

Editorial

Teacher Education Practices in a Flexible, Higher Education Environment

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Although the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) world pandemic is almost over, the indelible mark it has left on teacher education, which this journal focuses on, cannot be easily erased. In their article on the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on teacher education in Portugal, Flores and Gago (2020) share the problems, trials, and prospects it brought, with the implications for teaching and teacher education in such inexact times. This aside, in a country like South Africa, a recent report has indicated a massive need for teachers in the next ten years due to almost half of the teaching force retiring by then (Van der Berg, Gustafsson and Burger 2022). Developing flexible learning pathways for all students is a crucial agenda in the Education 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goal 4 to meet the ever-increasing demand for higher education. Therefore, the field of teacher education needs to evolve innovative ways of staying relevant, irrespective of the demands.

Before the pandemic, most teacher education institutions were contented with face-to-face teaching and learning, including practicum, which is an essential part of in-service teacher training. For this volume, the call went out for manuscripts that will focus on the transformations teacher education has experienced in the face of pervasive technologies which the pandemic has forced on all institutions. Articles in the volume cover flexible teaching and learning pathways that some teacher training institutions had to grapple with, the lessons learnt, and their openness to further growth.

In their lead article in this volume, Jacobs and Ferreira-Meyers (2024) have rightly drawn attention to going forward, and the need for flexible teacher education which should directly speak to the context of the recipients.

In their response to this call, Wollhuter and Greyling (2024) shared their experience through comparative and international education case studies at their institution on how the pandemic has forced a major review and reshaping of the model the institution has used for over two decades. The lessons they learnt are invaluable.

One of the new trends that came along with the pandemic experience was moving the teaching practicum online. Using the Domestication Theory, Taole et al. (2024), in the third article, explore the challenges supervisors face with online supervision, using an online

platform. These included poor communication between supervisors and pre-service teachers, the lack of digital literacy among pre-service teachers, the difficulty of network coverage, providing feedback, and the need for training of supervisors and teachers in training in using the adopted platform with its diverse functions before supervision.

De Jager (2024), in the fourth article, shares the experiences of student teachers in acquiring practical online art skills during teaching practicum. Apart from sharing the challenges they face, some of which include a lack of in-person teaching and student-teacher support from mentors and lecturers, their valuable suggestions cover demonstrations posted on WhatsApp groups, peer tutoring, creating offline videos for learners to view and work on activities at their own pace, virtual museums, and using natural resources from learners' surroundings to develop practical art skills.

In the fifth article, Arfa-Kaboodvand et al. (2024) focuses on the perceptions of academics in international branch campuses on professional development and distance education in enhancing their capacity. This becomes necessary given the increasing number of such campuses and the need for upholding the integrity of the programmes despite the obvious contextual factors. Their findings portray the value the respondents place on the importance of professional development coupled with technological adeptness. Nonetheless, depending on the subject matter, they still prefer traditional face-to-face learning modalities for their CPD.

Lastly, Wolhuter (2024) extends his work to cover comparative and international education as a way of strengthening internationalisation in teacher education programmes at universities in Africa. This is because this is one of the huge gaps this field faces on the continent. He contends the different purposes served by comparative and international education courses in teacher education programmes can help to counteract Northern hegemony in education and model the course of the decolonisation of education move.

Overall, this volume draws attention to the need for more research into flexible teaching and learning pathways for teacher education. Although TETFLE received far more manuscripts than those published here, not many met the required standard of the journal.

It is our hope that our readers will enjoy reading and ruminating on the articles thereby inspiring to further work on this important theme.

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