar{x}$ = 3.730 (0.452)); and that teachers need to have high expectations for students ($\bar{x}$ = 3.461 (0.647)), remain dedicated ($\bar{x}$ = 3.423 (0.758)), and enthusiastic ($\bar{x}$ = 3.346 (0.816)) about teaching, irrespective of the challenges they encounter. The majority of teachers also agreed that teachers should inform parents about what happens in class ($\bar{x}$ = 3.5 (0.812)). It was encouraging to note that teachers do not regard the content that they teach as more important than how they teach it ($\bar{x}$ = 2.307 (0.970)), and that passing exams is not more important than developing VAAs among students ($\bar{x}$ = 2.076 (0.688)). Additionally, teachers also disagreed ($\bar{x}$ = 2.423 (1.027)) that they know more than students do, that students should not be allowed to develop answers to questions that may be incorrect, and that teachers should give students the correct answers. However, teachers disagreed to having noise in their classes when students explore information on their own ($\bar{x}$ = 2.807 (0.895)), and perceived that they cannot make progress with difficult students ($\bar{x}$ = 2.961 (0.662)). The findings mentioned last appear to be beliefs that do not align well with teaching practices that nurture AP.

Perceptions about teaching practice. The teachers indicated that teaching for AP happens between half to three quarters of the time during lessons ($\bar{x}$ = 2.840 (0.553)). It is noteworthy that the majority of the participants indicated that they create opportunities for students to develop thinking skills ($\bar{x}$ = 3.684 (0.939)), encourage students to find solutions to problems on their own ($\bar{x}$ = 3.115 (1.177)), encourage students to ask questions about the information presented to them ($\bar{x}$ = 3.115 (1.177)), and build their teaching around real-life problems ($\bar{x}$ = 3.000 (0.938)) in about three quarters of their lessons. However, asking students to help plan activities for class ($\bar{x}$ = 1.730 (0.919)), requesting students to explain their own thinking ($\bar{x}$ = 1.884 (0.993)), waiting long before students quieten down before lessons start ($\bar{x}$ = 2.076 (1.129)), and allowing students to discover meaning of subject matter on their own ($\bar{x}$ = 2.615 (1.098)) could be regarded as limitations towards nurturing AP. The mentioned activities appear to happen only in half and fewer than half of the teachers' lessons. In particular, the emphasis that appears to be placed on direct transmission of subject content about three quarters of the time ($\bar{x}$ = 3.230 (0.710)) would not promote the nurturing of AP. This response also contradicts the teachers' perceptions that they create opportunities for students to develop thinking skills in about three quarters of their lessons ($\bar{x}$ = 3.461 (0.706)). Evidently, the important contribution that parents could make in assisting teachers to nurture AP needs to be addressed more adequately, as the teachers indicated that parents are only informed about what happens during teaching about half of the time ($\bar{x}$ = 2.884 (1.275)).

Management and support of teaching and learning. Management and support at management and Department of Basic Education levels appear to happen *frequently* ($\bar{x}$ = 3.253 (0.540)), that is, four times per school term. Support from community health and social services to disadvantaged students, however, appears to pose a limitation as the involvement was perceived as *very seldom* (three times per school term).

Professional development. Professional development efforts seemingly take place *frequently* ($\bar{x}$ = 3.152 (0.476)), that is, about three times per school term. Although professional development in general appears to be a strength, the collaboration with teachers at other schools in planning teaching and learning activities that only takes place *occasionally* ($\bar{x}$ = 2.333 (0.963)), that is, twice per school term, could be regarded as a limitation.

Competency in the application of teaching and assessment strategies. It could be assumed, in general, that the teachers who took part in the study only appear to be somewhat competent in applying teaching and assessment strategies that nurture AP ($\bar{x}$ = 2.835 (0.551)). The majority of participants viewed themselves as competent in using worksheets ($\bar{x}$ = 3.269 (0.724)), cooperative learning ($\bar{x}$ = 3.153 (0.834)), charts ($\bar{x}$ = 3.083 (0.720)), projects ($\bar{x}$ = 3.038 (0.958)), assignments ($\bar{x}$ = 3 (0.938)), open questions ($\bar{x}$ = 3 (0.849)), and stories ($\bar{x}$ = 3 (0.800)), thus indicating that they know how to apply the strategy, but need more practice. It is troubling that teaching and assessment strategies that promote the development of the ACPs and VAAs, such as Habits of Mind, Problem-based learning, Six Thinking Hats, Thinking Maps, Play, Debates, Self-Assessment, Peer-Assessment and Concept Maps, seem to be underutilised. The teacher responses to the application of these strategies only yielded mean averages of $\bar{x}$ = 2^{+}, implying that they perceive themselves to be *somewhat competent*; having some knowledge about the strategies, but lacking the skills to apply the strategies.

Self-confidence in the application of teaching and assessment strategies. Teachers seem to only feel confident in about half of their lessons ($\bar{x}$ = 2.925 (0.562)). The teachers appeared to be the most confident in applying teaching strategies, which involve the direct transmission of content ($\bar{x}$ = 3.480 (1.056)), and presenting summaries of previous lessons to students ($\bar{x}$ = 3.346 (0.892)), in about three quarters of their lessons. It is worrying that teachers' self-confidence appeared to be low with regard to asking students to help plan activities for class ($\bar{x}$ = 1.923 (0.891)), encouraging students to ask questions

about information ($\bar{x}$ = 2.961 (0.871)), asking students to explain their thinking ($\bar{x}$ = 2.230 (1.177)), and holding debates in which students argue for a particular point of view, which might not be their own ($\bar{x}$ = 2.423 (1.102)). The authors carefully conclude that teachers do not feel confident in applying many important teaching and assessment strategies that could nurture the ACPs and VAAs that are important for nurturing AP.

Competence in teaching the ACPs and VAAs. The teachers seem to feel *competent*, thus understanding how to teach the ACPs and VAAs, but need more practice to teach students how to attain intellectual confidence ($\bar{x}$ = 3.307 (0.736)) and self-regulation ($\bar{x}$ = 3.115 (0.711)), as well as how to plan strategically to use different learning strategies ($\bar{x}$ = 3.153 (0.613)). On the contrary, they noted being somewhat competent, consequently having some understanding of the ACPs and VAAs, but lacking the skills to teach the ACPs and VAAs involved in identifying alternative perspectives ($\bar{x}$ = 2.846 (0.675)), working with speed and accuracy ($\bar{x}$ = 2.9730 (0.778)), and making connections between information ($\bar{x}$ = 2.923 (0.628)). The mean score obtained for the entire section ($\bar{x}$ = 2.998 (0.522)) disclosed that the majority of the teachers only feel *somewhat competent*, possessing some understanding of the ACPs and VAAs but lacking the skills to teach them.

Self-efficacy beliefs. In terms of self-efficacy measured on a nine-point scale (1 = none at all; 9 = a great deal), the majority of the teachers observed that they possess *quite a lot* of self-efficacy ($\bar{x}$ = 6.818 (1.983)) to nurture AP. In particular, to get students to believe they can do well, formulating good questions for students, and getting all students involved in learning, teachers perceived that they possess quite a lot of self-efficacy ($\bar{x}$ = 7^{+}).

Comparison: Factors that nurture AP

Table 3 below reports on a comparison of the means between the various questionnaire sections by using a t-test. The comparison established which of the factors that influence the nurturing of AP could be regarded as possible strengths or limitations.

Table 3:
T-test analysis of means factors to nurture AP

Questionnaire section	*n*	$\bar{x}$	*S*	*t*	*p*	*d*	Effect size
C: Attitudes and beliefs: Teaching and education	26	3.155	0.334	3.208	0.004	0.569	Medium
D: Current Teaching Practice	26	2.840	0.553				
C: Attitudes and beliefs: Teaching and education	26	3.155	0.334	2.533	0.018	0.580	Medium
G: Competence: Application of Teaching and Assessment Strategies	26	2.835	0.551				
D: Current Teaching Practice	26	2.840	0.553	-2.922	0.008	0.746	Medium
E: Perceptions: Management and Support of Teaching	26	3.253	0.540				
D: Current Teaching Practice	26	2.840	0.553	-2.207	0.038	0.564	Medium
F: Professional Development	26	3.152	0.476				

Questionnaire section	*n*	$\bar{x}$	*S*	*t*	*p*	*d*	Effect size
E: Management and Support of Teaching	26	3.253	0.540				
G: Competency: Application of Teaching and Assessment Strategies	26	2.835	0.551	2.953	0.007	0.758	Medium
E: Management and Support of Teaching	26	3.253	0.540				
H: Self-Confidence: Application of Teaching and Assessment Strategies	26	2.925	0.562	2.191	0.039	0.583	Medium

* Significance: $p < 0.05$
d = 0.2 (small effect); d = 0.5 (medium effect); d = 0.8 (large effect)

DISCUSSION

Feasibility criterion 1: Rich and practical information revealing the teachers' perceptions about strengths and weaknesses in relation to the factors that influence the nurturing of AP.

Strengths

School principals and school management are regarded as proactive and supportive leaders of learning (Newton & Wallin, 2013; Hallinger & Lu, 2014). Yet, management and support seem to neither have a strong influence on how the teachers perceived the quality of their teaching practices nor on their competence and self-confidence to nurture AP adequately. A main study could scrutinise additional factors that might strengthen feelings of competence and self-confidence.

Weaknesses

Although teachers appear to hold positive beliefs and attitudes about nurturing AP among all students, their perceptions about their teaching practices to nurture AP indicate that they could be more effective. Similarly, their perceptions about their competency reveal that they are not highly competent in applying teaching and assessment strategies to nurture AP as they only possess some understanding of but lack the skills to teach the ACPs and VAAs.

Teachers held positive attitudes and beliefs about teaching and education to nurture AP do not align well with the type of teaching practices they apply. Limitations in this regard point to providing feedback to students that feed the learning process forward, question-posing by students, and student freedom to reason and communicate. The aforementioned elements of learning are crucial when nurturing AP. What seems puzzling is the apparent discrepancy between what teachers 'believe' and eventually 'do' in the classroom. The reasons for the perceived discrepancy between what teachers 'believe' and 'do' need further exploration to identify and address what might cause the inconsistency between 'believe' and 'do' when nurturing AP.

Although it is reassuring to note that some teachers regard it as important to develop thinking and reasoning skills, some teachers appear not to create opportunities for students to explain their thinking and to discover meaning in the subject matter. The reasons for the limited involvement of students during teaching and learning is a factor requiring further exploration.

Parents form an important pillar in nurturing AP (see Figure 1) (Eyre, 2016). The causes of limited parental involvement observed in the data should be gauged in greater depth. The involvement of community health and social services to support disadvantaged students seems disappointing and could pose a

limitation towards nurturing AP. Further investigation into contextual influences outside of the internal school domain, such as local authorities, health and social services, school districts and universities (Eyre, 2016; Sammons, 2012), is required, as these influences are regarded as critical factors in nurturing AP.

It is promising that the professional development of teachers is supposedly not left to chance (Eyre, 2016; Reynolds et al., 2016). A main study could confirm professional development as a possible strength factor towards nurturing AP. Collaboration among teachers at other schools, however, needs more attention. A main study inquiry could foreground the prevalence of individual teacher accountability versus communities of practice to enrich teaching practice (Danielson, 2016). Nevertheless, professional development does not seem to contribute a great deal to raising teachers' satisfaction with their current teaching practice. Further probing would be required to establish factors besides professional development that could influence contentment in relation to teaching practice. In addition, further probing into the quality of current professional development initiatives towards nurturing AP might reveal some limitations.

The participants mainly acknowledge the use of cooperative learning, charts and stories, but exclude the use of important student-centred teaching and assessment strategies for nurturing AP, such as Habits of Mind, Six Thinking Hats, Thinking Maps, Play, open questioning, self-assessment and peer assessment. A main study needs to confirm to what extent teachers are knowledgeable about specific strategies that nurture thinking skills and dispositions. The latter observation agrees with the self-confidence that the participants expressed in their application of transmission and reception teaching and presenting summaries of lessons to students, thus over-relying on the application of teacher-centred strategies.

Teachers' competence in teaching the ACPs and VAAs appears to be inadequate and confined mainly to teaching students to be intellectually confident and self-regulated, whereas seeing alternative perspectives and finding connections between information appear to be the most difficult to teach. Consequently, it could be argued that the nurturing of all the ACPs and VAAs might be neglected. The application of true enquiry-based teaching (Green & Murris, 2014; Wegerif, 2013) and formative assessment (Earl, 2013) that places cognitive demands on students appear to be elusive, and their application needs to be confirmed in a main study.

Surprisingly, teachers rate their self-efficacy as between *some degree* to *quite a lot*, which does not align well with the lack of confidence noted in the responses above. Growth mindsets (Dweck, 2000; Eyre, 2016) in relation to developing student potential or ability for acquiring the ACPs and VAAs have evidently not yet become the hallmark of teaching in all the classrooms that took part in the research. Teachers' apparent uncertainty about their self-efficacy possibly influenced their perceptions that teaching to nurture AP is challenging (Wyatt, 2014), which could also be attributed to a fixed mindset concerning their own competence to nurture AP. It is likely that teachers' uncertainty about their self-efficacy might be linked to contextual factors, such as the different subject fields they have to teach, classroom size, curriculum overload, and the ability level of the students (Morris, 2017), of which the influence could be explored in a main study. Comparing teachers from different genders and cultural groups, and with different years of experience and qualifications in relation to their perceptions about factors influencing AP, could reveal greater depth in the data. This requires further investigation.

The participants' responses to the open questionnaire items support the responses obtained with the closed questionnaire items. The perceived restricted understanding of AP, the limited repertoire of teaching and assessment strategies to teach and assess for AP, viewing the teaching of ACPs and VAAs as challenging, and the divided opinions about the possibility of being able to reverse fragile ACPs and VAAs confirm the limitations noted in relation to current teaching practice towards nurturing AP.

The authors argue that the questionnaire constructs could be regarded as suitable, as they revealed in-depth information regarding the teachers' perceptions about the apparent strengths and weaknesses in relation to the factors that influence the nurturing of AP among all students, for which confirmation in a main study should be investigated.

Feasibility criterion 2: Suitability of the contents of the measuring instrument to establish the teachers' readiness to nurture AP

In order to examine the relationship between the independent contextual variables, a regression analysis was conducted. The relationship between perceptions about teaching practice, school management support, professional development, competency in applying teaching and assessment strategies, self-confidence in applying teaching and assessment strategies, competence in teaching ACCs and VAAs, and self-efficacy beliefs in relation to the dependent variable, namely attitudes about readiness to teach and educate in order to achieve AP, was established (see Tables 4 and 5).

Table 4:
Regression model

R	R square	Adjusted R	Standard error of the estimate	R square change	F change
0.784	0.615	0.447	0.255	0.615	3.652

According to Table 4, R^2 = 0.615, meaning that 61.5% of the total variation in nurturing the dependent variable *attitudes about readiness to teach and educate in order to nurture AP* can be explained by the following independent variables (contextual factors): (i) perceptions about current teaching practice, (ii) competency in the application of teaching and assessment strategies, (iii) school management and support, (iv) professional development, (v) self-confidence in the application of teaching and assessment strategies, (vi) competence in teaching ACCs and VAAs, and (vii) self-efficacy beliefs. Subsequently, 38.5% of the variation in the dependent variable *attitudes about teaching and education to nurture AP* is influenced by other independent contextual variables, which need further identification in follow-up studies.

The individual contribution of the contextual variables in the model and their significance are provided in Table 5 below.

Table 5:
Individual contribution of contextual variables

Model	B	Standard error	Standardised coefficients Beta	t	Sig
	0.923	0.897		1.029	0.319
Current teaching practice	0.268	0.108	0.436	2.482	0.025
Application: Teaching and Assessment Strategies	0.213	0.108	0.335	1.976	0.066
Management and support	-0.108	0.145	-0.149	-0.745	0.467
Professional development	0.083	0.140	0.136	0.595	0.560

Model	B	Standard error	Standardised coefficients Beta	t	Sig
Confidence: Application teaching and assessment strategies	0.005	0.121	0.009	0.042	0.967
Competence	0.322	0.139	0.437	2.317	0.034
Self-efficacy	-0.014	0.035	-0.082	-0.392	0.700

These results show that the following independent contextual factors probably play a significant role in nurturing AP, namely (i) perceptions about current teaching practice are statistically significantly related to the beliefs about teaching and education to nurture AP, as $p < 0.05 = 0.025$, as well as perceptions about competence in teaching thinking skills and dispositions, as $p < 0.05 = 0.034$.

