

# **African Journal of Pedagogy and Curriculum**

**ISSN 2309-4648**

**Volume 1, No. 1, March 2014**

**Bloemfontein, Free State Province**

**South Africa**

**Publisher**

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## African Journal of Pedagogy and Curriculum

ISSN 2309-4648

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## Editorial

We are pleased to introduce the *African Journal of Pedagogy and Curriculum (AJPC)*, a peer review journal focusing on scholarly information on major contemporary and innovations in education, humanities and social sciences in an African and global context. AJPC focuses on advancing curriculum theory, educational inquiry, and pedagogical praxis. We expressed our gratitude toward the national and international editorial board members as well the authors who have contributed for helping to produce the first inaugural issue of the journal and Mimosa education Press for agreeing to publish this journal. In this first inaugural journal consists of papers that have been peer reviewed, amended where necessary and published. The overarching theme emerged from the papers was the advancement of educational research from an African perspective to create sustainable and effective teaching and learning practices.

The relevance of educational research in the African context is crucial for sustainable economic development with reference to the context of teaching and learning. This volume consists of case studies that investigate the theory, practices and challenges faced in the process of advancing educational research in sustainable teaching and learning practices to promoting economic development, poverty eradication and transformation in Africa. It represents an important component of global knowledge on development issues (Nkomo (2000). Learning from African context, by investigating first what local communities know and have, can improve understanding of local conditions and provide a productive context for activities designed to help the communities. Afrocentrists aim to expand the curriculum to include the valid achievements and knowledge of all societies and to use the voice of the community/culture itself to present a people's histories and struggles for affirmation to economic development through educational research (UNESCO 2012). Adapting international practices to the local setting can help improve the impact and sustainability of development assistance. Sharing teaching practices, in particular in an African context, and across communities can help enhance cross-cultural understanding and promote the cultural dimension of teacher development (Hoppers 2001).

Major themes emerged from papers submitted in this first volume of the journal are those of teaching methods, teaching practices, barriers to learning, character education, feedback on assessment and the context of education in Africa.

In the first paper, Amponsah reported on the use of student teams' achievement division (STAD) in teaching English First Additional Language in Kwazulu-Natal secondary schools. Results indicated that STAD is established as the strongest cooperative learning strategy and thus beneficial in the teaching of EFAL

Pretorius and Frans explore the barriers to learning English as a Second Language in two Higher Learning Institutions in Namibia. The effectiveness of learning language requires that users of a language be provided with the right knowledge to subsist with its complexity and demanding nature especially in the area of writing. Findings show that students' communicative competency is very poor. Therefore, it is recommended that a framework for improvement is needed from syllabi content, teaching of speaking and writing skills.

van Wyk explores the phenomenon of social media in an open distance learning teaching practice course. Findings indicated that there was a positive correlation between the frequency of student use of social media and their relationship with their peers and instructors as well as how they describe the overall quality of instruction and the preserve program, the results also highlight that there are many questions still to be answered.

Ndamba investigates the use of mother tongue instruction in rural Zimbabwean primary schools. Research reveal that there is a growing body of knowledge that supports the use of the mother tongue in education, raising the question why the cognitive advantages of the mother language should remain untapped for the benefit of primary school pupils in ex-colonial African countries.

Baamphatha Dinama's paper focusses on multi-religious education curriculum. Findings revealed that pluralism in a multi-religious education curriculum is an imperative since in its efforts it attempts to

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deliver a form of education which is accessible to all learners irrespective of religious, ethnic, cultural, economic and social background. On the practical side, multi-religious curriculum has the potential to prepare the young to live in a national as well as a globalised world.

Okeke argues that learning from 'good' practices that African [universities] possibly could learn from the Bologna process and European students' mobility. The author emphasizes that learning from good practice is a step in the right direction, and therefore concludes that Africa could still maintain her Africanness while adopting the good practices of other regions such as that offered through the Bologna Process. Doing so, would enable Africa to forge a compatible approach towards the positioning of Africa's higher education to compete with other education systems at the global arena.

Kasozi and van Rooy reported that the educational orientation of teacher educators in colleges of education in Botswana was influenced by their educational practices. The findings revealed that most teacher educators who completed the questionnaire had a pedagogic rather than an andragogic orientation. A pedagogical orientation is associated with teacher centred practices and an andragogical orientation is associated with learner centred practices.

Okeke interrogates the position of the new policy, Minimum Requirement for Teacher Education Qualifications, requirements for teacher education qualifications regarding character education for trainee teachers. The study suggests the need for a proper mandate and pedagogical framework on character education for teacher training institutions. Some curricula issues involved in character education are presented. Noting that the public holds schools and teachers accountable for societal demeanour, the paper concludes that policy-informed well-structured character education would culminate in the raising of the right calibre of teachers that may be responsive to societal needs.

