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What counts as preparation practices for English Across the Curriculum (EAC) among South African student teachers?

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to explore the practices used by three South African universities to prepare student teachers to integrate English language skills and subject content across the curriculum. Specifically, we report on Initial Teacher Education (ITE) preparation in EAC in a context where English is a second language and the medium of instruction. Initial Teacher Education as the preliminary process for entering the profession has been a subject of fierce debate. Globally, consensus has never been reached on how student teachers should be effectively prepared for the classroom (Taylor, 2016). Driven by government policies, social pressure, globalisation and market forces, ITE has

been a subject of empirical scrutiny which has not yielded common practices for the profession. In fact, Mensah, Boateng and Pillay (2018) note that, even with this constant focus, ITE has not been shielded from ongoing criticism and restructuring. This attention results from the need to maintain excellence in teaching, as a result of a realisation that its quality is dependent on the type of preparation practices that student teachers undergo (Darling-Hammond & Lieberman, 2012).

In the literature, researchers suggest that quality is achieved through well-developed teaching knowledge and the attainment of higher qualifications. Using Finland as an example, Darling-Hammond (2017) provides details on the way well-developed teacher education systems are a result of

quality learning experiences, as she notes that the country has created a 'sophisticated profession of teaching' (p. 292) largely by improving the preparation practices of student teachers who in most cases 'hold at least a two-year master's degree that encompasses both strong subject matter and pedagogical preparation, and that integrates research and practice' (p. 292). Darling-Hammond (ibid.) uses teacher qualifications and knowledge as signposts for quality education. While ITE has generally included a knowledge base that incorporates knowledge in content, pedagogy, educational contexts, psychology, pedagogical content knowledge and practice (Shulman & Shulman, 2004), it is the combination of these types of knowledge that is thought to be a successful model for preparing teachers to be effective facilitators of learning in their classrooms.

In addition to the generic knowledge base for teacher education, there has been a call for the inclusion of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in multilingual contexts. For example, researchers such as Wingate (2016), Macaro (2018), Lin (2016) and Macaro, Curle, Pun, An and Dearden (2018) point out the inadequacy of discourses in teaching knowledge that do not include preparation in the language of instruction. In other words, teacher preparation that only includes general pedagogy, content and pedagogical content knowledge is inadequate without proficiency in the language of learning and teaching (LoLT). In realising this inadequacy, in Europe, Australia and Asia there has been a concerted effort to prepare and develop all teachers in the skills and practice of using EAC (Lin, 2016). As a result, in recent years there has been a call for the explicit

preparation of student teachers in the use of the LoLT. Additionally, Pawan (2008) notes that such preparation requires a collaborative instructional approach that results from a cooperation between general English teachers and subject content teachers.

Consequently, the importance of language in learning across the curriculum has gained credence in education in recent years. That is, there has been recognition that disciplinary learning and knowledge acquisition are strongly dependent on proficient use of '... academic writing in English' in the LoLT (Hyland, 2018, p. 383). Vygotsky (1978) provides theoretical insights to explain the relationship between meaning, language context and knowledge construction, highlighting that a symbiotic relationship exists between language and thought. This relationship explains why students are not able to comprehend disciplinary concepts if they do not understand the word presentation (the language). This suggests that, beyond the general language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, students require successful disciplinary linguistic skills to be successful in disciplinary learning.

In South Africa, to address the preparation of student teachers in the LoLT, both the Department of Higher Education (DHET), which is responsible for ITE, and the Department of Basic Education (DBE), which oversees learning and teaching in the primary and high schools, advocate an EAC approach. The DHET, through its *Policy on the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications* (2015), stipulates that all ITE graduates should have an endorsement on their certificate confirming their proficiency in the use of at least one LoLT. In South Africa, there are two official LoLTs, namely English and Afrikaans,

however, this study focuses only on the former. For its part, the DBE, which is responsible for developing, maintaining and supporting the South African primary and higher school systems, strongly advocates for EAC. One of the strategic DBE goals is to improve teaching practices, capacity and quality. In fulfilling this goal and drawing from a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach and aligned to the Language Across the Curriculum (LAC),¹ the DBE advocates for the EAC approach (DBE, 2015).

The term EAC is not new in the Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) literature, but it is a relatively new language approach in countries like South Africa. In cases where English is the medium of instruction, the LAC approach is referred to as EAC. Macaro (2018, p. 15) explains that this approach refers to '[t]he use of the English language to teach academic subjects (other than English itself) in countries or jurisdictions in which the majority of the population's first language is not English'. The overarching aim of this approach is to expand learners' language learning opportunities and to align their learning experiences (Lin, 2016). The development of the EAC assumes that all disciplinary learning is dependent on English language skills, thus learners should be exposed to listening and speaking, reading and viewing, and writing and presenting across the curriculum (DBE, 2015). The role of the general English language teacher is to introduce language skills that are reinforced across all subjects in the curriculum.

Teachers of content, on the other hand, are responsible for modelling the language in their disciplines to enhance learners' language and disciplinary knowledge development (Lughmani, Gardner, Chen, Wong & Chan, 2016).