The authors did not identify any problems related to the wording or ordering of the questions. The questionnaire is comprehensive but had to provide sufficient items initially that could be pruned to streamline future data collection (Thabane et al., 2010). A main study to investigate the influence of additional contextual factors with more participants will enable researchers to conduct a factor analysis to prune some of the questionnaire items. Given the strong influence that perceptions about current teaching practice and perceptions about competence in teaching thinking skills and dispositions possibly have on teaching and education that nurture AP, the questionnaire items could be selected and grouped more meaningfully to focus the attention on these two constructs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Although this study was preliminary and conducted on a small scale, as researchers, the authors had an ethical and a scientific obligation to attempt publishing the results of their research endeavours (Thabane et al., 2010). The pilot study shows that the study can be done and offers some suggestions on how one might proceed for a main study to conclusively establish which factors play a role in nurturing AP. Although the findings cannot be generalised, they provide some insight into scale and instrument development for which internal consistency was confirmed and could therefore be applied to a larger study.

CONCLUSION

Education should move beyond producing individuals who can read, write and count. Teaching to nurture AP among all students is therefore not an option but a moral responsibility. All students have the right to receive quality education that (i) accommodates their needs, (ii) will enable them to take charge of their own learning journey, (iii) push them to explore and discover, (iv) encourage them to ask questions, (v) allow them to work through challenges, and, most importantly, (vi) give them wings to fly. In order to provide support to and equip teachers to successfully create classrooms that nurture AP, research to conclusively identify the factors that play a role in nurturing AP is vital.

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The learning experiences of learners transitioning from rural and township schools to ex-Model C schools[1]

Theresia Joakim Kanyopa, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa
Dipane Joseph Hlalele, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa[2]

ABSTRACT

Soon after attaining democracy in 1994, the South African government introduced the Schools Act (No. 84 of 1996), which came to act as an instrument for the elimination of all segregation from the exclusionary education system of the apartheid era. The Schools Act proclaimed the right to education for all learners and provided the Department of Education with guidelines on removing all segregation features in the education system. The aim of this study was to examine the learning experiences of learners in an ex-Model C school who have transitioned from rural and township schools. The study was conceptualised within the theoretical framework of Purkey and Siegel's invitational education theory. The participants and research site were selected using purposive and convenience sampling. Data were generated through art-based and focus group discussion methods. Findings from this study suggest that learners in ex-Model C schools experience both inviting and uninviting elements in the learning environment. Learners identified as inviting factors security, resources and small numbers of learners in the classroom, while as disinviting factors they mention language barriers, culturally oriented programmes and a lack of orientation. This paper argues that practices advised by invitational education theory should apply in every ex-Model C school environment in order to enhance the learning experiences of learners transitioning from rural and township schools.

Keywords: ex-Model C schools, township school, learning experience, learners, transitioning

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Studies by Goldstone (2017), Slabbert and Naude (2018), Canham (2019), and Slabbert and Naude (2020) have interrogated the changes implemented by the South African government in the wake of democracy after 1994. The major change in South African education soon after the end of apartheid that is reported in these studies was the removal of inequalities and desegregation of schools. These changes were aimed at addressing the colonial injustices and discrimination that were further institutionalised through the apartheid segregation policy. The South African Schools Act (SASA no. 84 of 1996) was seen as a mechanism to redress all forms of institutionalised discrimination against learners based on their

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2 ORCID: 0000-0003-4455-4876

background, race and socioeconomic status. Hence, SASA has been viewed as an attempt to remove all forms of discrimination and prejudice in the South African education system and inculcate respect for and appreciation of diversity. With regard to the political shift of 1994 in South Africa, one of the major education transformations introduced was that of school choice, whereby learners were allowed to attend any school of their choice (Stuurman, 2013). To this end, Canham (2019) affirms that the preamble of the new education system insisted that the country is no longer under a segregated education system, and it thus proclaimed the right to education for all learners by achieving racial equity and equal access to education opportunities. De Kadt et al. (2014) and Zoch (2017) stress the significance of the new system, which involved establishing inclusive and fair school governing bodies (SGBs).

The new context enabled parents and families to take advantage of the freedom of school choice by transferring their children to schools with quality education. As Tabane (2010) and Chisholm (2015) report, most parents perceive the public rural and township schools as dysfunctional and poorly resourced. This results in the translocation of learners from these schools to ex-Model C schools, which is mainly influenced by factors such as quality of the school, qualified teachers, safety, and well-resourced learning environments, which were perceived to offer better education. These learners would have to actualise themselves within two different social situations, the one representing their home and the other the school. This major movement raises many questions. For instance, what is the role of SGBs, teachers, and other staff, as well as learners at ex-Model C schools in supporting the transitional learners' learning experiences?

Existing research affirms that learners in this transition are faced with diverse challenges as they try to adapt to the new school environment (Coetzee, 2013; Banks, 2014; Machard, 2015). Jacoby (2016) reveals that learners become self-conscious, lack self-esteem, and lack confidence in their learning abilities as they transition to a new school environment. Yet most of the studies done on learning diversity in ex-Model C schools failed to explore ways of enhancing the learning experience of learners in the transitioning from township and rural schools. This prompted the authors of this study to examine learners' experiences after their transition from rural and township schools to ex-Model C schools and to propose ways in which ex-Model C schools can enhance the learning experiences of such learners. Hence, the following research questions were used to discover to what extent this school demonstrates respect, optimism, trust and care towards these learners:

1. What is the current situation of learners transitioning from rural and township to ex-Model C schools?
2. What are the learning experiences of the learners transitioning from rural and township to ex-Model C schools?
3. How can the learning experiences of the learners be enhanced transitioning from rural and township to ex-Model C schools?

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section unpacks literature related to the learning experiences of learners making this transition, and overviews existing literature on the trends, relationships and different qualities of learning experiences in South African schools. On the whole, in reviewing the literature, the authors identified the gap and inconsistency in learning experiences for learners transitioning from rural and township to ex-Model C schools.

Essentially, it becomes evident from the limited body of relevant literature that the issue of learners transitioning to ex-Model C schools has been under-researched. For instance, Canham (2019: 155) asserts that 'the quality of the learning experience of the learners transitioning from rural and township to their destination schools (ex-Model C schools) remains largely under-researched and little understood'.

However, a recurrent theme in the literature on desegregation and multicultural learning in ex-Model C schools is that this is mostly a one-way process for the learners from rural and township schools moving to suburban schools (Monageng, 2012; Chisholm, 2015). Similarly, Bartlett (2016) and Kanyopa (2019) report that most parents perceive public rural and township schools as dysfunctional and poorly resourced, while ex-Model C schools are perceived to offer better education.

Moreover, the literature reveals the challenges and influencing factors that hinder the desegregation process within the education system (Slabbert & Naude, 2018). In essence, work by such scholars as Alexander and Mpisi (2014) and Christie and McKinney (2017) reveals that the desegregation process in ex-Model C schools seems not to result in improved racial relations. Instead, most learners transitioning into these schools are being 'converted and invited to be assimilated into white culture that operates in schools' environment' (Christie & McKinney, 2017: 18). Thus, the assimilationist culture of these schools makes learners of other races feel inferior as they always feel inadequate when compared to white learners.

Slabbert and Naude (2020) further affirm that learners from rural and township schools are confronted with racial tension which results in one racial group undermining the other. In the same vein, Stuurman (2013: 22) argues that 'in most cases race has remained the dominant factor in the marking of social privilege in ex-Model C schools'. Consequently, learners transitioning from rural and township to ex-Model C schools tend to experience some ambiguity regarding their identities within the learning environment. Goldstone (2017) similarly argues that learners transitioning into the ex-Model C school find this process ambiguous and troubling. Additionally, Slabbert and Naude (2020: 11) demonstrate that 'some of white learners in ex-Model C schools do not see themselves as Africans, rather they see themselves as Europeans'. As a result, learners of other races – such as Blacks, Indians and Coloureds – find difficulty in constructing their identities in the environment of these schools (Slabbert, 2015; Bartlett, 2016). Thus Bartlett (2016: 44) argues that 'it is impossible to escape the tensions and struggles of racism and whiteness prejudices in the ex-Model C schools'. The result is continued stereotyping of the learners from 'other races', especially of those who are transitioning from rural and township schools. These learners constantly encounter negative stereotypes about themselves: they are labelled as inferior in relation to the white learners at these schools.

A further challenging experience is the lack of academic support for learners in this transition. At present, only a few supporting services exist in the ex-Model C schools, and these services are not 'compatible with the diverse needs of economic and environment historically backgrounds deprived by each learner at school' (Machard, 2015: 22). Soupen (2017) further reports that learners transitioning to ex-Model C schools experience psychological and emotional problems that become evident in dysfunctional relationships between themselves and other learners at school or between them and some teachers of other races.

Though ways are needed to enhance the learning experiences of the learners making this transition, the findings from the relevant literature above reveals that most ex-Model C schools lack the qualified employees and suitable support structures that could provide these learners with meaningful learning experiences. The authors of this study argue that effective learning is built from the flow of learners' experiences and that enhancement of the learning experience is the central consideration for the successful achievement and improved academic performance of the learners making this transition.

INVITATIONAL EDUCATION THEORY

Invitational education theory is a theory of practices in educational settings that overcome tough psychosocial challenges (Purkey & Aspy, 2003). It was introduced in late 1970s by American psychologists William Purkey and Betty Siegel. Although this theory originated in the United States of America (USA), the theory

is popular throughout the world as it focuses on how to create and maintain a safe and inviting educational setting 'that summons people to realise their full potential' (Purkey & Novak, 2008: 11). The theory was developed after it was realised that we needed a greater understanding of what influences human failure and success in educational settings (Purkey & Siegel, 2003; Haigh, 2011). As a result, this theory came to highlight that a vital component in any educational organisation is people; therefore, schools and other educational institutions should view them as valuable, able and responsible (Haigh, 2011; Cain, 2013). In addition, this theory advocates for the creation of an inclusive and integrative learning environment by schools to cultivate respect, optimism and trust for diverse learners to allow everyone to grow and develop.

Ford (2015) affirms that invitational education theory is a new lens in educational psychology research and a critical paradigm as the theory constructs itself on addressing the challenges in the educational settings. Furthermore, research by Steyn (2016) maintains that, unlike other theories that have been introduced in the educational field, invitational education theory 'provides a critical framework that intentionally address the entire nature of human existence and opportunities in the educational organisation that makes life more exciting, satisfying while enriching the peoples' experiences' (Steyn, 2016: 59). This is aligned with the purpose of this study, which is to propose ways in which ex-Model C schools can enhance the learning experiences for the learners transitioning from rural and township schools.

The authors chose this lens because it emphasises the concrete schools' practices, safety and successful transformation of the problems that are likely to harm or demolish learners' ability in a school environment. Research by Shaw, Siegel and Schoenlein (2013: 24) reveals that 'the invitational education theory is transformative in nature' and is thus aligned with the critical paradigm that guides this study, which is itself based on a 'transformation agenda by placing more emphasis on the issues like reconstruction and restructuring of social and political power' (Creswell & Poth, 2018: 224) to empower and emancipate the marginalised.

On the whole, the transformative tendency of both the critical paradigm and the invitational education theory emerged as a countertheme to this study: being able to acknowledge the social reconstruction of ex-Model C schools' practices and programmes into a more multicultural and supportive manner which results in the enhancement of the learning experiences of the learners transitioning from rural and township schools.

METHODOLOGY

This article emerged from a qualitative study which was conducted in an ex-Model C school in the largest city of KwaZulu-Natal province, South Africa. The study was grounded in the Participatory Action Research (PAR) design and embraces the values of the critical paradigm as its worldview. Generally, qualitative research is a methodology that is concerned with developing explanations of social phenomena as they occur naturally in the research context (Ritchie et al., 2013). It is useful in describing participants' behaviour, feelings, experiences and perspectives; thus, the qualitative research approach is appropriate to this study because of its focus on the learning experiences of these learners in transition.

PAR, specifically, is a qualitative research design that focuses on solving certain problems in research contexts with the full participation of research participants (Scotland, 2012; Wahyuni, 2012). The authors chose the PAR design because the main aim of this study is to propose ways in which ex-Model C schools can enhance the learning experiences of these learners. In essence, the worldviews and assumptions of the critical paradigm intend to emancipate or transform society (Cohen, Manion & Marrison, 2018). Its historical realist perspective recognises that many realities in society have been shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender values that intentionally favour one group over others (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006; Scotland, 2012). It is also known as a transformative paradigm because its main agenda

is to change social and political views and evaluate all forms of inequalities that exist in a society, while seeking the empowerment and emancipation of people in that society (Atkins & Wallace, 2012).

These commitments were thus reflected in the study, which aimed to transform some of the practices and programmes in this ex-Model C school on the basis of invitational education theory, which aims to create safe and inviting learning environment that will help learners grow and develop, which, in this case, were all learners transitioning from rural and township schools. Again, the transformative nature of this theory seems to concur with both the critical paradigm and PAR design, as these three concepts aim to liberate people by 'promoting full engagement of all people in the research process especially those who are oppressed and marginalised so as to act towards their deprived freedom' (Kanyopa, 2018: 47).

SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

The research context and participants (the co-researchers) were selected using a purposive and convenient sampling method. The researchers deliberately selected the research site (location of the study) and eight participants because they were easily accessible and convenient to the researchers. The selected school is located in a suburban area known as the Upper Highway area or the Outer West region of Durban City (King, 2013) in the Pinetown education district. The school Peace primary school (pseudonym) is an ex-Model C school located in a predominantly white area, followed by Indians, Coloureds and a small number of Blacks. It was established in 1970 and is also known as one of the most popular primary schools. It is a co-educational public school that offers quality education from grades 1 to 7. Peace primary school is also known as one of the educational forerunners in Durban with an enrolment of over 400 learners and 150 staff members, which include teachers, administrative staff, interns, groundskeepers, and aftercare staff. Every year, the school has a record of about thirty learners who transit from rural and township schools to it.

Merriam and Tisdell (2015) report that a purposive sample is a non-probability sample, whereby selection of the participants and research site is based on the characteristics and the objective of the study. It is also known as judgmental, selective or subjective sampling, whilst convenience (or availability) sampling is a non-probability sampling method, whereby the participants are selected because of their convenient accessibility and proximity to the researchers (Flick, 2014). In particular, the sample of this study comprised two female and two male grade-6 learners (pseudonyms: L1, L2, L3 and L4) who for four years have transitioned from rural and township to ex-Model C school and were between the ages of 12 and 15 years; two grade-6 teachers: a female (T1) and male (T2); and two female parents of the learners (P1 and P2). The reason for selecting only two learners' parents and not all four was because they were on the School Government Board (SGB) and are also family friends of one of the researchers. This was convenient; they were easily accessible to the researcher. All the participants are beneficial to this study as they were able to share their ideas and explain how schools can enhance the learning experiences of the transitioning learners.

DATA GENERATION METHOD

This study used a focus group discussion and a drawing art-based method to generate data. The two parents and the two teachers, who are the class teachers for these learners, were engaged in the focus group discussion. Scholars affirm that focus group discussion is a method of generating data that is cheaper and quicker (Krueger & Casey, 2014; Yin, 2015). In the same vein, Creswell and Creswell (2018: 103) affirm that 'focus group is a quicker and cheaper data generation method, whereby the process of generating data is done by the social gathering, conversation and discussion between the researcher and participants'. Further, Cohen et al. (2013) and Padgett (2016) postulate that focus group discussion is a method of data generation that enables a researcher to explore the participant's feelings, thoughts and behaviours.

The discussion and debates in the focus group provided this study with rich data as it enabled full engagement with the participants in discussions through open-ended questions. Participants were able to reflect, discuss and argue with each other to produce in-depth information on the relevant learning experiences. Additionally, this method enabled participants to critically discuss issues and suggest solutions to how learning experiences could be enhanced. The focus group discussion was divided into four phases, as influenced by PAR design. The first phase was **planning**, whereby the participants as co-researchers and the researchers started by discussing the ex-Model C school's programmes, policies and practices that seem to influence the learning experiences of the learners transitioning from rural and township schools. The second phase was **action** in which co-researchers were asked to reconstruct or restructure those programmes, policies and practices in their daily routines. The modification inclines them to be more inclusive, to accommodate learner diversity and to enhance their learning experiences, regardless of their background, ethnic group or culture. In the third phase, both the researchers and co-researchers **observed** the daily schedules at the school to determine if the adjustment and restructuring of programmes and practices brought any significant change to the learning experiences of learners transitioning from rural and township schools. In the fourth phase, co-researchers and researchers **reflected** on whether there is a need for more reconstruction or adjustment of anything in the school environment which they think could enhance the learning experiences of these learners.

