EDITORIAL
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TETFLE TEACHER EDUCATION THROUGH
FLEXIBLE LEARNING IN AFRICA
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Reimagining African teacher education through distance education for a post-pandemic future

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Although the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted education systems, especially at the schooling level, it is important that we now begin to look ahead to determine what we have learned from the pandemic that will help us to rebuild and move away from an emergency response to future-directed resilience (Kanwar & Daniel, 2020; Hodges et al., 2020).

Several compilations have been made of our lessons of experience. A good example is an e-book edited by Ferdig et al. (2020), which comprises 133 chapters with over 850 pages of examples and reflections by diverse education stakeholders. In similar vein, a study undertaken by Bozkurt et al. (2020) draws information from across 31 countries to reflect on the ways in which the pandemic exacerbated issues of social injustice, inequity and the digital divide. Their study also highlighted the importance of openness in education, the need to think about more flexible forms of assessment and evaluation, as well as the ethical implications of increased access to student data because of the move online. A grounded theory study of publications related to the impact of school closures in low- and middle-income countries and the emerging increased role of technology by Jordan (2020) also identified five recurring themes related to access, response, support, quality and implications for the future. The current issue of TETFLE can be seen as a modest contribution to this ongoing process of reflection –however from an African contextual perspective – and it is hoped to contribute to the important agenda of continuous quality improvement in teacher education (Anietor, 2019).

As in most other countries across the world, the immediate response to the closure of school and university campuses in Africa was to try to move learning online. This reaction now gives rise to questions about teacher preparedness for such a move. There is general consensus that teachers remain central to learning provision, even in the online environment, but they need appropriate training and support to develop strategies that are not confined by the limitations of working in the physical classroom only (Mays, 2021). Such initial and continuing professional development will include, among other things, training and modelling related to using appropriate pedagogies and technologies (such as social media) to support online learning (Adelakun, 2018; Anumula et al., 2020; Chaka et al., 2020); making ethical and sound use of the increased data about learners that becomes available in the online environment (Bart et al., 2020; Herodotou et al., 2020; Prinsloo et al., 2022); and rethinking models of learning design and assessment for increasingly diverse contexts (Gil-Jaurena et al.,

2020; Mittelmeier et al., 2018). All of the foregoing will inevitably also mean making informed decisions about what technologies to deploy, in what contexts and in what ways, and the impact this will have on how blended and online teaching is designed, implemented and reviewed (NJoki, 2021; Makoe & Shandu, 2018; von Lindeiner-Stráský et al. 2020; Weidlich et al. 2018).

The first article in this issue, contributed by Leonorah T. Nyaruwata (Teacher development during and beyond COVID-19: Perspectives from Zimbabwe), observes that in response to the pandemic much teaching and learning moved online, despite the fact that most teachers were inadequately prepared and often under-resourced. It is speculated that blended learning – involving the use of both face-to-face and online learning – will become the norm in the post-pandemic era, making use of the best of both worlds. This implies the need for a change in how teachers are prepared. Teacher educators will need to model appropriate blended learning practice for preparing well-equipped teachers in future.

Modelling appropriate e-learning practice is also the focus of the paper by Oyeyemi O. Aitokhuehi (How well are student teachers prepared for e-learning and teaching? A case study from the University of Lagos). The author refers to the Community of Inquiry model to reflect on practice at the University of Lagos during the pandemic. She observes that while there was evidence from the Faculty of Education that elements of social, cognitive and teaching presence had to some extent been addressed, there was scope for improvement.

Chinengundu Tawanda and Hondonga Jerald (Teaching Practicum Assessment Procedures Adopted by Primary Teachers' Colleges during the COVID-19 pandemic era in Zimbabwe) noted in their article that while much of the theoretical learning involved in teacher education could be moved online, the assessment of teaching practice was severely restricted due to school closures. Although practice can (to some extent at least) be modelled online and through analysis of video-recorded lessons, Ministries (as teacher employers) and university/College staff (as teacher trainers) prefer the direct observation of practice in authentic settings. This meant that for many student teachers, completion of their studies had been postponed until schools could re-open and direct observation of their teaching practice could resume.

The article by Omidire M. Funke and Manyaku Maroga (E-learning for student support, inclusion and equity in diverse post-pandemic teaching contexts) observes that at least some elements of e-learning are here to stay. Hence, there is need to

TETFLE — TEACHER EDUCATION THROUGH FLEXIBLE LEARNING IN AFRICA · JOURNAL

conceptualise and operationalise strategies to promote inclusion and equity in diverse post-pandemic teaching contexts. This qualitative study, based on affordance theory, suggests that when content experts work collaboratively with learning design experts, and they have the necessary technical support, they can design in multiple modes of engagement to mitigate at least some of the challenges inherent in working with a diverse student population.

In an interesting phenomenological reflection on practice, Jean Antunes and Mariam Farooq (Reimagining Online and Blended Provision of English for Academic Purposes: Practices and Reflections from a Distributed Network in East Africa) argue the need for "more critical and contextually relevant approaches to the integration of technology" – especially in relation to language development in the rich multilingual environments that are characteristic of most countries in Africa. While the other articles in this issue were research based, Antunes and Farooq's submission reported on blended teaching practices in the teacher education programme. The authors reported on how to make online and blended teaching practices of English for Academic Purposes more contextually relevant.

To conclude, the editors of this special issue of *Teacher Education through Flexible Learning in Africa (TETFLE)* would like to thank the following colleagues who assisted with the review process and contributed to the community of practice in this way:

Dr Tony Lelliott
Dr Ephraim Mhlanga
Dr Fatimah Akinrinade
Prof. Karen Ferreira-Meyers
Dr Deborah Ali
Prof. Lynette Jacobs
Prof. Geesje van der Berg
Prof. Funke Omidire
Prof. Gezani Baloyi
Prof. Bernadette Geduld
Dr Kris Stutchbury
Dr Florence Kamonjo
Dr Rexwhite Enakrire
Prof Charlene Du Toit

Prof Leonorah Nyaruwata

Dr Lydia Mbati

Dr Lebo Patience Mudau

Dr Kris Stutchbury

Dr Kris Stutchbury

Hendri Kruger

Nelia Oosthuysen

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