Notwithstanding the research, or the policy and teaching documents that have been provided by the DHET and the DBE, there is limited discourse on how student teachers are prepared for EAC. Realising this gap, the present study using South Africa as a research site offers descriptions of how three universities prepare student teachers for EAC. Specifically, the study responds to an unresolved question from the literature on how disciplinary teachers are prepared during ITE to use English as a medium of instruction in ESL contexts.

THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Most student teachers in South Africa are enrolled in the 26 public universities, with fewer in private institutions. The student teachers are prepared to teach in either the primary or high school education systems. According to the DBE (2019), the fields of specialization for teachers in South Africa are: Foundation Phase (\pm 5–9-year-olds), Grades R–3, Intermediate Phase (\pm 10–12-year-olds), Grades 4–6, Senior Phase (\pm 13–15-year-olds), Grades 7–9 and Further Education and Training (FET) Phase (\pm 16–18-year-olds) and Grades 10–12. The participants were high school student teachers who were being prepared to teach in two specialisations:

¹ Language across the curriculum refers to the integration of language learning in all subjects in the school curriculum. The approach is underpinned by the notion that language cannot be learnt without a context. Hence, infusing language learning in all content subjects provides that context. In other contexts, LAC is referred to as Content and Language Integrated Learning whose focus is to develop the learners' proficiency in the language of instruction.

Senior and FET phases. The DBE (2019) explains that, in South Africa, there are two routes to qualify as a teacher. First, one can take a four-year Bachelor of Education degree (BEd). Secondly, a holder of a Bachelor's degree with a one-year Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) qualifies to be a teacher. The participants were student teachers in the BEd programme.

UNDERSTANDING EAC AS A REFLECTIVE AND TRANSFORMATIVE PROCESS

In this study, the student teachers' description of their preparation in EAC is framed in terms of the theoretical insights of the works of John Dewey (1933), Donald Schön (1987) and Henry Giroux (1998). Dewey (1933) argues that teacher education should emphasise the teacher's involvement in reflective action as opposed to the routine that is a characteristic of the technicist view of ITE. Dewey (1933, p. 75) explains that reflective practice is the 'active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge'. This process results in reflective practitioners embodying three distinct characteristics, namely, open-mindedness, responsibility and wholeheartedness. Aligned to Dewey (1933), for Schön (1987), reflective teaching is a continuous process of growth that involves the teacher acting, observing, inventing and testing classroom experiences. Schön (1987) explains that there are three forms of reflection, namely, reflection-for-action, which is the planning stage before an action is taken, reflection-in-action which takes place during the action itself and reflection-on-action that takes place after the action. Simply put, reflective practice is a process

that facilitates student teachers' thinking and doing in the act of teaching and is geared to improving their professional knowledge. In line with both Dewey (1933) and Schön (1987), Giroux (1998) argues that teachers are transformative intellectuals. As transformative intellectuals, it is imperative that student teachers actively exercise judgement on pedagogical, moral and ethical practices that allow effective teaching and learning to take place.

As a blend of these different theoretical insights, the following characteristics of reflective and transformative models of ITE are applied in this study. We were interested in the student teachers' descriptions of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action as they develop and transform knowledge on integrating language skills and disciplinary content. As such, we explored both lower (normative and technical knowledge of EAC) and higher levels (subjectivity and contextual practices of EAC) of reflection (Schön, 1987). That is, to suggest student teachers are reflective and transformative practitioners is to acknowledge that they are involved in cognitive and philosophical discussion of 'knowing that' and 'knowing how' (Van Manen, 1995, p. 42) about EAC. By drawing from these complementary theoretical understandings in the context of this study we acknowledged the student teachers as active, engaged, intellectual, relational and cognitive EAC practitioners. By locating the study in reflective and transformative practices, we acknowledge that student teachers can process their thinking about EAC knowledge development by describing how they were prepared as EAC practitioners and offering solutions on how their preparation practices could be improved in context.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Our meaning-making process in this study is in the interpretivist tradition. According to Creswell and Poth (2017), interpretivism focuses on ways in which participants make sense of their realities and attach meaning to them. For this study, this means that we sought to understand the student teachers' descriptions and the meanings they attach to the EAC preparation practices in the context of their university. To understand the EAC preparation practices at each of the three universities, a qualitative multiple case study design was employed. The multiple case study involved three cases (universities) which were studied jointly in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the EAC preparatory practices at ITE institutions. A total of 120 student teachers volunteered to be part of the study and, through purposive sampling, 102 student teachers from three South African universities (University A = 30, University B = 40 and University C = 32) were eventually selected. The criteria for selection included fourth-year Bachelor of Education students, a non-language area of study (student teachers in Tswana, Sotho, Zulu, Swati, Pedi and Afrikaans were also excluded from the study) and having completed all the requirements for teaching practice.

Focus group discussions of between 40–120 minutes were conducted with each group of student teachers at their university. The audio data from these group discussions were transcribed and inductive thematic analysis conducted to describe EAC preparation practices at

the three universities. Ethical clearance for this study was received from the University of Free State, Faculty of Education Ethics Committee. The trustworthiness of the data was assured through crystallisation,² triangulation, audit trail and member checking.