The study further used an art-based data generation method to explore the learning experiences of the learners transitioning from rural and township to ex-Model C schools. Rule and John (2011: 70) affirm: 'Drawing is a method that creates opportunity for the participants to generate data that is not contingent on the language skills'. This method also provides access to unconscious views and beliefs. Furthermore, this method entails participants' thoughts by drawing and talking or drawing and writing about the meaning rooted in their drawings (Khanare, 2012). Therefore, the drawing process in this study was undertaken in four sessions that lasted one hour. The first session was to explain to the participants (four grade-6 learners, two boys and two girls) how to do the drawings. The researchers showed them examples of how to use metaphors in drawings; thus, the first session corresponds to the **planning** phase of PAR, which guides the researcher and co-researchers on the research preparations. The second session was the drawing session in which pencils, rubbers and white A4 papers were issued to the participants. They were advised to think deeply about themselves for ten minutes. Then, they were also asked what ways they think the ex-Model C school can use to enhance their learning experiences and why they think they need enhancements. Again, the second session corresponds to the second phase of PAR, which is **action**. Furthermore, in the third session, participants were asked to draw a picture using a metaphor to describe 'who they are and explain what the picture means to them'. The participants were given 20 minutes to draw and add a caption to the drawing. This session corresponds to the third phase of PAR, which leads the co-researchers to **observe** things that influence the enhancement of learning experiences. Lastly, during the fourth session, which lasted twenty minutes, each of the participants was given three minutes to share or talk about their drawings and questions were asked by other group members, as well as by the researchers. This session corresponds to the fourth phase of PAR, which allows co-researchers to **reflect** on the things that they discovered and those that represent their experiences, knowledge and understandings in their drawings. Furthermore, the researchers probed the participants with more questions to gain a deeper understanding of the issues investigated. This session was audio-recorded with the consent from the participants. Thus, the use of this interactive art-based method enabled the learners to speak out and to interact with one another through dialogue.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data generated from the drawings and transcribed focus group discussions were analysed by using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA is a problem-oriented approach that is transdisciplinary and consists of sets of theories and methods that are used in education research (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997).

In the same vein, Van Dijk (2015) and Gee (2014) argue that CDA is a multidisciplinary approach that focuses on understanding the social problems that seriously threaten the lives and well-being of people in a society. Moreover, the primary aim of CDA is to provide the tools for addressing the challenges in educational sites, systems and practices by using its moves from description and interpretation to explaining how discourse constructs itself in the school's social world (Van Dijk, 2015).

Therefore, this study utilised CDA to analyse the transcribed textual and visual data retrieved from the drawing and focus group discussion processes. Kanyopa (2018) argues that the critical paradigm and CDA are both socially committed models that address different challenges in educational sites through a range of theoretical perspectives. Data analysis in this study took place under three levels of CDA. Fairclough (2003) and Wodak and Meyer (2015) assert that, to accomplish analysis by means of CDA, data has to go through (i) textual analysis, (ii) discursive practices analysis, and (iii) sociocultural analysis. Consequently, on the first level, which is textual data analysis, the raw data from the focus group discussion and the drawing sessions were processed to see if there were any similar data to inform the themes and codes. On the second level of CDA, which aims to interpret the configuration of discourse practices in an organisation, the researchers were mostly concerned with how the participants interpret their drawings and transform their texts into meaningful data. On the third level of CDA, which is sociocultural analysis, both data descriptions and interpretations were analysed to suggest a meaningful explanation of why and how social practices should be constituted to enhance the learning experiences of the learners transitioning from rural and township schools.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The ethical considerations in research involve what is proper or improper and right or wrong when undertaking a research project (Gajjar, 2013). Therefore, the authors of this study sought the permission from the principal of the school, and the selected teachers, parents and learners by issuing them with an informed consent letter with a declaration to be signed. For learners, because they are minors, permission was sought from their parents or guardians and they signed assent forms, which were written in simple English for their better understanding of the aims and objectives of the study. This was done prior to inclusion in the study. The explanation of all ethical issues and their rights to participate in the study, including voluntary participation, was clearly given before data collection. The anonymity of all the participants and the relevant school was protected by using pseudonyms.

TRUSTWORTHINESS

Leung (2015) affirms that, in order to achieve trustworthiness, a study must use the proper methods of data generation and data analysis. As mentioned earlier, data were generated through the focus group discussion and art-based method. The focus group transcriptions were issued to the participants to read and confirm correctness of interpretation and to verify that no information was omitted or manipulated. Furthermore, **credibility** was ensured by selecting appropriate participants, who were learners transitioning from rural and township to ex-Model C schools, and their teachers and parents in order to obtain useful data. Again, this study ensured **confirmability** by focusing on the reflections of the participants and maintaining a sense of awareness and openness to the study. The issue of **dependability** was made tenable through the discussion by explaining how and why the participants and research site were selected for the study, how the data were generated and for how long. Furthermore, this study ensured **transferability** by providing a dense description of its population, context, sample and sampling procedures, data generation methods, and data analysis. The next section provides direct quotes from the participants' transcribed text in order to add to the richness of the findings presented.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This section presents the findings of the study on the learners transitioning from township and rural school to ex-Model C schools. The findings are presented under three main themes: (i) the influence of learners' behaviour on the environment, (ii) multifaceted learning experiences of learners transitioning from rural and township to ex-Model C school, and (iii) perceptions on strategies for enhancing learning experiences.

Theme 1: The influence of learners' behaviour on the environment

This theme emerged from the findings that transitioning to the new school environment had implications for the learners' behaviour. While exploring the observation of learners during their first days of transitioning, the comments made by the teachers and parents showed that the learners, like other people, should be viewed as responsible, able and valuable, and, therefore, should be treated accordingly (Hunter, 2015; Ford, 2015; Purkey & Novak, 2008). Thus, the participants' (teachers and parents) responses indicate that, during the transitioning phase, learners are confronted with some challenges in adjusting to the new school environment and this affect their behaviours.

T2 (male educator) elaborated:

> … what I observed is normal for every human being not to be sure when facing new environment… new people… new this, new that… so, even these learners in the beginning they were not sure about most of everything in our school environment, even the things that they learned and this affects them negatively…

T1 (female educator) noted that

> … for what I saw from these learners during their first days of transitioning was the struggling to cope with our school culture… as we all know how hard is resentment towards a new culture especially our school culture which is mostly based on Britain…

Again, parent participants asked if there were any changes or improvement in learners' behaviour once they transitioned from rural and township schools' behaviours.

P1 (first parent) indicated:

> … I have noticed so many positive changes on my son's academic progress… but the amazing thing is that my son became so passionate with sports… and especially rugby… (she smiles) … he even joined the rugby school team.

In the same vein, P2 (second parent) concurred:

> … before my daughter was so lazy with school's work… but since she moved to ex-Model C school she become very committed and responsible for her school works… and yep… she improved her marks so much compared to what she was get in a rural school.

Therefore, this theme reveals that the school environment has a big influence on learners' behaviour. After transitioning to ex-Model C schools, the transitioning learners seemed to be motivated in their new school environment. The co-researchers' responses indicate that learners made significant improvements, which are mainly because of the inviting learning environment created in ex-Model C school. To support this, Goldstone (2017) argues that learners who attend ex-Model C schools experience greater safety, which results in an increase in their self-confidence and self-esteem. Additionally, Kanyopa (2019) affirms that

the ex-Model C school learning environment equips the transitioning learners with the ability to face the development and challenges of today's and tomorrow's worlds.

On the whole, this paper argues that the school environment is both inviting and inclusive, making learners motivated and passionate about their studies. It has also enabled them to develop skills, such as speaking different languages, including English and Afrikaans, and becoming active in extracurricular activities and sport.

Theme 2: The multifaceted learning experiences of learners transitioning from rural and township to ex-Model C school

This theme emerged from the findings: transitioning to the new school environment had a complex impact on the diverse learning experiences of the learners. Both learners and their parents experienced inviting and disinviting factors from the school environment. The participants' responses indicated that all of the participants (learners, teachers and parents) encountered a negative experience during the transitioning phase as follows.

T1 revealed:

> I experienced the challenge on getting close with two new learners… only because we are not the same ethnic group… and I think by having rules and expectations visible in our classroom makes them see us as… we are strictly just as those classroom rules and regulations… maybe that is why they do not get so close to us easily…

T2 mentioned:

> … ooh… I remember when they were not able to concentrate on multitasks… ooh my God… it was hectic for me as a teacher to spend a lot of time to the one learner… guiding him/her on the one task and make sure the task is successfully… before jump into another one…

On the other hand, parents also had negative experiences during the transitioning phase; for instance, when they faced financial constraints and poor guidance on how to deal with their children's schoolwork. This was evident in their responses.

P2:

> … I remember when I transitioning my son to ex-model C school on 2015… few days I was fired from the company where I was working… so I experienced some financial difficulty, then I decided to speak with principal to put my son under the exceptional… but because my son was new at school… my application was declined…

P1 also commented on the insufficient support on understanding their children's' education:

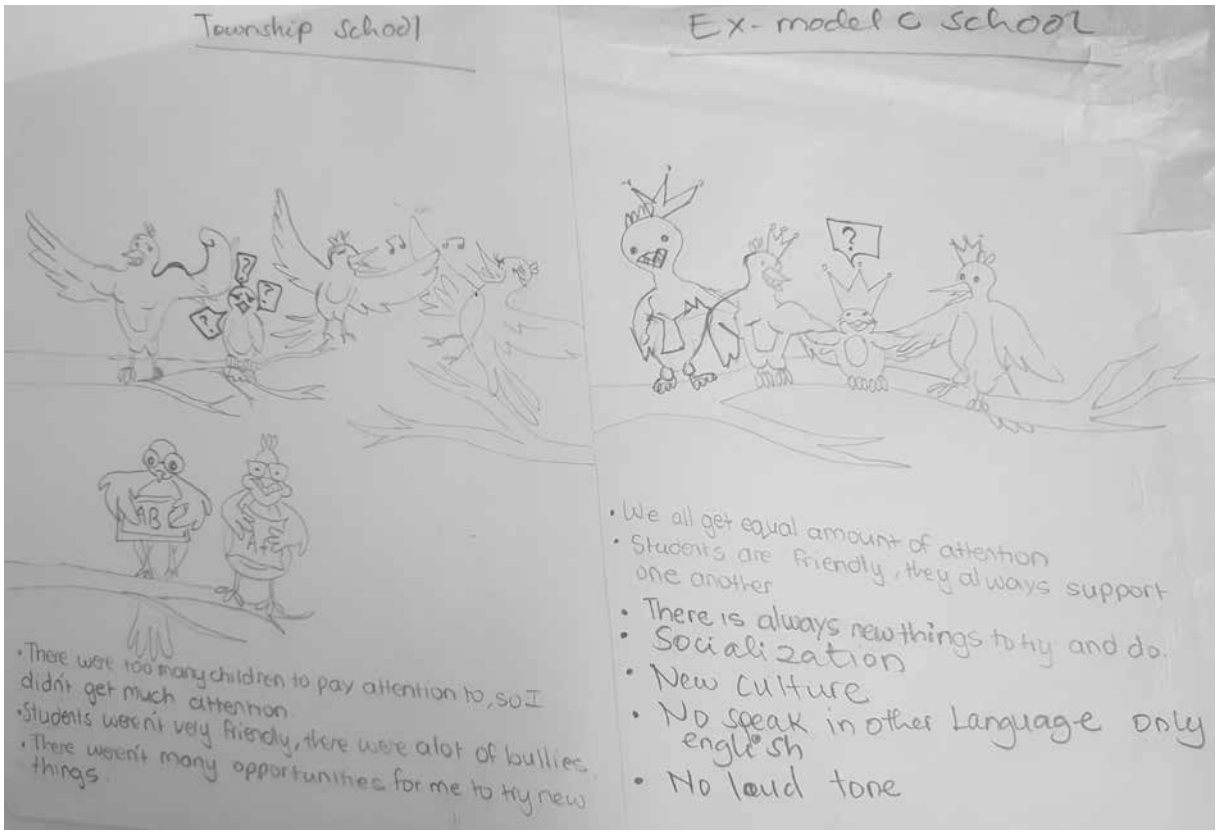
> … Hmmm… for me it was very frustrating phase… because I total failed to understand my daughter at all… [She laughs] … I think she was under pressure because every day she was coming with different stories about her new school…

Learners also mentioned a lack of interaction or relationship with their peers. Besides, they experienced a lack of formal orientation to the new school during their transitioning process which resulted in difficulty in accessing their classrooms easily.

L3 (a girl), who described herself as 'a small and confused bird' in her drawing, as shown in Figure 1, explained:

> … Mmmmm… learners in this school is so difficult to relate with diverse learners… I only managed to talk and communicate after almost three weeks since my transitioning to this school and hmmm! It was so hard to get new friends.

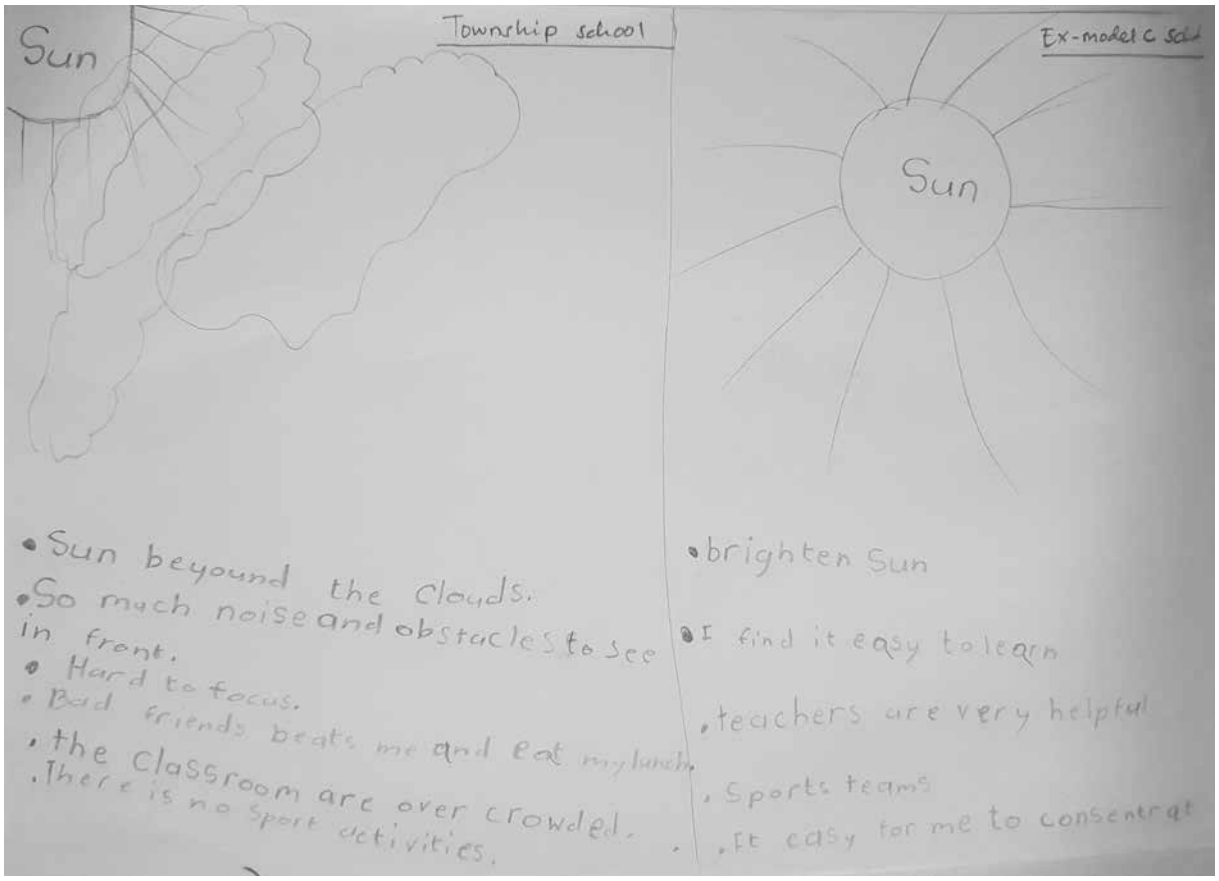
Figure 1:
L3 who depicts herself as a small and confused bird



In addition, L1 (a boy), who described himself as a sun, and as shown in Figure 2, further indicated:

> … this school is big and all the classes are looking the same. I remember I failed to know where my class is. I was late for classes on so many times because I was unable to find my classroom.