Booyse in her paper argues for teachers' deeper apprehension of the need for learning to progress towards specific levels of skill and understanding by using formative assessment and feedback as teaching tools. Recognising the full range of learner achievement in a diverse teaching and learning community through constructive feedback allows learners to learn from the experience of the group. The motivational effect of such feedback inspires learners to achieve their best. In this way the learner becomes a strategic and effective learner.

The papers in this inaugural volume focus on various issues regarding educational research from an African perspective as a phenomenon providing and creating sustainable teaching and learning practices to promoting teacher development in an African context. Though the inaugural issue focus on the relevance of educational research, most of the papers explore the issues from an educational context. The peer reviewers and editors are thanked for the value constructive feedback received and good work done.

*Micheal M Van Wyk*

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## Investigating The Use Of Student Teams Achievement Division In Teaching English First Additional Language In Kwazulu-Natal Secondary Schools

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### ABSTRACT

*The Department of Basic Education (DBE) emphasizes inclusivity as a central part of organizing, planning and teaching at school (DBE, 2010). This calls for teachers who are well equipped and are able to exhibit a sound understanding of teaching techniques in order to overcome the barriers to learning through diversity in teaching. One learning technique that can guarantee effective teaching and learning and that caters for all learners in the English First Additional Language (EFAL) class is the Student Teams Achievement Division (STAD). Hence this research looks into how EFAL teachers apply the technique in their classrooms. A sample of 262 EFAL teachers from four districts in the Kwazulu-Natal Province participated in this study. The cross-sectional survey approach was used in this study, allowing for the use of a likert scale survey questionnaire to be used for data collection. Result of the research indicated STAD is established as the strongest cooperative learning strategy and thus beneficial in the teaching of EFAL.*

**Key words:** *Student Teams Achievement Division. English First Additional Language. Cooperative learning. Learning Technique. Learning Strategy.*

### Introduction

In the words of Van Wyk (2007): “*This cooperative technique is at present the most researched cooperative learning model in especially Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Art and other subjects. The main purpose of [Student teams achievement divisions] STAD is to drastically improve and accelerate learner performance.*” Van Wyk’s assertion obviously brings to the fore the importance of STAD as a cooperative learning technique and its benefits in the teaching/learning environment. Several authorities share the sentiments of Van Wyk and postulate that STAD has established itself as the most researched into and most widely used technique under the cooperative learning approach that has been assessed on academic achievements, attitudes, social interactions as well as the interpersonal relationships (Tarim and Akdeniz 2008; Nagib 2003; Johnson & Johnson 1998; Johnson et al. 1983; Slavin 1990; Kagan 1994).

Apart from being the most extensively researched technique in cooperative learning, STAD is also accepted as the simplest form compared to the other cooperative learning techniques which makes it an effective instrument for teachers who are new in using the cooperative learning technique (Slavin 1990). In the light of the buildup so far, this study seeks to establish STAD as an effective learning technique for both students and teachers in a cooperative learning situation by taking a deep dive into STAD in terms of exposing the model upon which STAD, as a cooperative learning technique, is grounded and also do an exposition on the background to the technique as well as various definitions that have been given by different writers.

Apparently, there are many factors that may cause a student to lose interest in school in this era of high competition in the job market. However, one factor that is likely to stand out is the teacher factor. It is therefore of little surprise that both Haskins and Loeb (2007) and Sanders and Rivers (1996) all agree teacher quality is the most dominant factor that affects students’ academic achievement at school. What makes the teacher the most important factor is that though the teaching/learning process has over the years changed from teacher dominance to learner-centredness, the teacher is in a position to select teaching strategies that would work well for the benefit of all learners and this can be done by accepting that what works for one set of learners may not work for others (Berliner & Biddle, 1995 cited in Tresner, 2010). It therefore makes much sense in agreeing with Brimijoin (2005) that teachers need foundational skills in differentiation to understand how each student best learns the curriculum.

In close relation to the above, it must be noted that even when both teachers and learners are present in the classroom, as in the ‘normal’ face-to-face practice in regular classrooms, there can still be



what Moore (1993) explains as a distance which is pedagogical rather than geographical between the teacher and the learners. To this end Amponsah (2010) explains that there is the need for special organization and teaching procedures in any educational programme as a way of bridging the pedagogical distance that may be created in the classroom. He further states that transactional distance can be overcome by ensuring that the medium of the delivery [of teaching] has direct effect on the teaching outcomes and also the quality of the dialogue need to be fine-tuned to suit the teaching/learning environment.

The buildup so far makes it imperative for teachers to cater for individual differences in their classrooms in order to ensure that they do not go by a one size fit all policy in terms of content and methodology. To ensure equity, it is a matter of prudence on the part of teachers to make use of teaching strategies that would be beneficial to all learners, thus bringing all inclusive education to bear and this can best be done by adopting one of the most researched and guaranteed teaching approaches called cooperative learning.