FINDINGS

The following themes resulted from the analysis.

THEME 1: FORMAL PREPARATION PRACTICES

The participants in the study were asked to reflect-on-action (Schön, 1987); that is, to describe the preparation practices that their universities had dedicated to developing their competence as EAC practitioners. In the three universities sampled, the student teachers took formal classes that prepared them for EAC practice. Formal modules such as English Medium Instruction, English as a Language of Learning and Teaching, and Academic Literacies were used at University C, University B and University A respectively to prepare student teachers for EAC. All Bachelor of Education (BE) students at University B read English or Afrikaans language and literature courses with Bachelor of Arts (BA) students, depending on the LoLT they will teach on graduation. University B uses this practice as the initial step to prepare student teachers as EAC practitioners. At University A, there was no specific module for EAC preparation. Instead, the student teachers referred to a generic first-year module called Academic Literacies that is read by all first years.

² Crystallisation refers to the practice of ensuring the trustworthiness of qualitative research findings by using multiple methods of data collection to understand a phenomena from different perspectives.

What we found striking from the descriptions of the formal preparation practices in EAC was that none of the activities attempted to develop student teachers in ‘integrating the teaching of the content subject with language learning’ (DBE, 2015, p. 3). Secondly, the application of English language skills in content subjects was not modelled for student teachers at any of the three universities. Thirdly, the modules did not specifically address EAC or disciplinary language skills, but rather generic proficiency in the use of language for academic purposes. Fourthly, there appeared to be no communication between the EAC lecturers and the disciplinary lecturers. The student teachers felt estranged from EAC – despite being a promising approach to disciplinary learning, it was shunned in all non-language content subjects. Lastly, EAC was not taught as a practical subject; while subjects such as Psychology and Sociology were included as part of the Teaching Practicum lesson observation guide and rubric, EAC was not.

THEME 2: INTERSUBJECTIVE EAC PREPARATION PRACTICES

As we acknowledge that student teachers are transformative intellectuals (Giroux, 1998), we asked them to engage in reflection-on-action (Schön, 1987) using their teaching practicum experience to describe their real-world practices for EAC. The student teachers highlighted that their preparation practices in EAC had an intersubjective quality that was consciously and unconsciously embedded in both the craft and the practice of teaching. By intersubjective, we understood the student teachers to mean the professional, cognitive and academic agreement among the university disciplinary lecturers and

mentor teachers about the value and merits of EAC in content teaching. The EAC preparation practices in all three universities emanated from outside the discipline, which was problematic as the student teachers had not had the experience of observing EAC in action. The student teachers had somehow accepted the importance of EAC as a shared and collective teaching and learning arrangement in their disciplines, but were cognitively and relationally alienated from developing EAC practice further than a generic module. This is because in their interaction with experienced disciplinary academics and mentor teachers, the EAC practice was excluded from their professional mentorship.

The student teachers saw the link in their EAC preparation practices from their own perspectives as collective individuals who battled with divergent feelings and thoughts on integrating language skills and disciplinary knowledge. The subjectivity of the student teachers’ previous experience as a learner in education limits the zeal by which the student teachers develop the practice of EAC. Secondly, the simultaneously divergent and sometimes frustrating understanding of the value of EAC and inadequate knowledge of how to implement it was echoed by all the student teachers. English Across the Curriculum seems to have found merit with the student teachers, but is outrightly rejected verbally or through non-implementation by experienced practitioners to whom they are attached during teaching practicum. This results in student teachers being hesitant to apply EAC as an approach in disciplinary teaching and learning.

CONCLUSION

This study provides descriptions of EAC preparation practices at three ITE institutions where English is used as a medium of instruction. The findings indicate that the student teachers may be graduating from the ITE system without adequate theoretical and practical knowledge of EAC and its critical role in disciplinary ESL contexts. Although both the DHET and the DBE have policies on ITE preparation and EAC strategy in high schools in place, the reality is that the integration of this approach is still in its infancy both at universities and in school systems. Consequently, because experienced lecturers and mentors do not model the EAC strategy for them, the student teachers' role as transformative intellectuals is thwarted. Unlike the ideal reflective practitioner, whom Dewey (1933) states can resolve problems, the student teachers in this study were not able to integrate language skills in disciplinary learning in their teaching practice.

Despite the small sample size, this study has certain implications for ITE institutions. Firstly, if student teachers are

to truly understand the need for EAC, there may be a need for curriculum analysis and revision. In all three universities, EAC was not common practice, thus the student teachers never saw the principles of EAC being embedded and enacted in their own ITE curriculum. Secondly, the location of formal EAC preparation practices outside the discipline is problematic. This situation, where student teachers do not see EAC practices in their disciplines, results in curriculum estrangement. Lastly, the need for EAC to be modelled both at universities and during teaching practicum is critical. In South Africa, as in many countries where English is a second language and a medium of instruction, EAC is a relatively new phenomenon that few have experienced. Hence, the need for modelling it for BEd students across the university curriculum is key to its application in the high school education system.

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