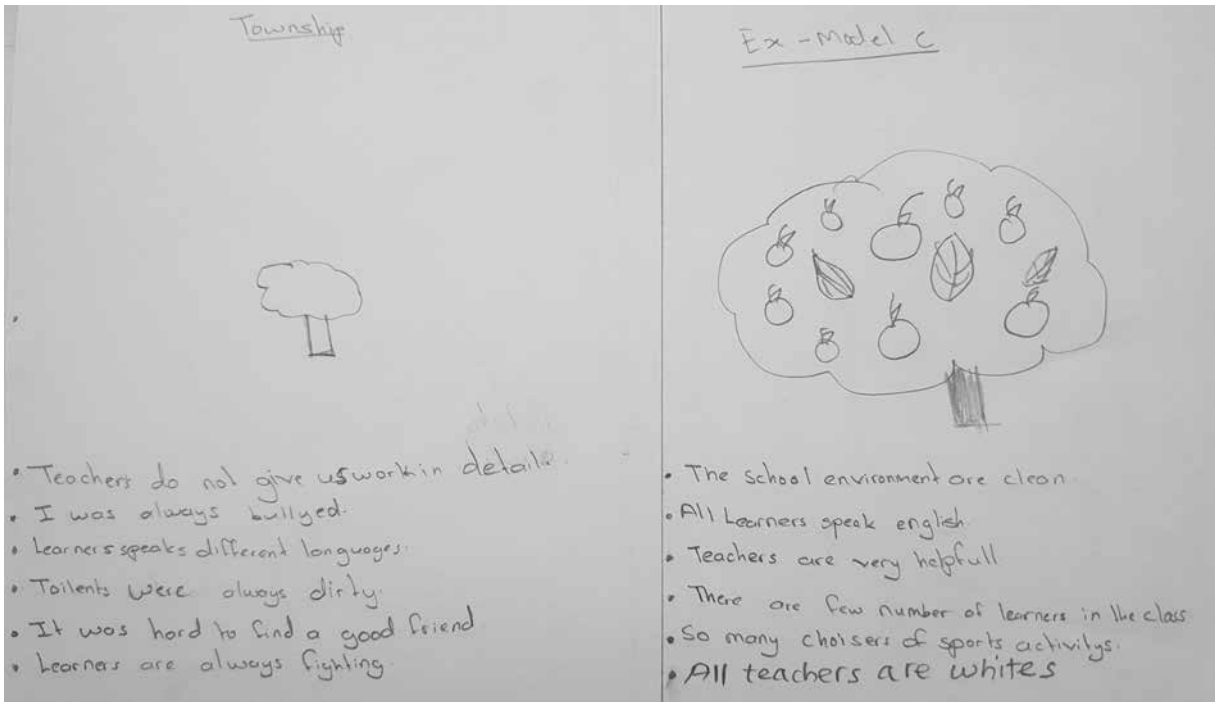
Figure 2:
L1 who depicts himself as a sun



L4 (a girl) described herself as a tree, as shown in Figure 3:

> … ooh it was my first time to be in a school which all teachers are whites… it was not easy for me to understand the way they talk; so quick.

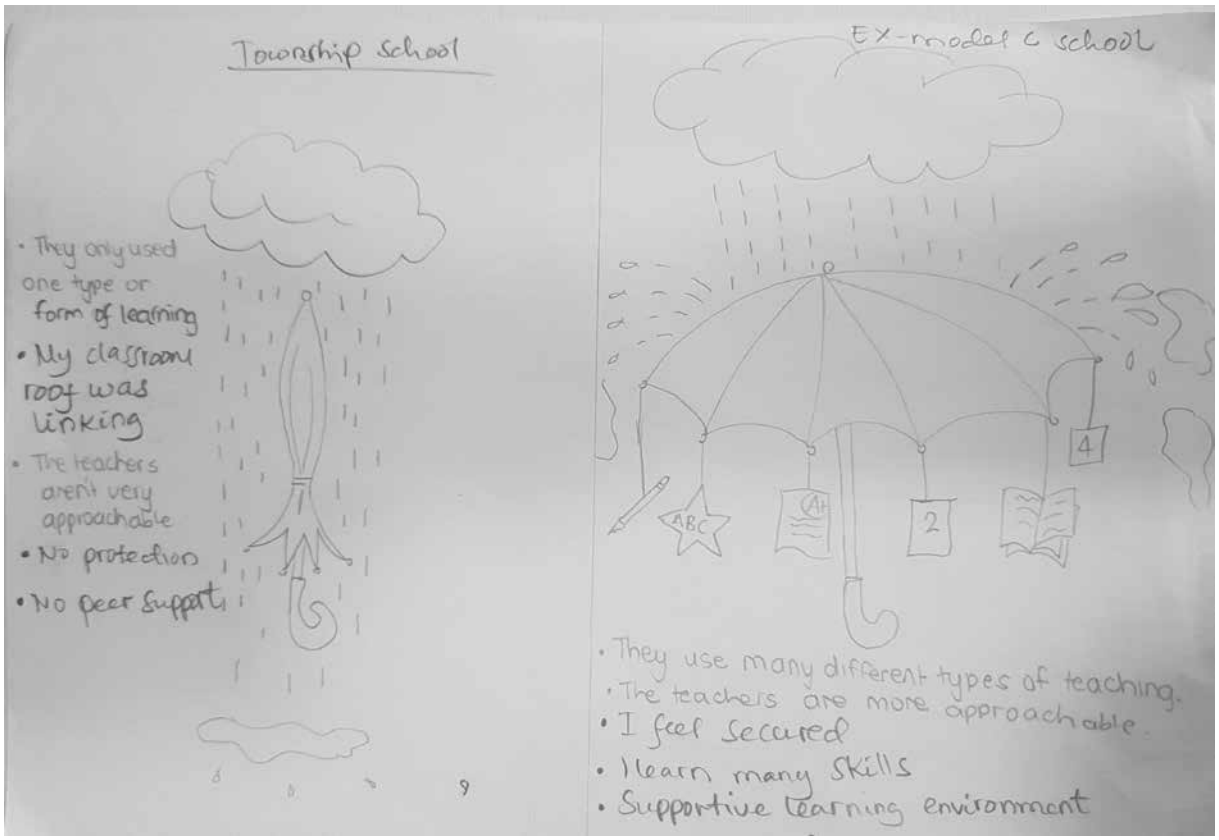
Figure 3:
L4 who depicts herself as a tree



Despite the negative learning experiences that parents, learners and their teachers faced during the transitioning phase, L2 (a boy), who described himself as an umbrella, and as shown in Figure 4, revealed some positive learning experiences:

> …. in this school I feel secured and motivated that is why I become unfolded umbrella… [he smiled] I have five teachers teach me different subjects… my teachers here are helpful… I learn many things like sport, Afrikaans… and children are not naughty like in township school…

Figure 4:
L2 who depicts himself as an umbrella



Additionally, L3 concurred by saying that

> … but here in ex-model C school I found it easy to focus in the classroom, I play netball every week, my class has only 20 children and also my teacher helps me when I don't understand some instructions…

L4 also affirmed that

> … now I know to work with computer… I can speak Afrikaans… and I know to play volleyball.

Findings from this theme reveal that learning experiences in this ex-Model C school are complex; during the transitioning phase, both parents and learners experienced both inviting and disinviting factors. As evidenced from Canham (2019), in most cases, learning experiences in predominantly white institutions have contributed to existing stereotypes in the dominant culture of the dominant ethnic group. Therefore, this paper argues that the implementation of invitational education practices in ex-Model C schools will result in an intentionally inviting learning environment, whereby the learners will not only experience the challenges during their transitioning phase but will also experience an intentionally positive learning environment that will help them in their learning progress and development. The findings show, for instance, that transitioning learners received support from people in this school (teachers), developed computer skills, and learned other languages and communication skills. Additionally, the small number of learners in the classroom was regarded as an inviting learning environment in their new school.

Theme 3: The perceptions on strategies for enhancing learning experiences

During the focus group discussion and the drawing sessions, participants were asked to suggest different strategies that they believe ex-Model C schools can use to enhance their learning experiences. Participants

highlighted several ways in which the school's management could develop inviting programmes and learning activities, such as excursions to museums, group work, the creation of cultural awareness, engaging them in dialogue, and properly orienting learners.

T1 indicated:

> Mmmmh… I think it is important for a school to conduct a formal orientations for the new learners… also we as teachers and other staffs and learners should acts as instructors and also by daily contacts with them… inside and outside the classroom we will be able to motivate them to learn.

P2 stated:

> It is necessary that all activities in the school environment be collaborative and cooperative through meaningful involvement of all cultures that shape our learners and staff. Although it might be difficult in the beginning… But this will bring a better and good understanding of other cultures… which will turn to be easy for someone to adjust to another culture.

Additionally, participants believed that creating an inviting programme that effectively engages learners in sharing their ideas, thoughts, opinions and perceptions, and using one-on-one teaching approaches, will make a learner feel more invited. Also, using the learners' lived experiences will help develop a sense of belonging, which will enable them to respond to people's reactions and improve on their thinking ability and understanding of one another.

P1 stated:

> Mmm! I think teachers should apply one to one consultation methods to the new learners… this will help them to understand and develop the habit to learn early.

L2 stressed that

> … also us as learners we learn so many thing in our daily interactions… so I think in order to enhance our learning experiences, we should be given a chance to share, to talk more about our different lives experiences…

L1 mentioned that

> Mmmm! For me I really like to learn things from parks, museum, because it is easy to remember and I also like to learn by doing. I like when our teacher gives us a task to do inside or outside the classroom.

L3 also commented on creative learning. She said she learned more when the teacher asked her to create something or to draw a picture:

> … like what we did here… with our drawings… this kind of learning is easy, also it help us to be creative and to think… it also easy to remember.

In a specific way, L4 commented on the people and procedures in ex-Model C schools, as sometimes their actions can be perceived as creating a disinviting learning environment for learners transitioning from rural and township to ex-Model C schools. She commented as follows:

> Oooh! I think teachers should give us time to choose the groups by our self, because sometimes they group us with learners who are not willing to help or it is better if they assign one peer partner who really wants to help to understand the school environment and other stuffs.

Moreover, excerpts from the participants showed that an intentional learning enhancement process will help learners transitioning from rural and township schools to develop a sense of belonging as well as to overcome the anxieties and fear that seemed to confront them. Christie and McKinney (2017) emphasise the decoloniality of ethos and policies to bring valuable insight to the social relations in ex-Model C schools. Vernon (2014) and Steyn (2016) also assert that, if ex-Model C schools use invitational education theory of practices to enhance the learning experiences of its learners, learners will develop a sense of belonging and will also be helped to feel more accepted and be able to reach their full potential, which will enable greater development of these learners.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The study's findings revealed that learners transitioning from rural and township to ex-Model C schools experienced both negative and positive learning experiences. Hence, the findings revealed that the learners' learning experiences are complex and multifaceted, and that they relate to, for example, language issues; adaptation and adjustment issues; and difficulties in maintaining relationships with their peers and teachers from different races, language groups and ethnicities. On the other hand, the learners also experienced the school as engaging because they developed a sense of belonging and the school was safe and conducive for them to read. However, in order to help these learners enhance their learning experiences, this study suggests that the ex-Model C schools' SGBs provide opportunities and encourage interactions between new learners with their peers and their teachers, and create more conducive school environments as well as policies and programmes for effective learner integration. This also recommended the use of invitational education practices in ex-Model C schools to enhance their learning experiences and to support them in dealing with all the challenges they experience. Therefore, this study concludes by emphasising that learners transitioning from rural and township schools to ex-Model C schools are responsible, able and valuable. Furthermore, their learning experiences are shaped by an inviting learning environment that is conducive, supportive and caring, and that improves their knowledge and academic achievements.

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The elephant in the room: Power and race at play in art practice in primary schools[1]

Kobie (J.J.) Meiring, Stellenbosch University, South Africa[2]
Karolien Perold-Bull, Stellenbosch University, South Africa
Elmarie Costandius, Stellenbosch University, South Africa

ABSTRACT

Pervasive exercising of power in educational institutions and processes could be a contributing factor to the undervalued status of art education in South African primary schools. A case study approach that aimed at gaining insight into power relations that played out in the establishment of an art education programme in a low-income area in the Western Cape, South Africa was employed. The article addresses problems of race, inequality, and exclusion as well as schools as possible spaces for critical transformative dialogue. In order to address the impoverished status of art education in primary schools, teachers should become knowledgeable in the functioning of hidden curricula to be able to work towards unbiased observation of learners. Inequality and exclusion emphasised feelings of discomfort, which relates to language and learning barriers as well as limited material and human resources. It is suggested that dialogue could cultivate within teachers greater understanding of the intersection of class, race and power, and the unfolding thereof in education. In striving for a meaningful way to work towards social justice, schools could become spaces for critical transformative dialogue in role players' detachment from the symbolic forms of meaning that constitute their histories, social constructions, beliefs, viewpoints and preferences.

Keywords: art education, power relations, hidden curricula, conflict, dialogue, primary school, South Africa

INTRODUCTION

Power relations, invisibly upheld by hidden curricula[3], play an important role in prevailing perceptions of art education. Although policy instructions state art education as important to learner development, evidence suggests that art as classroom practice is regarded as both affordable only to the privileged and associated with whiteness. Consequently, the arts are considered as 'secondary' (Moloi, 2012: 68) to the basic skill disciplines (that is, languages, mathematics and science) and seen as a 'nice-to-have'

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2 0000-0002-8991-8824

3 The hidden curriculum is described by Afshar and Yazdani (2018: 200) as a peaceful and silent message, implicit, non-explicit and unintentional. It is an operational, unspoken message that is not specifically stated, but consists of unspoken codes, and is inherent in culture and organisational structure. It is conflicting, ideological information that is transmitted by teachers or learners with or without recognition.

activity. Through an analysis of a case study in a low-income area in Delft, Western Cape, South Africa, this article addresses the negotiation of power relations that played out during the implementation of a specific art education programme. The objectives of the study were to gain nuanced insight into the variety of power relations at play in the implementation of the programme and to explore the power relations in relation to one another. It sought to do this primarily through involving learners, parents and teachers in the art programme and through the recognition of possible limitations of cross-cultural research as white researchers in South Africa. By considering the context of social justice in South African education, the study highlights the themes of race, inequality, and exclusion, as well as schools as spaces for critical transformative dialogue, and it raises the question of appropriate teacher training in striving for an inclusive and more just education system.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Although the transformation process since democracy in 1994 has brought about major changes, specifically at policy and curriculum levels, historical disadvantages brought about by colonialism and apartheid are still deeply rooted in South African education. The educational experience for most South African learners has generally not changed significantly, and, specifically, not where the arts are concerned. Prew (as cited in Department of Education [DoE], 2009: 3) refers to education in South Africa as a two-tiered system: 'We talk equality but we implement differentiation.' Although many factors influence the perpetuation of economic and sociocultural ideologies that serve to maintain systemic social injustices, the racial issue is a significant factor underpinning the negotiation of power relations and addressing the complex nature of social justice in South Africa. The study on which this article reports applied the theories of power and power relations by Michel Foucault (1980) as well as Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) framework on cultural reproduction to the South African education context. In addition, education-related material is presented by way of Michael Apple's (1990, 1993, 2004) theories on hidden curricula.

Power relations

> It is when we acknowledge how power has been bestowed on us by our roles, the colour of our skin, and the accident of our births and families that we can possibly extend ourselves and are able to understand somebody else's oppression. Then, we own our responsibility to end the oppression and advocate for equity, respect, and justice. (Tuason, 2005: 45)

Power is described by Foucault as not just a mechanism that implies certain persons' exercise of power over others, but as 'manifold forms of domination that can be exercised within society, and which is in constant flux and negotiation' (Foucault, 1980: 96). The term 'power/knowledge' is used by Foucault (1980) to indicate that power is shaped through known systems of knowledge, scientific understanding and 'truth'. These concepts or 'truths' are reinforced through the education system, the media and the continuous change of political and economic beliefs. Power becomes a 'battle' for the status of truth, as well as the carrying out of its economic and political roles (Foucault, 1980: 91). Bourdieu (1986: 471) also refers to power relations as a social order that has been increasingly ingrained in people's minds through 'cultural products' as well as through systems of education, language, judgements, values and classification, and events of ordinary life.

According to Weedon (1987: 164), the education system is central to the way power structures operate in society and, as such, allows for the investment in values, modes and preferences of the dominant social group. This causes an imbalance in power relations. The imbalance in power occurs on all levels and is among the factors that underpin inequality. Addressing inequality entails first asking how social power is implemented and how social relations of gender, class and race are shaped and perpetuated, and 'where we might look for weak points more open to challenge and transformation' (Weedon, 1987: 132). According to Weedon (1987: 35),

> [p]ower relations structure all areas of life, the family, education and welfare, the worlds of work and politics, culture and leisure. Power relations determine who does what and for whom, what we are and what we might become.

In this way, power relations are at the core of the way cultural ideologies and practices are reproduced.

Cultural reproduction

What we assign power to – the symbols, meaning and actions that form the basis of everyday life – are what will be reproduced by future generations. Cultural reproduction refers to a system where norms, values, meanings, symbols and activities are transferred from one generation to another within a specific social body by means of socialisation processes. Although there is disagreement (Gartman, 1991) on the value of Bourdieu's theory on cultural reproduction, it provides a model to explain how education systems seem to play a vital role in the perpetuation of stratification and inequality in society (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

Bourdieu's (1986) position on socialisation implies that all cognitive structures and practical knowledge that have become internalised originate from forms of classification and historical schemes of perception and appreciation. These personifications are seen as common to all agents of society and become accepted and 'normalised', and, in this way, allow for the production of beliefs and structures seen as the basis for a common, meaningful world.

Apple (1990: 32) explains how Bourdieu's focus on the student's ability to cope with what might be called a 'middle-class culture' provides an example of the influence of the power of socialisation. Schools accept the social gift of the 'cultural capital' of the middle class as natural. By implying that all children have had equal access to cultural capital, those who already have the linguistic and social competencies to handle middle-class culture are covertly favoured. Just as economic systems are engineered to favour those who have economic capital, the school system favours those who inherit cultural capital.

Schooling, via both formal and hidden curricula, is used as a mechanistic and socialising filter to process knowledge and people. For example, different sentiments are taught to diverse school groups, influenced by social indicators such as class, gender and race, which could lead to the legitimisation of the limited roles certain populations ultimately play in society (Apple, 1990).

Hidden curricula

Literature on schooling suggests that the production of education programmes reveals two types of curricula (Eisner, 1994). The first type is the formal and official programme, designed by education authorities with detailed descriptions of educational content, objectives and activities. In the second type, the hidden curricula, essentials are not clearly laid out, but are taught covertly via social interactions that deal with attitudes, principles and behaviours.

The way in which hidden curricula covertly function is best described by the concept of 'hegemony', which implies that fundamental patterns in society are held together by unspoken assumptions or rules, economic control, and power. It suggests a web of conventions that, when internalised by learners, becomes legitimatised and normalised knowledge (Apple, 1990). The very fact that these assumptions are unspoken enlarges their potency as aspects of hegemony (Apple, 1990). Hegemony acts as the vehicle through which subtle connections that exist between educational activity and particular economic and socio-political interests become normalised.

Apple (2004: 174) maintains that 'Schools are seen as connected to a marketplace; especially to the global capitalist market and the labour needs and processes of such a market.' Disciplines (subjects)

are either highly 'commodified' (Apple, 1990: 37) by the system or tolerated as a fringe activity in the curriculum. Disciplines on which the capitalist system feeds are those that are kept in favour by hidden curricula. According to this approach, 'schools help perpetuate an unjust social order through conveying beliefs, values, and norms that are effective in political, social, and economic life' (Apple, 2004: 21). In this way, the inattention to art education that prevails in many schools in the country could be linked to the way in which hidden curricula correspond to ideological needs of cultural capital (Giese & Apple, 2006). Henri Giroux (as cited in Palmer, 2001) warns against schools as sites that simply perpetuate cultural reproduction and suggests that schools should instead be environments where critical imagination and discussion can occur as well as where struggles and journeys for the search and imagining of new solutions to the complexities of a current world experience are invited.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN ART PROGRAMME AT A PRIMARY SCHOOL IN DELFT, WESTERN CAPE

The current state of inequality of educational opportunities is the issue that lay at the core of the idea of establishing an art education programme at a primary school in Delft. The art programme that became the practical project for this study was run and funded by a partnership between a Western Cape Education Department (WCED) institution, Tygerberg Art Centre, and a non-profit organisation, A Reaching Hand, which collaborated with the University of South Africa (Unisa). The programme provides weekly (during school hours) as well as Saturday art classes to learners (age group 5–13) from the local primary school and the rest of community. The idea of the programme was initiated at a meeting between the stakeholders (Tygerberg Art Centre, A Reaching Hand and Unisa) and a community member in Delft who expressed her need to address the lack of exposure to art education experiences of her own children, as well as of the community of Delft. This idea is in accordance with the intended function of the art centres initiated by the WCED to provide opportunities for learners not exposed to the visual arts. However, despite the fact that art centres are WCED institutions and function within the same governmental and institutional framework as all government schools, engaging in programmes across cultural, class and economic barriers proves challenging.

Art education for learners is clearly indicated in government policies and curriculum statements, but there is a discrepancy between what realises as lived experience of learners with regard to art education and what is promoted by the curriculum. Many principals, teachers and parents perceive art education as not being vital to the education process. The arts are regarded as 'nice but not necessary' (Eisner, 2002: xi). Moloi (2012) maintains that the arts hold a secondary place compared to other subject areas. The emphasis on mathematics and science, brought about by amendments to the education practices of apartheid, has caused many schools to concentrate on the development of mathematical and scientific abilities. This preference may also be caused by lack of knowledge of the educational value of arts experiences as rich opportunities for learning and the potential to facilitate a rich variety of learning opportunities through the arts (Westraadt, 2011). In this regard, Van Graan (as cited in Lochner, 2011: 137) refers to how the 'non-prioritisation of culture and the arts in development' is perpetuated. He refers to the majority of South Africans who experience a lack of artistic skills and resources and relates this lack to the ensuing difficulty of maintaining and finding identity, making meaning of lived experiences as well as finding difficulty in articulating aspirations, fears and ideas. He states that, if development is designed to overcome the historical disadvantages of colonialism and apartheid, then it should be rooted in a philosophy where human beings are seen as equals and observed in a holistic way, rather than seen as self-serving and in pursuit only of economic or political benefits. Westraadt (2015) maintains that transformative teaching is possible through art education in that it allows for cognitive and emotional development of both teacher and learner. Westraadt (2016, par. 3) argues:

> Art education can open up avenues for different ways of knowing – for all subjects. These include the aesthetic, scientific, interpersonal, formal and practical modes that can be encountered through

> the senses, intellect and emotions. Making and appreciating art involves the emotional and mental faculties.

Research in schools indicates that most teachers do not feel confident about teaching art. Many omit art from their teaching programmes or use prescriptive resource materials and theoretical tasks from textbooks. This approach limits creativity and knowledge acquisition (Westraadt, 2016). In this regard, research (Department of Arts and Culture, 2011) on art education revealed that the way art education is shifted to the periphery brings education inequality in South Africa into clear focus. Likewise, Lochner (2011: 136) states that art is perceived as an 'elitist practice' that tends to alienate many. This brought into focus that art has become interlinked with notions of race, class and economic status, all of which mark the divide between the educational 'haves' and 'have nots'.

The core concerns that shaped and led to the final research question were: How and why is the neglect of art education 'sanctioned' within the framework of schools and government despite the promotion thereof in curriculum statements? In addition, how and why is there an apparent buy-in by parents, teachers and school management in this neglect? In this regard, Gore (1995: 166) contends that the

> apparent continuity in pedagogical practice, across sites and over time, has to do with subtle, but pervasive, exercises of power relations in educational institutions and processes that remain untouched by the majority of curriculum and other reforms.

This introduces the main research question of this study: How have power relations been negotiated in the establishment of an art education programme at a primary school in Delft, Western Cape? The objectives of the study were to gain nuanced insight into the variety of power relations at play as well as how these power relations relate to one another.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research approach, which implies an interpretive lens, was implemented for the purposes of this study, and the case study design was chosen for empirical purposes. This study involved the exploration of a specific issue (the negotiation of power relations) using a single case (the establishment of an art education programme) for the purpose of 'maintaining the holistic and meaningful characteristics of the real-life events' (Yin, 1984: 2) encountered in the research.

The case study was conducted mainly at the physical location of a primary school in Delft (an economically deprived area) by a teacher from the art centre, which allowed for intersection across the racial and socioeconomic divides. Non-probability sampling methods and qualitative data-collection techniques were employed to generate the research sample. Judgement sampling, where 'the researcher actively selects the most productive sample to answer the research question' (Marshall, 1996: 523), played a part as possible participants necessarily had to actively be involved in the establishment of the art education programme in question. Although, in total, 250 learners were involved in the art programme, for practical purposes, only 20 parents who attended the art exhibition and their children (20) were conveniently selected[4] and asked to participate in the study. The research sample further consisted of eight staff members, two collaborators and one volunteer. Qualitative data were collected from interviews conducted with the principal, the deputy principal, teachers, and parents, and were supplemented by feedback forms completed by learners and parents as well as participant observations and written reflections. Data capturing was achieved by means of written notes and voice recordings. Inductive content analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data collected.

4 Convenience sampling refers to 'the selection of the most accessible subjects' (Marshall, 1996: 523).

In order to ensure validity, data were collected over a period of 18 months and consent was obtained for all recorded individual and group interviews. Although all measures were taken to ensure the validity and reliability of the research, it is recognised that conducting cross-cultural research as white researchers in South Africa may be a limitation to the confirmability of the data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF THE EMPIRICAL EXPLORATIONS

The broader educational aim (social justice agenda) in the establishment of the art programme was to address the issue of inequality, albeit in a small way, of opportunities for learners across the racial and socioeconomic divide that marks the South African education reality. In reaction to the impoverished status of art education in South Africa, this study further aimed specifically to reveal and unpack the mechanisms that lie at the core of the way in which power relations were negotiated in the establishment of an art education programme in a low-income area in Delft, Western Cape.

The elephant in the room

After the data-collection processes were completed by means of interaction with the learners, teachers, parents, collaborators, and the volunteer, who formed part of the art programme, it was found that issues relating to (i) race, (ii) inequality and exclusion, and (iii) schools as spaces for critical transformative dialogue were prominent themes in the negotiation of power throughout the process. The issue of race introduced a challenge in that all the key themes seem to be entangled with the central issue of race. Race was regarded by the participants as simultaneously overwhelming and elusive, ignored and accepted. This brought to mind the image of the proverbial elephant in the room. The elephant became an apt way of thinking about the racial issue: imagining an elephant in a room is to realise how its presence will fill the whole space, how the contrived space will contribute to immobility, and how view and movement will be completely blocked. Because of close proximity, it will also become nearly impossible to have a holistic view of the obstacle from a single point of view – only detailed observations of the obstacle will be possible. While the elephant signifies the theme of race, the themes of inequality and exclusion, and schools as possible spaces for critical transformative dialogue, provided such 'close-up observations', and, in a manner of speaking, became the spaces in and around the obstacle that allowed for movement and a 'bigger picture' view from which to make meaning. Although the seemingly insurmountable obstacle of race is ever present, government institutions and policies, within a post-apartheid framework, provide the platform from which learners could be introduced to new experiences and activities and where attempts to diffuse the racial and socioeconomic divide can be made. Olneck (2000: 317) argues that learners' agency could transform the social reproduction process by impacting on their school-based cultural capital, and that teachers could promote both dominant and minority cultural capital in a non-conflictual manner. Teachers are particularly well situated to 'produce… moments of contestation, challenge, and social inclusion' (Lareau & Horvat, as cited in Monkman, 2005: 5).

Race

The data revealed that thinking about race in a binary way was still very much embedded in the minds of the participants. The learners and adults mostly referenced notions of race within the framework of white as superior and Black and Coloured as inferior. In an example of this, a teacher observed as follows:

> From a general perspective, sorry to put it bland like this, white people are great, children have that idea… that white people give good… once you mingle… that you are in a white school or in a white area – that you are better off – that is the perception, that may be wrong, that may be right, but that is the perception.

This mindset automatically favours institutions, teachers and concepts related to whiteness, and creates imbalances in power relations. According to Gore (1995), power relations have a marked impact on how learners, parents and teachers experience education. Comments such as

> They [the parents] know that this [the art classes] are just the best what they receive because the so-called white people are typically the best and the people of colour will typically stay as they are

refer to perceptions of parents where white is regarded as better as opposed to the perception of people of colour being trapped in the cycle of disadvantage. Whiteness was also referenced by learners as a predominant factor: rather than referring to teachers from the art centre as art teachers, a learner referred to 'The friendly white women'. In order to deal with the unease and discomfort of the 'white as better and dominant' notion, the schoolteachers and research team mostly employed a colour-blind approach, as can be seen in a teacher's response:

> I do not see you as different from me

and

> It doesn't matter to me what colour you are, whether you are white or dark or brown. To me we are just one.

Although there was an explicit desire to move beyond racial issues, the tendency towards colour-blindness seemed to contribute to the way in which the racial issue became the 'elephant in the room'. It seems that the actual difficult and sensitive issues are obscured and, therefore, easily avoided or overlooked – issues of racial stereotyping, inequality, exclusion, and feelings of inadequacy. This is noticeable in a parent's remark that illustrates how racial equality masquerades as equality on all levels:

> In the past it was… me in my place. Today we are… all equal… we are still striving towards all being… where we want to be… it will still take time.

Statements such as 'Art is a white thing' by a parent further refer to historically and culturally produced sentiments about art, which are rooted in an apartheid education system that equated art education with white privilege. The fact that the art programme is facilitated by white teachers further contributes to the complexity of negotiating power relations across the racial and socioeconomic divide. A teacher illustrated this imbalance in power pertinently by stating the following:

> … that is why our children feel… I am sure that they are even telling the neighbouring schools that we have white teachers teaching us art because they have the perception that they are getting a good thing from white teachers.

A parent further commented on the imbalance in power:

> The white people should not think that they can come and take over…

Although the participants' sensitivity to the racial issue seems to oppose the colour-blind approach, these two concepts that present themselves as opposites are in fact revealed as existing simultaneously as embodied paradoxes. 'Whiteness'[5] as a concept is described by Goldberg (2002) as much more than just implicating skin colour: it refers to those in control or benefitting from patriarchal whiteness, to those

5 'Whiteness' is a term coined in critical race theory and could best be thought of as a 'form of legal or cultural property' (Harris, 1995: 284). Whiteness provides 'material and symbolic privilege to whites, those passing as white, and sometimes honorary whites' (Harris, 1995: 284). Examples of material privilege would include better access to higher education or a choice of safe neighbourhoods in which to live; symbolic white privilege includes conceptions of beauty or intelligence that not only are tied to 'whiteness', but that 'implicitly exclude blackness or brownness' (Harris, 1995: 284).

competing for the benefits, privileges and profits of whiteness and to mechanisms that uphold systemic inequalities. Providing art education as white teachers within the framework of prevailing ideas of art education as a white privilege activity was key to negotiating power relations. The power implicated by 'white as good/great' and the way the art centre unjustly benefits from its association with whiteness are examples of reasons why unease and discomfort were experienced by the role players. It opened a metaphorical can of worms, exposing all the aspects of an education system that is still not capable of delivering the high standard of education demanded by both curriculum and policy to the majority of learners in South Africa. It brought to light the fact that art education is considered a status symbol that is affordable only to the privileged and associated with whiteness, which implies the appreciation of art education as relevant to the notion of the race/class entanglement. Race and power are experienced feelings that cannot be seen or quantified. The 'elephant' (race and power) is often avoided due to its difficult nature. The question could be asked whether the unease experienced by the participants was really about race. Was it not in fact related to aspects of domination, oppression, and privilege, exposed by the negotiation of power relations?

Inequality and exclusion

A social justice agenda would entail that an education system seriously contests the normalisation of education processes that benefit some learners while disowning others. The neglect of art education is an example thereof. The majority of South African learners are not exposed to art education, in spite of the demand thereof in policies and curricula. In this regard, a teacher commented that 'it [art] is being neglected'.

In this study, Creative Arts[6] was referred to as not only neglected, but also problematic. Many participants (principals, teachers, parents) perceive the arts as not vital to the education process. It was evident that although school management initially welcomed the art activities, they do not consider it as an essential academic subject. They seem to think of the art programme mainly as entertainment and relaxation for learners. A teacher commented:

> Also, when music is offered at school, it will give children a break from academics.

Another said that

> The teacher that does Creative Arts let them [learners] do something at home – some made something and some did not… this is the only way that the problem of Creative Arts can be solved.

This attitude towards teaching art at school leaves the impression that art activities are not regarded as a vehicle for learning, but considered a soft skill, enjoyment, or relaxation, and not 'really necessary'. It adds to the workload and resource problems faced by teachers.

Inequalities that manifested as exclusions from economic, cultural, and social resources were lack of art material, government's and school management's disregard of art, and teachers' own lack of confidence in teaching art. A teacher mentioned in this regard:

> But I think if the art materials were available… sometimes in the Creative Arts book, material like charcoal and other things [are] needed and if you ask the office – they do not have. So at least if we could have some material it would help.

6 'Creative Arts' is defined by the National Curriculum Statement as a study area that provides exposure to and study of a range of art forms, including dance, drama, music and visual arts. The purpose of Creative Arts is to develop learners as creative, imaginative individuals, with an appreciation of the arts. It also provides basic knowledge and skills to be able to participate in creative activities (DoE, 2011: 9).

Similarly, another teacher remarked that

> It is also so with technology – if we want to do a project we have to do everything out of our own pocket.

The lack of attention given to student teacher art education/training was mentioned:

> I wanted to learn more but not a lot of attention was given to it.

The same teacher also commented on government's disregard of the arts:

> So I ask the question: Why is there only two hours allocated for Creative Arts [which includes Life Orientation] in the curriculum as opposed to eight hours for maths and languages? Why is there so little time allocated? Look at the new 21-century plans for the new school against the wall, no art class, no music class; it has been approved by the government without giving attention to the arts.

Teachers also experienced little confidence in their abilities to foster the creative aspects of learners. This is evident in a teacher's remark:

> I am not creative.

Art did, however, seem to open new ways of learner observation for teachers:

> I notice things about students in the art class that I could not pick up about them when they do schoolwork.

There was recognition and appreciation among the research participants of art as an expressive tool for emotional well-being:

> Art makes children relax; makes them feel better about themselves.

Teachers also acknowledged that most learners not only enjoyed art but thrived on it, and specifically mentioned how learners with learning difficulties in other subjects often seemed to do well in their art activities. A teacher observed in this regard:

> If one sees the fruits, the results that the art has reaped, then you can only be proud and happy and fortunate. The beautiful things that the children did, how the children achieved, came out of their shells, what the children can do, especially those who cannot write, they can draw, they feel good about themselves, because everything is beautiful, especially if there is colour added.

Teachers observed that the language barrier (the language of instruction is English, whereas isiXhosa and Afrikaans are the learners' home languages) causes a lack of comprehension. As a result, learners are deprived of any further optimal creative experiences, especially because a lack of understanding of tasks due to language barriers promotes imitation and conformity to peer and teacher examples. Alexander (2012: 3) supports this observation when he refers to 'the self-esteem, self-confidence, potential creativity and spontaneity that come with being able to use the language that has shaped one from early childhood' (one's mother tongue). To be prohibited from using one's mother tongue represents the very essence of exclusion and disempowerment. Learner exposure to the arts through the art programme led to a growing awareness that they were deprived of the opportunity to discover and develop possible aptitudes for and skills in the arts as additional to the basic skill disciplines. In this regard, a teacher remarked:

> Sometimes they are not good in their schoolwork, but then they are good with their hands. I think it [the art programme] is a very big thing, because if they see they are not going to make it there at the school – with the academics – then they can focus on that which they can do with their hands and through that it can become their work one day.

Inequality and exclusion from cultural capital were further experienced as a result of the apparent lack of administrative and governmental support of and demand for art education. It seems that the low level of understanding of the benefit of art education for child development contributes to the way in which art education is neglected, in spite of policy and curriculum demand thereof. In this regard, Prew (as cited in DoE, 2009: 3) argues on the implementation of policies at school: 'Policies are seen as irrelevant. Those on language and religion, for instance, are largely ignored.' The lack of resources seems further to cover up, legitimise and naturalise the phenomenon of neglecting creative and difficult-to-measure activities in favour of assessment- and test-orientated activities. In light of this marginalisation of art education, Barnett and Coate (2008) refer to hidden curricula, or a curriculum within a curriculum, where what is said on paper and in policy documents does not always correspond with what is happening in actual educational interactions. Likewise, Apple (1990: 43) refers to schools as contributing to inequality by means of hidden curricula that normalise certain kinds of knowledge while disregarding others, thereby 'maintain[ing] and perpetuat[ing] the ideological hegemony of the most powerful economic classes in society'.

Contrary to popular thought, research by Spaull (2013) has shown that resource scarcity might not be the key problem, but that the focus should be on a teacher education approach. In this study, for example, resource scarcity as well as language and learning barriers experienced by teachers all intersect with the issue of race and class in such a complex way that, at first glance, the focus seems to be on 'the elephant in the room'. This emphasis on the race issue masquerades as an inaccurate understanding that prevents unbiased learner observation and obstructs investigation into some of the real issues underlying inequality in education. In light of this, it is suggested that teachers become knowledgeable in the functioning of hidden curricula that subvert education practice and cause teachers to unwittingly become caught up in the micromanagement of everyday schooling to such an extent that little attention is paid to the 'how and why' of teaching.

Regarding inequality and exclusion, by establishing the art programme, a key unease concerned the intersection of moving towards social justice while simultaneously favouring whiteness in subversive ways. How did the programme (even if only in a small way) interrupt cultural reproduction and allow for a more humane and socially just system concerning art education, and did it allow for the construction of equitable and fair distribution of power within society? The next section addresses this controversy on power, inequality, and social justice within the Freirean understanding of dialogue, praxis and conscientisation.[7]

Schools as spaces for critical transformative dialogue

The conflict and unease, but also the possibilities brought about by dealing with power relations as experienced in the establishment of the art programme, brought the realisation that schools in the South African post-apartheid framework should ideally be spaces for critical transformative dialogue from which new possibilities and opportunities for learners can arise. A teacher remarked in this regard:

7 'Paulo Freire was concerned with praxis – action that is informed (and linked to certain values). Dialogue was not just about deepening understanding – but was part of making a difference in the world. Dialogue in itself is a co-operative activity involving respect. The process is important and can be seen as enhancing community and building social capital and to leading us to act in ways that make for justice and human flourishing. An important element of this was his concern with conscientisation – developing consciousness, but consciousness that is understood to have the power to transform reality' (Taylor, 1993: 52).

> Schools and governmental institutions are platforms from which could be worked in the community, even and although we are from different areas in life. The school and the principal are agents from which to do this [start initiatives such as the art programme].

Another teacher mentioned that the art exhibitions that form part of the art programme

> [brought] the community together and encourage[d] parents to become involved in their children's schooling. The school also benefit from it because the parents are now encouraged to become involved with the school in other aspects as well.

A teacher further stated that parents are not usually aware of the benefit of art for their children and remarked that

> they would never [previously]… [have chosen art] but with the exposure that they have seen… what their children can do… then, definitely they will choose art as a subject.

This changed view on art education could be possible

> because they can see their children are doing very well in art. At the end of the day those children can make a living out of it.

The research team experienced a similar shift in awareness. Commitment to the art programme and entrenchment in the sometimes discomfort and unease, but also in the small joys of relationship building while collecting data and doing self-reflection, brought about an interruption of personal cultural reproduction concerning perceptions of race, class, culture and the role of education in a post-apartheid South African context. This brought the awareness that schools could possibly be platforms for critical transformative dialogue that could provide ideal symbolic and physical spaces where contentious/contested issues can be dealt with. In Giroux and Apple's (as cited in Margolis, 2001) view, schools are not just places of domination, but also of contestation, which becomes important with reference to power relations. Teachers and learners actively take part in the system that attempts to socialise them; they are not merely indifferent receivers. The school and hidden curricula should be understood as a 'symbolic, material, and human environment' (Apple, 1993: 144) that is continuously being recreated. Apple (1993) believes the key to uncover the influence of hidden curricula is conflict. Likewise, data from this study revealed that, in negotiating power relations, potential conflict situations that caused discomfort could be dealt with within a Freirean approach to dialogue.

Considering the way hidden curricula allow for the 'normalisation' of the neglect of art education, the dialogue process allowed for appreciation of the different ways in which teachers deal with interpreting curricula and policies. Freire's system of conscientisation (critical consciousness) created a space of connection and empathy where knowledge and 'little narratives' of each individual teacher and parent could be respected and considered as fully legitimate and valuable (Griffiths, 2003). The dialogue process opened such moments of 'truths' (Foucault, as cited in Rabinow, 1991) that could be explored and were not only crucial to the negotiation of power relations in the establishment of the programme, but also key to the continuation of the programme. Although the programme takes place across the racial and socioeconomic divide that signifies South African education, what made it possible was how each role player was able to detach from the symbolic forms of meaning that constitute his or her histories, social constructions, beliefs, viewpoints, and preferences. For Giroux, a 'language of possibility' is the vehicle through which teachers should act as 'transformative intellectuals' to raise learners' awareness of contested issues (as cited in Palmer, 2001: 280). In this way, prevailing beliefs, norms, and attitudes could be challenged and transformed into new paradigms of development and transformation (Palmer, 2001).

CONCLUSION

The study provides a platform for future discussions in the process of seeking solutions to the neglect of art education. Without exposing the hidden structures that underlie the education system, it could be assumed that a two-tiered education system defined by imbalanced power relations, inequality, exclusivity, and segregation will be perpetuated. The study revealed that the influence of hidden curricula is distinctively stronger than actual policy instructions, and that prevailing perceptions of art as a subject crucial to learner development should be addressed. Schools and tertiary institutions can be spaces for teachers and student teachers – across the racial and socioeconomic divide – to engage in critical dialogue and to imagine alternative possibilities. Art education as an agent for social justice can contribute significantly to identity formation and cultural confidence, on both a personal and a national level (Singh, 2012). This could help teachers embrace the change from teaching within a pragmatic and technocratic approach to teaching embedded in reflection and personal transformation.

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Performing Arts: A case study on curriculum transformation[1]

Sakhiseni Joseph Yende, Tshwane University of Technology, South Africa

ABSTRACT

Over the past few years, the Tshwane University of Technology's (TUT) Department of Performing Arts (Dance and Musical Theatre, Music and Vocal Art) has reinforced the importance of curriculum transformation in the changing South African landscape. This is due to the visible disequilibrium and insufficiency of the skills required by the industry in the previous curriculum. Therefore, The TUT Performing Arts Programme had to establish a new curriculum (artistic creativity, problem-solving, and business skills for performing arts) to accommodate the industry demand and to ensure that performers are relevant to the contemporary Performing Arts industry. This paper seeks to explore how students and lecturers experience the changes within the new curriculum at TUT as well as their perception of the significance of the transformed curriculum. A qualitative research methodology was used in this study, whereby methods such as interviews were conducted with Performing Arts students and graduates, lecturers, and employers in the industry. The research sought to establish how curriculum transformation is supported by the changed curriculum. The findings of this study demonstrate that the new curriculum will empower performers with balanced skill sets that enable them to become more marketable. The study also found that the new curriculum would provide sufficient entrepreneurial skills for performers to establish their businesses confidently. The paper concludes that TUT's new curriculum will accommodate the demands of a fluctuating 21st-century arts industry.

Keywords: arts industry, employability, skills, entrepreneurial skills, new curriculum, Performing Arts (PA), transformation

INTRODUCTION

In 2010, the transformation of higher education (HE) in South Africa became a fundamental discourse in the National Higher Education Transformation Summit led by the country's Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). The Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) was one of the universities that responded to the call for transformation and decided to embrace transformation as a priority. The Faculty of the Arts at TUT proclaimed the importance of curriculum transformation in a changing South African landscape (Ebewo & Sirayi, 2018). Griesel and Parker (2009), Yende (2017) and Leal (2018) agree that the demand for sustained employability calls for curriculum transformation that would contribute to economic growth. There has been a global and national paradigm shift in the Performing Arts (PA) industry in the 21st

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century that requires higher education institutions (HEIs) of the arts to consider curriculum transformation to align their curriculum with the requisites of the changing market (Ebewo & Sirayi, 2018). Some of these paradigm shifts are (i) economic sustainability in the face of dwindling government funding, (ii) producing skilled graduates in decolonisation and (iii) transformation of curricula (Yende, 2017). According to Yende (2017), the paradigm shift in the PA industry has resulted in significant changes, ranging from the decline of funding for the PA to the closure of PA companies.

In the context of music in the PA, Spies (2015) and Leal (2018) indicate that employers in the PA space deem skills such as music administration, music business and marketing as core skills for a changing market. The 21st century requires performers to have a sense of self-readiness, self-directedness, and personal agency in retaining and securing sustainable employment (Spies, 2015; Leal, 2018). Yende (2017) adds that universities have to align the present curriculum with the needs of employers so that graduates are employable. The industry has become competitive with small companies battling in an arena of survival of the fittest (Yende, 2017). Therefore, there is a need for arts institutions of HE to revise their curriculum to suit the needs of employers.

According to Heleta (2016), colonialism had a negative effect on South African institutions of higher learning, and these institutions have to be transformed. For over a century, South African education institutions were forced to embrace the Western system of formal education, which was an integral instrument of social and cultural change (Yende, 2017). According to Ebewo and Sirayi (2018), the education policies of the colonisers in African countries were an effective tool that governed the direction of social change. Decolonisation of the curriculum is imperative in HE to promote homogenous education coupled with African culture, business, and politics (Ebewo & Sirayi, 2018). This paper addresses the skills added in the new curriculum rather than decolonisation and its implications.

TUT held its first Transformation Framework symposium about curriculum transformation in 2017. Curriculum transformation can address many areas of change in HE. However, this article focuses on fundamental skills that were readdressed at the symposium, and the resultant new curriculum offered by TUT.

TUT Vice-Chancellor and Principal Professor Lourens van Staden highlights the priority to transform in the Transformation Framework (2017: 1):

> We have been offered an opportunity as TUT community to embrace transformation as a university priority. It is something that we must do in deep solidarity with higher education in South Africa and the broader South African community. We must be our own agents of change. Transformation is our responsibility. We face the challenge of developing an institutional identity whilst we are on the road of transformation.

In the context of PA, the goal of curriculum transformation is to ensure that the PA programme has all the skills required by the employers. Yende (2017) agrees that curriculum transformation serves as a fundamental tool for addressing all the key PA skills required by industry. According to Ebewo and Sirayi (2018), the curriculum transformation at TUT's Faculty of the Arts is necessary and will help to ensure that PA graduates from this institution are effective and relevant to the PA sector.

It is useful to foreground in this study that TUT was previously known as Technikon Pretoria and was established in 1900 (Insight of Tshwane University of Technology, 2015). A government initiative merged the former Technikon Northern Gauteng, Technikon North-West, and Technikon Pretoria into the Tshwane University of Technology. No changes or improvements were made to the PA programme to adequately meet the needs of the PA industry (Insight of Tshwane University of Technology, 2015). Due to the curriculum

mismatch with the needs of the industry, graduates experienced some difficulties finding employment due to the insufficient skills to meet the needs of the PA industry (Council on Higher Education [CHE], 2016).

It is prudent to highlight that the new curriculum came into operation in 2020. Yende (2017) highlights that the revised curriculum will better provide the industry with performers who are trained as performers and who can do basic business duties, such as administration and marketing. Sodipo (2014) indicates that the new curriculum should equip graduates with the necessary skills required in the PA industry. It was against this background that the author was stimulated to study the significant changes required to improve the relevance of the PA industry. The author posed questions to various sectors of the industry – that is, to students, lecturers, and employees.

Baker and Henson (2010) and Taylor (2016) stress that it is imperative to embrace a curriculum that will change and solve the challenges experienced by graduates in the arts industry. Jansen (2017) and Yende (2017) establish that it is important for South African universities to embrace the philosophy of curriculum transformation. According to Yende (2017), to achieve the transformation goal, the participation of a wide range of individuals is required, namely students, alumni, lecturers, institutional management, advisory boards, employers, and other relevant stakeholders in the PA industry. However, due to the nature of the author's study, this article was limited to TUT students, graduates, lecturers and industry employers. Assembling data based on the experiences of the new curriculum and its result on graduate employability will help universities of PA and the PA industry work together to bridge the unemployment gap (Yende, 2017).

This study refers to dance and musical theatre, music, and vocal art, and focuses on the significant changes that are being ushered in by the new curriculum for PA graduates at TUT. A study conducted by Yende (2017) demonstrated that the curriculum offered by the TUT Department of PA before 2020 was no longer aligned with the requirements of the PA industry. The shortfall experienced in that curriculum was due to the absence of the entrepreneurial skills required by the PA industry (Spies, 2015). The new curriculum is set to address this shortfall by including the entrepreneurial skills also believed to be key PA industry skills.

This paper was driven by performers who experience a consistently high level of unemployment in South Africa. Yende (2017) contends that, due to the paradigm shift, the PA industry has become highly competitive, and performers who are not in line with the required changes taking place in the arts are confronted with a variety of challenges – including unemployment. It is no longer sufficient for PA graduates to have qualifications without additional skills that would make them employable, such as music administration, music business and marketing (Spies, 2015; Yende, 2017; Leal, 2018).

The new curriculum was proposed by the TUT Department of PA in 2007 and is now implemented. It will prepare students with the necessary entrepreneurial, administrative and marketing skills required in the workplace. The acquisition of these skills will ensure that performers flourish in their careers (Yende, 2017). The revised curriculum ensures that the new subjects that provide entrepreneurial skills are compulsory (Yende & Mugovhani, 2018).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Since the end of the South African apartheid regime in 1994, there has been a paradigm shift in the PA industry, both globally and nationally. This shift reveals that performers have to move with trends in the PA industry. The three pillars of skills required in the 21st century are (i) administration, (ii) entrepreneurship, and (iii) marketing (Spies, 2015; Leal, 2018). A study conducted by Yende (2017) reveals that many PA graduates remain unemployed if they do not have the necessary skills required by the industry. Thom

(2016) agrees that artists who lack entrepreneurial and administrative skills usually spend more time looking for jobs.

A preliminary study conducted by Yende (2017) finds that PA graduates at TUT did not have the kinds of skills necessary for the industry resulting in employability challenges. The new curriculum at TUT will positively and successfully expose PA graduates to the range of skills required by the PA industry, and it will improve performers' employability.

Ebewo and Sirayi (2018) and Yende and Mugovhani (2018) highlight that the new curriculum offered by the TUT Department of PA has a wide range of new modules, namely Creative Industries, Business Practice, Community Empowerment, African Performance, among others. The modules are aligned with DHET accreditation. The fundamental purpose of the new curriculum is to equip performers with entrepreneurial and business practice skills (Yende & Mugovhani, 2017; Leal, 2018). The new curriculum's modules have a suitable balance of theoretical and practical knowledge as well as skill. Yende (2017), Ebewo and Sirayi (2018), and Yende and Mugovhani (2018) indicate that it is hoped that the new curriculum adjusted by TUT will help mitigate graduate unemployment by equipping graduates with the necessary skills required and ensure that graduates are relevant to the demands of a changing arts industry in the 21st century. Griesel and Parker (2009) assert that it is essential for HEIs in South Africa to produce skilled graduates who can meet the demands of the marketplace and who are competent within a shrinking labour force worldwide.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study addresses the following questions:

1. How do students, lecturers and arts industry professionals experience the new curriculum adjusted by the TUT Department of PA?
2. How does the new curriculum meet the demand for curriculum transformation and provide for sustainably employable performers?
3. What are the differences between the old curriculum and the new curriculum?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Challenges in curriculum transformation in the Performing Arts

Considerable research was conducted at the institutions of higher learning to define the challenges in and crucial nature of the process of curriculum transformation in South Africa (Ebewo & Sirayi, 2018; Taylor, 2016; Baker & Henson, 2010). According to Kwok (2003), PA institutions of higher learning are consistently challenged to develop curricula to address the employability of the PA graduates. It is easy to announce curriculum transformation; however, the curricula have to be implemented practically (Adendorff et al., 2002; Letsekha, 2013; Slonimsky, 2016; Idowu, 2017).

Ebewo and Sirayi (2018) define curriculum transformation in the South African context as a method that intends to improve teaching and learning in the existing content with more Africanisation in the curricula, which includes the values of African people and foregrounds African cultural practices. According to Ebewo and Sirayi (2018), the new curriculum possesses strong African subjects such as African dance, African music and creative industry. In the revision of the curriculum, it was necessary to reflect strong African values in South African HEIs, which could solve the problem of unemployment, especially for PA graduates (Mugovhani, 2011; Ebewo & Sirayi, 2018).

In light of the Africanisation of HE curricula, Ebewo and Sirayi (2018) highlight the paradigm shift that addresses the inequalities of the past and the adoption of relevant 21st-century skills. Therefore, it is imperative for researchers and curriculum developers to develop curricula that equip students with professional skills relevant to the world of work and improve their chances of employment success (Yende, 2017).

Curriculum transformation is important worldwide (Zinser, 2003; Sha, 2006; Singh & Singh, 2008). Sha (2006) and Oluwajodu et al. (2015) advise that institutions of HE must align their curricula with the skills demands of the 21st-century labour market.

Opportunities in curriculum transformation

Crucial curriculum transformation opportunities have recently been presented at institutions of higher learning in South Africa (Du Preez, Simmonds & Chetty, 2017). Bester (2014) points out that academic opportunities for curriculum transformation are more prominent and that the curriculum will better prepare graduates for the workplace. Yende (2017) indicates that curriculum transformation is also crucial for PA graduates as the transformation will allow graduates to be relevant in the 21st century.

There is an accelerating global change in the economic landscape that requires institutions of higher learning globally to update and change their curricula to increase the number of performers with a variety of required skills in the PA industry (Yende, 2017). Graduates who are equipped with such skills will be more productive in the PA (Yende, 2017). The entrepreneurial, business and marketing skills mentioned are deemed crucial for performers to contribute to the industry's paradigm shift (Ebewo & Sirayi, 2018).

Curriculum transformation will improve the South African economy, which has been stagnant for some time and is in jeopardy of collapsing (Yende, 2017). Ongoing curriculum transformation will address the challenges experienced by institutions of higher learning in South Africa. Curriculum transformation is seen as a stepping-stone towards addressing the employability challenges of South African graduates, which affect their potential for success as performers (Yende, 2017; Ebewo & Sirayi, 2018).

Significance of curriculum transformation in PA at TUT

Curriculum transformation has been revealed to be a significant tool in refurbishing the quality of the skills the PA industry seeks in performers (Crowe, 2006; Yende, 2017; Ebewo & Sirayi, 2018). According to Walmsley (2011), the transformed curriculum could address constant change in the PA industry in South Africa. Therefore, the new curriculum would improve PA graduates' ability to perform in and keep up with the fast-changing PA industry (Walmsley, 2011; Yende, 2017). According to Ebewo and Sirayi (2018), a well-developed curriculum should reflect the key skills that are required in the PA industry. Entrepreneurial, administrative and marketing skills are limited in the previous PA curricula and are embedded in the new curricula at institutions of higher learning in South Africa and globally (Yende, 2017).

According to Ebewo and Sirayi (2018), the current, pressing skills needs are now addressed in the new curriculum offered by TUT and in the PA programme, which now also offers work-integrated learning (WIL) designed to help students work for a few months in the industry to gain practical experience. The transformed TUT PA curriculum is designed to expose its students to key parts of the PA labour market (Yende, 2017).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research method was used to collect data from a population of PA students, graduates, lecturers and employers in the PA industry. In this study, a non-probability, purposive and snowball sampling method was used (Martínez-Mesa et al., 2016). Face-to-face interviews (both structured and

non-structured) were conducted with 20 students and graduates from TUT, 10 lecturers from TUT, and three employers in the PA industry. In this study, the researcher used structured and non-structured interviews with the selected participants. The sample interviewed was situated predominantly in two South African provinces, namely Gauteng (Pretoria and Johannesburg) and the Western Cape (Cape Town). These cities were chosen because most PA companies in South Africa are in these three cities. The populations in these cities are assumed to be knowledgeable about the importance of revising the curriculum. In this study, a purposive sampling method was employed based on the awareness of participants of the changing PA industry. Thus, the participants' knowledge provided information imperative to the study.

The findings gathered from the selected participants were analysed and discussed, and recommendations were made. A letter of consent was received from the university to conduct the study and this ensures the quality of this study. All the necessary submissions for ethical clearance were made. Participants were all informed about the nature and purpose of the study, and they participated voluntarily. Signed informed consent was obtained from each participant in the study. The researcher employed thematic coding analysis and inductive coding to protect participants and ensure participants' anonymity. Participants are referred to using alphabetical capital letters according to their order in the raw data. Table 1 reflects the number of participants that took part in this project.

Table 1:
Participants in the study

Level	Number selected	Percentage of population
Students	10	30.3%
Graduates (alumni)	10	30.3%
Lecturers	10	30.3%
Employers of PA industry	3	9.1%
Total number of participants	33	100.0%

Limitations of the study

The study was limited to students, graduates, and lecturers at TUT, and to PA industry employers. For this reason, the results of the study can neither be generalised to other forms of art, such as visual and fine arts, nor can they be generalised to other countries. The aim of the study was to explore the expected impact of the new curriculum at the TUT Department of PA. It is recommended that the study be replicated on a broader spectrum.

FINDINGS

The three aims of this study were to explore (i) how students, lecturers and arts industry professionals experience the new curriculum adjusted by the TUT Department of PA; (ii) how the new curriculum meets the demand for curriculum transformation and provides for sustainably employable performers; and (iii) what the differences are between the old curriculum and the new curriculum.

The outcomes of this study were deliberated based on the insights and perceptions of selected participants. The results were compared to related literature to ensure that this study originates new, dependable findings about curriculum transformation. Results and discussions are presented according to the aims stated.

The findings of this study were divided into four categories: (i) students, (ii) graduates, (iii) lecturers and (iv) employers in the PA industry.

Students' perception of the new curriculum

The study findings revealed that the majority of students believe that the new curriculum will transform their employability in the industry. The findings established that most of the students were excited about the new curriculum. The students' strong belief demonstrates that the anticipated curriculum has a sufficient and broader spectrum of choices to permit versatility of employability in the industry. The findings show that the students felt that curriculum transformation was required; the findings also established that the students anticipated that the new curriculum would unlock future employment opportunities. The new curriculum will provide skills that employers are looking for in the industry, according to Ebewo and Sirayi (2018) and Yende (2017).

Student A observed:

> I believe that the new curriculum will be beneficial to students who will be going into the industry. With this new curriculum, we will not only be performers, but we will have various kinds of valuable skills such as entrepreneurial skills, administrative, and marketing skills crucial for performers.

Student B said:

> I am excited that the Department of PA is revising its curriculum, and I am certain that the new curriculum will equip us with the new set of skills that the employers are looking for. These skills include business skills, administrative, writing, and directing.

The students' contributions above reveal the significance of the new curriculum in the employability of future graduates. The new curriculum will offer various options for graduates, making them flexible in the PA industry. According to Ebewo and Sirayi (2018), in this transforming world through digital technology, multidisciplinary skills are viewed as crucial tools to produce graduates that are effective in the arts industry, in contrast to graduates who are specialists in a single discipline.

Graduates' perception of the new curriculum

The study further found that many PA graduates who are active in the industry highlighted that the new curriculum will help upcoming performers be employable.

Graduate A said:

> Employment is a serious issue for us as graduates because we battle to get employment. The employers are well pleased with the basic skills that we have, such as voice, sight-reading, and acting, but they require more than that. It is hard in the industry of arts if you do not possess these attributes that entice the employers.

Graduate B confirmed:

> It is difficult to be a successful performer having only the attributes that are taught by the university, as a singer, extra attributes are needed.

These responses reveal that there was a need for a revision of the curriculum. According to Yende and Mugovhani (2018), the university curriculum had to be revised to solve the unemployment problem by ensuring that graduates are well equipped with the requisite skills, such as entrepreneurial and administrative skills.

Lecturers' perspective on the new curriculum

The following are the abridged findings from lecturers' points of view with regards to the new curriculum. The study findings revealed that many lecturers believe that there has long been an evident gap between the existing curriculum and the employability of graduates, which will now be bridged by the new curriculum. Recent changes, such as the closure of many PA companies, have resulted in increasing competitiveness in the PA industry. Performers require the skill set found in the new curriculum to compete to find jobs in the shrinking PA industry (Yende, 2017). Ebewo and Sirayi (2018) and Yende (2017) affirm that the new TUT curriculum will contribute to the employability of performers.

Lecturer A described the new curriculum as follows:

> I really trust that the upcoming curriculum will effect, transform and bring change in the industry of arts for graduates. The new curriculum will provide new perspectives to graduates who will bring transformation in their careers. The integration of a range of various modules will bring visible change.

Lecturer B said:

> The new curriculum focuses more on creativity, good work ethic, and enough knowledge that could aid the PA graduates to clinch the few jobs that are available.

Lecturer C highlighted:

> The new curriculum is designed in such a way that it places students in a simulated environment in which the students are entirely responsible for developing and managing a PA festival.

Lecturer D postulated:

> The added modules such as Creative Industries, Business Practice, Community Empowerment, and African performance are principally pragmatic in the means in which students are required to engage in practical implementation and application of learned content.

These findings indicate that there has been a demand for new approaches to enhance the previous curriculum to dynamically meet industry requirements. Ebewo and Sirayi (2018) establish that the new curriculum would be favourable to students because of its interdisciplinarity, as opposed to the previous curriculum. According to Millar (2016), interdisciplinarity is a vital tool in the curriculum because it brings change and aligns the curriculum with the requirements of the industry.

After extensive research carried out by the Department of PA with an expert of the PA industry, Yende and Mugovhani (2018) agree that the previous curriculum did not meet the needs of employers. Yende (2017) notes that employers confirmed that they are looking for performers or graduates with exceptional and competitive skills beyond the performative skills. Entrepreneurial and administrative skills, among others, are fundamental for prospective employees in the PA industry (Spies, 2015; Yende, 2017). The new curriculum will improve graduates' proficiency when combining theoretical and practical skills in the workplace. The teaching and learning in these subjects also integrate reflective experiential practice.

The interdisciplinarity offered by the TUT Department of PA comprises performative skills with business skills, such as administrative, enterprise and workplace experience. According to Ebewo and Sirayi (2018), the new curriculum creates 'international partnerships for exchange programmes, skills transference, and benchmarking purposes; and community engagement for the service of the catchment community.'

Employers' perspective on the new curriculum

The following are the summarised findings from the employers in the arts industry who participated. The findings of the study demonstrated that employers were delighted to hear that TUT is revising the curriculum to benefit the standard of the arts industry. The findings of the study confirmed that employers do appreciate the interdisciplinarity of the new curriculum.

Employer A stated:

> There has been a great change in the arts industry all over the world, and this requires new skills from graduates for them to be effective in the industry. I am excited to hear that TUT is working on a new curriculum.

Employer B asserted:

> The previous curriculum offered by the TUT Department of PA was limited and did not fully equip students with additional skills that would make them competitive in the industry. In recent years, skills, such as administrative, business enterprises, and workplace experience, are key skills in the PA industry.

The employers' statements above demonstrate that employers trust that the new curriculum will make graduates more employable in the arts industry. The statements above suggest that the new curriculum will drive change in the arts industry.

DATA OBTAINED ACCORDING TO THE SUB-AIMS USING EXISTING LITERATURE

Students and lecturers' experience of the changes within the new curriculum at TUT

According to Yende (2017) and Ebewo and Sirayi (2018), the transformed curriculum at the TUT's Department of PA puts more emphasis on African content in the strong business and creative industry subjects offered. This emphasis on African business and creativity allows students to focus on local industry aspects of marketing, budgeting and finance. Yende and Mugovhani (2018) establish that the new curriculum is structured to give PA students a wider choice of modules to cater for wider employment opportunities. The new modules will serve to ground students' understanding of a wider spectrum of activities within the PA (Yende & Mugovhani, 2018).

According to Yende and Mugovhani (2018) and Ebewo and Sirayi (2018), the previous curriculum was limited and narrow because students were equipped with artistic skills only. However, now the new curriculum includes programmes such as African performance studies, analysis and criticism, writing skills, multidisciplinary professional practice, and creative industries that will prepare students with knowledge through WIL.

Curriculum transformation to meet the demand for sustainably employable performers

Since the PA industry is faced with diminishing funding and the closure of many PA companies, curriculum transformation was necessary to ensure that performers can compete by making sure that they are well prepared for the demands of industry and sustainable employment (Yende, 2017; Ebewo & Sirayi, 2018). According to Yende and Mugovhani (2018), the transformed curriculum is designed so that students can network with employers to create future opportunities. The new curriculum manages to meet the PA industry's demands for additional skills by designing a curriculum that allows students to engage with industry experts (Yende & Mugovhani, 2018). Awareness of employers' common perceptions ensured the quest for curriculum transformation to meet social and economic demands.

The differences between the old curriculum and the new curriculum

Yende and Mugovhani (2018) express that the management of TUT, the Faculty of the Arts, and the Department of PA cooperatively embarked on finding possible solutions to the graduate employability conundrum. The quest for curriculum transformation was crucial as the old curriculum could no longer meet the required demands of the PA industry (Yende, 2017; Spies, 2015). According to Yende and Mugovhani (2018), the new curriculum is designed so that PA students will have a broader choice of modules that accommodate wider employment opportunities. Ebewo and Sirayi (2018) highlight modules that integrate reflective, experiential practice in the transformed curriculum. Yende and Mugovhani (2018) note that the new modules ground the understanding of a wider spectrum of PA. According to Yende and Mugovhani (2018) and Ebewo and Sirayi (2018), the new curriculum's modules are mainly practical so that students engage in practical execution and implementation of learned content.

ANALYSIS

This study found that students are excited about the new curriculum that commenced in 2020. Skills such as entrepreneurship, administration and marketing that were missing in the previous curriculum are covered in the new curriculum and will contribute to the sustainable employability of graduates. Interdisciplinarity plays a vital role in transformative education.

Yende (2017) established that the new curriculum would improve students' entrepreneurial and administrative skills and confirmed that TUT PA graduates would be more relevant to the arts industry. Furthermore, the new curriculum will equip students with the necessary skills for the PA industry.

The lecturers' responses show that the new curriculum could improve the industry. The lecturers show that the new curriculum will position students as more independent with the addition of entrepreneurial, administrative, and marketing skills.

According to Ebewo and Sirayi (2018) and Yende and Mugovhani (2018), curriculum transformation for TUT PA graduates is crucial and will be an improvement on the previous curriculum.

The findings of this study demonstrate that the new curriculum will empower graduated performers with balanced skills that will enable them to find employment. It was also noted that the new curriculum will provide sufficient entrepreneurial skills for performers to establish their own businesses confidently. The findings also demonstrate that many of the participants agreed that the PA institutions of HE had been consistently and continuously pressured by the paradigm shift in the industry. As a result, curriculum transformation for PA graduates at TUT was considered a key remedy that would unlock the employability of performers. Furthermore, the teaching strategy for these modules are pragmatic with embodied and experiential opportunities that culminate in continuous assessments in practical assessments.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Curriculum transformation is recognised as an urgent need globally (World Economic Forum, 2020). South African universities recognise and acknowledge that the existing curriculum had to be revised to improve the challenge of unemployment experienced by graduates. Based on the findings and the analyses of this study, the TUT Department of PA's new curriculum was necessary to provide students with interdisciplinary knowledge about business, management, and entrepreneurial skills, as well as WIL. The TUT Department of PA will present a variety of subjects so that students can integrate conceptual and practical design skills across the full spectrum of their learning careers.

The study recognised that PA graduates are often unsuccessful when finding employment because the industry has become very competitive and full-time jobs are scarce. Employment-seeking requires

perseverance, a good work ethic and knowledge from graduates to clinch the few jobs available. The study points out that the new curriculum was necessary as it brings a new set of skills that increasingly makes PA graduates competent in the industry. The new curriculum prepares students for the labour market and for being business-minded. The graduates from the TUT Department of PA will benefit from the new curriculum by making students relevant to the PA industry and to other industries where the arts are valued.

The new curriculum has been designed and structured to contribute significantly to supplementing skills. The new curriculum will accommodate improved employment in the fluctuating 21st-century arts industry.

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RESEARCH TITLE

A study of the leadership approaches of principals heading National Strategy Learner Attainment (NSLA) schools in the Metro Central Education District in the Western Cape Province

Name: ***Dr Rudolph Peter (R.P.) Cornelissen***
Supervisor: ***Professor Juliana (J.) Smith***
Co-supervisor: ***Dr Thandi (T.) Ngcobo***
Institution: ***University of the Western Cape, South Africa***
Year of Award: ***2019***
Qualification: ***PhD***

ABSTRACT

This thesis investigated the leadership approach associated with sustained improved academic performance of principals heading National Strategy for Learner Attainment (NSLA) schools. The research problem addressed the leadership practices and personality traits that characterised the leadership approaches of principals heading high schools which have achieved long-term academic improvement amongst the schools undergoing the NSLA interventions. The main research question was: What leadership practices and personality traits characterised the leadership approaches of principals heading schools who have achieved long-term academic improvement amongst the schools undergoing the NSLA interventions? Thereafter, four subsidiary research questions guided this research. Firstly, what were the leadership practices of principals in selected successful NSL schools? Secondly, what personality traits characterised these principals? Thirdly, what learning and teaching challenges did principals heading these schools face? Lastly, how did these principals address the learning and teaching challenges in these schools? The literature and past research supported and provided information that leadership at schools plays a pivotal role for teaching and learning to be successful. However, the literature does not prescribe a specific leadership approach, but recommended a contingency leadership approach. The contingency leadership approach was used as the theoretical framework for this study. This approach recognises that there is no single preferred style of leadership and that the situational context must be taken into account for leadership to be effective. The study was guided by the qualitative methodological paradigm which is embedded in the interpretivist approach in order to develop rich and in-depth descriptions and meaning, feelings and experiences gathered from respondents. The case study as a qualitative research design was used to collect, analyse and interpret data from principals, teachers and selected members of the School Management Team (SMT). The population comprised of fifteen high schools in the Metro Central Education District, Cape Town that underwent the NSLA intervention. However, the investigation took place at five schools in the Metro Central Education District and participants remained part of this initiative for more than three consecutive years. These schools are resident in a wide area on the Cape Flats. All principals

at the time, were permanently appointed. Two research instruments were used. A questionnaire to collect data about the leadership of principals was completed by post level one teachers. This questionnaire covered three areas, the biometric information of the respondent, the leadership behaviour of the principal and the leadership approach promoting teaching and learning. A semi-structured interview was done with the principal and selected members of the Schools Management Team (SMT). Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the questionnaire. To analyse the semi-structured interviews, categories and themes were used to maximise the information collected. Through qualitative research the researcher was able to develop rich and in-depth descriptions of meaning, feelings and experiences through analysis. The study concluded that to achieve long-term academic improvement amongst NSLA schools an integrated leadership approach for principals is recommended. This approach encapsulates the various leadership approaches and the leadership personality traits or characteristics of the principals as well as taking into account the situational context for effective leadership and decision-making. Limitations in respect of this research were enumerated. Finally, recommendations based on the conclusions were highlighted including recommendations for further investigation.

Keywords: leadership; secondary school principals; National Strategy for Learner Attainment (NSLA); leadership theories and approaches; global trends; change; academic performance; Contingency theory

The full thesis can be found at http://hdl.handle.net/11394/7241

RESEARCH TITLE

Grade 3 teachers' formative assessment practices in selected mathematics lessons

Name: ***Dr Poomoney (P.) Govender***
Supervisor: ***Professor Elizabeth (E.) Henning***
Co-supervisor: ***Professor Kakoma (K.) Luneta***
Institution: ***University of Johannesburg, South Africa***
Year of Award: ***2019***
Qualification: ***PhD***

ABSTRACT

This study responds to critical knowledge gaps evident in current literature about how formative assessment is enacted by foundation phase teachers in mathematics in South African public schools. Furthermore, the literature study revealed that most of the current research conducted in public primary schools focused on learner performance with emphasis on summative assessment, hence delimiting the importance of formative assessment as a strategic tool in improving learner performance. The aim of this study was to explore how grade three teachers enact formative assessment in mathematics teaching. I therefore investigated teachers' understanding of formative assessment, what teachers know about how children learn mathematics, how teachers use their knowledge of children's thinking to plan and enact formative assessment and what support is needed by grade three teachers to enact formative assessment in mathematics classrooms. Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) as propounded in third generation activity theory (AT) by Engeström (1987) served as the analytical framework for this study. Third generation AT which focuses on the interaction between a person or group (subject), a goal, motivation, or problem (object) and mediational interaction with (tools) as well as the intersection with the activity system leading to (outcome/s). This heuristic assisted me to conduct a systemic analysis of all inter-dependencies that had a bearing on how grade 3 teachers enacted formative assessment and what additional support they required to enact formative assessment in mathematics classrooms. This study followed a case study research design through a qualitative research approach. I started with a sample of 12 teachers in a selected school district in Tshwane in the Gauteng Province. The teachers were selected through a convenience sampling technique. The data was collected through two focus group interviews from these twelve teachers (divided into six each) as a pilot exploration. I then selected four teachers through purposive sampling. Data was collected through lesson observation, document analysis and four stimulated recall interviews from these four teachers. The data was analysed through content analysis technique, utilising Microsoft Macros which assisted me to segment all the data. I thereafter conducted pattern matching of the data. Finally, the data was coded, categorised and thematised. The core finding demonstrated that,

although teachers know about how children learn and that they can align their teaching to how children learn, they struggle to enact formative assessment effectively. Furthermore, while teachers recognise the importance of formative assessment, they do not implement formative assessment skills in an integrated way. The core finding of the study was that teachers' formative assessment practices are constrained by tensions of the activity system. This study contributes to the body of knowledge of formative assessment by highlighting relevant discords around challenges and successes pertaining to the enactment of formative assessment. The study also contributes to the research methodological body of knowledge on classroom observation of formative assessment where researchers will be able to replicate this study in different contexts. Finally, the study contributes by way of recommending strategies to policy makers and curriculum designers and education planners on the need to integrate formative assessment in a balanced way focusing on assessment for learning to enhance the quality of teaching and learning, hence improving learners' performance.

Keywords: Cultural historical activity theory, formative assessment, foundation phase, mathematics, assessment for learning, integrated, pedagogy, learner performance

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RESEARCH TITLE

Curriculum and practice to develop critical thinking competencies in first-year students

Name: ***Dr Heather Ann (H.A.) Goode***
Supervisor: ***Professor Geesje (G.) van den Berg***
Institution: ***University of South Africa, South Africa***
Year of Award: ***2020***
Qualification: ***PhD in Education (Curriculum Studies)***

ABSTRACT

Critical thinking competencies are not only seen as crucial for success in higher education, but also for future personal and workplace success. These competencies are commonly cited as a graduate attribute or goal of higher education, and resulting research has tended to focus on exploring and measuring the development of critical thinking competencies in students within higher education. However, few researchers have explored the curriculum and practice of academic staff within higher education in relation to their influence on developing critical thinking competencies in students, or how they theorise about the development of these competencies as part of their professional practice. Within the South African context, there is a perception of a decline in the development of critical thinking competencies within the secondary school system. This has informed policy imperatives to improve access and success in South African higher education through additional support for students, as well as through research into the first-year experience. Within a constructivist paradigm, and adopting a qualitative approach, this study takes the first year of higher education as its context in order to explore the curriculum, assessment, pedagogical and andragogical practices of academic staff designed to develop critical thinking competencies in first-year students. The aim is to explore how academic staff construct their theory and practice in order to contribute to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in South African Higher Education. Phenomenological case study research methods, which draw on data collection through semi-structured interviews and document analysis, enabled a better understanding of the lived experience of academic staff within private higher education. Academic staff, as research participants, were able to describe deliberate actions taken in their teaching practices to facilitate the development and assessment of critical thinking competencies. The findings revealed that academic staff – while having no coherent, well-articulated construction of critical thinking competencies – feel that such competencies are essential for academic and future life success. This not only affirmed previous research reviewed, but aligned to the inclusion of explicit and implicit references to critical thinking competencies found in the curriculum and assessment documents. Recommendations for professional development responded specifically to these findings.

Keywords: critical thinking, curriculum, first-year experience, professional development, scholarship of teaching and learning

The full thesis can be found at http://hdl.handle.net/10500/26729

RESEARCH TITLE

Burning to Be Men? Conspicuous consumption as a performance of masculinity in the activities of *Izikhothane* in Tembisa

Name: ***Jabulani Goodhope (J.G.) Mnisi***
Supervisor: ***Professor Pier Paolo (P.P.) Frassinelli***
Institution: ***University of Johannesburg, South Africa***
Year of Award: ***2020***
Qualification: ***PhD***

ABSTRACT

Burning to Be Men? is a study that investigates the role of consumption in the performance, enactment, and pursuit of masculinities in the subculture of ukukhothana. The phenomenon of ukukhothana involves township youths who predominantly come from impoverished economic backgrounds who engage in conspicuous consumption. The fieldwork was conducted in Tembisa, the second largest township in Gauteng, in the East Rand. I worked with The Good Fellas, which is one of the longest running and most popular crews in the area of Phomolong. Studying the consumption patterns of people is a very complex undertaking. This is particularly the case in the South African context, given that consumption studies as a discipline have mostly been developed outside of Africa. Finding a single theory to study a peculiar South African subculture such as ukukhothana was a challenge. In order to get over this challenge, I relied on multiple theories. I used theories of consumption, subculture, masculinity, and evolutionary psychology. When all of these are combined, they provide a lens through which I could read the consumption behaviour of izikhothane. Being a closely-knit subculture, gaining access to The Good Fellas was not easy. However, the ethnographic method that involved prolonged observations made it possible to create rapport with the members of this crew and successfully collect the data. The data that I present in this study was gathered by attending the events that The Good Fellas attended as well as by conducting individual interviews with them. I analysed my findings through the use of Discourse Historical Analysis (DHA) and Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA). The analysis of the data reveals that The Good Fellas are indeed burning to be men both literally and figuratively. In the literal sense, the burning entailed the theatrical destruction of valuable items of clothing in order to get esteem from their peers, while the figurative burning speaks of their internal desire to attain and demonstrate masculine identity in line with perceived societal expectations of what it means to be a man. For the members of this crew, being a man is not a state of being but rather a state of doing. The Good Fellas subscribe to the belief that masculinity is earned through behaving in a certain manner, and conspicuous consumption is at the centre of this behaviour. However, conspicuous consumption is not an end in itself but rather a means to end. It serves as a vehicle to demonstrate their abilities as men to hustle, provide, and be responsible. Though ostentatious

destruction is part of the subculture, the findings suggest that it only occurs in the early stages of the group and disappears as the group evolves through age and its establishment as a popular crew. It is clear from the findings that consumption is evolutionary and plays a significant role in the communication of masculinities among The Good Fellas.

Keywords: poverty, marginality, social, subculture, youth, masculinity

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The IIE has multiple associations and endorsements with leading organisations and professional bodies and works with several other public and private higher education institutions.

The IIE brands have sites across South Africa; qualifications which are offered on the sites are directly linked to their mission and target student market. This means that students on each site will be able to study with other students with similar interests and ambitions. The IIE also offers qualifications in the distance mode of delivery. The flagship programme is a Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education.

The IIE has a strong central national academic and quality assurance team based in Sandton that provides academic leadership for the sites and qualifications across the country. The team is also responsible for the registration, curriculum, quality of delivery, and assessment and certification (graduation) of all the qualifications, meaning that students on a site in one city receive an educational experience that is guaranteed to match that which is offered in any other city. This experience includes the same access to key academic resources and facilities. Each site adds to this academic base with its own specific group of well-qualified lecturers who are subject-matter and discipline experts, and collectively have a wealth of knowledge and industry-based experience in the areas in which they teach, as well as the individualised student support that the sites give. An IIE student is, therefore, rounded both academically and socially, thus maximising student success.

The IIE is a founding member of SA Private Higher Education (SAPHE). This is an association of South Africa's leading private providers of higher education which has two objectives. Firstly, to promote the understanding of the general public about the role that private higher education plays in offering choices to students; secondly, to promote the quality of provision and thirdly to play an advocacy role with the regulators. The Independent Journal of Teaching and Learning, as a peer-reviewed journal that appears on the DHET's approved list of South African accredited journals, is one of the many ways in which The IIE is ensuring academic leadership within the higher education landscape of South Africa and, in particular, in private higher education.

For more information about The IIE, its academic opportunities, qualifications offered and sites of delivery, or SAPHE, please go to www.iie.ac.za or email info@iie.ac.za

DIGI-LITHO ☎ 011 914 5192 (N002919)