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) emphasizes inclusivity as a central part of organizing, planning and teaching at school (DBE, 2010). The DBE acknowledges that inclusivity can become a reality when all teachers exhibit a sound understanding of recognizing and addressing the barriers to learning and also with the ability to plan for diversity. Planning of diversity should take into consideration individual differences and therefore different strategies that can be applied in the teaching process to ensure positive results are obtained at the end of the day. In a similar vein, Altshuler and Schmautz, (2006) add that the enactment of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) in the United States of America in 2001 sought to ensure that schools improved in order to meet the demands of an unpredictable world that required an educational system that is capable of delivering world-class learning students.

In this regard, Van Wyk (2007) posits that *"In recent years, South Africa has experienced an important paradigm shift in education: a teacher-centred approach has been replaced with a learner-centred approach. Put differently, the emphasis is now on an outcomes-based education (OBE) approach as the key underlying principle of the NCS"* (p.4). To add to this Effandi (2005) cited in Effandi and Iksan (2011) established that cooperative learning [in the case of this research, STAD] has caused a paradigm shift in the teaching/learning environment where the focus has shifted from teacher-centered to a situation where small groups become the focus, making it learner-centered. This situation is believed to offer excellent opportunities where learners have the chance to engage in problem solving with the help of task members which makes the STAD technique an efficient one to put learners in the center of affairs in the classroom.

Emanating from the studies, there is a high correlation between the quality of education that teachers provide to learners and what the teachers do in the classroom. Thus, in preparing the students of today to become successful individuals of tomorrow, teachers need to ensure that their teaching is effective. Teachers should have knowledge of how students learn and how best to teach. Effandi & Iksan (2011) concurred that changing how and what to teach are continuous professional concerns and for that matter efforts should be made to shift the focus of teaching from the traditional to a more student centered approach. It can be added that the STAD as a cooperative learning technique caters for student centered learning.

Based on the ongoing, it is justified to agree that education today must enable students to meet the challenges ahead and demands of the work environment and of daily living because this will shape their need not only for knowledge, but also for communication skills, problem solving skills, creative and critical thinking skills in the years ahead, which are all synonymous with the main components of the STAD technique. An American Association for the Advancement of Science (1989 cited in Effandi & Iksan, 2011:36) report that: *"...the collaborative nature of scientific and technological work should be strongly reinforced by frequent group activity in the classroom. ...Similarly, students should gain experience sharing responsibility for learning with each other"* (p.36).

In summation, Van Wyk (2007) opines that learners' performance is influenced by the environment in which learning takes place, which therefore means that the teacher has to make deliberate efforts to create a learning environment that is free and at the same time will challenge and motivate learners. He concludes up by noting that the learning environment must promote a learning culture. It is therefore worthy of note that, as many researchers have identified that one strategy that works well in the teaching/learning environment is cooperative learning and for that matter, the STAD technique is the most effective in this regard. Hence, this technique can be used in teaching of English First Additional Language (EFAL) in the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) Province in South Africa.

## Literature Review

Without a shred of doubt, anyone who has ventured into the use of cooperative learning will readily agree that STAD has been widely researched and applied more than any other cooperative learning technique and for that reason a lot has been written about this technique. To start with Slavin (1986) described STAD as a model that works best with material that has single, correct answers which is most likely to be used in areas such as mathematics computation, spelling, language usage, mechanics, and grammar. Eight years after, Slavin (1994) expanded his description for the technique by pointing out that STAD is not meant to be a comprehensive teaching method, but it is rather a way of organizing classes, with the main aim of accelerating the achievement of all students. By this later explanation Slavin was to a large extent doing justice to misconceptions people might have had about STAD, due to its effectiveness, by way of narrowing it to where it rightly belonged - a cooperative learning technique and not an approach in itself.

An agreement and disagreement arise when the assertions by Johnson & Johnson (1999a) is put in perspective. First of all, they agreed that cooperative learning results from healthy interaction skills, success of the individual student and group members, formation of personal and professional relationships which are all in line with what STAD was established for. A disagreement however arises when they mention that STAD is an approach because that notion had been discredited by Slavin in 1994. Nonetheless, the principles of the technique hold for both authorities and the strategy being accepted as a technique has come to stay over time.

In moving on, STAD in the lenses of (Nagib, 2003) is the use of heterogeneous teams for study and practice. A further explanation is that individual quizzes are given to teams on content to obtain team points so that if students want their team to earn some form of team recognition, they help their teammates learn the material. To corroborate Nagib's assertion, Rai and Samsuddin (2007) declared that STAD is one of the many strategies in cooperative learning which helps promote collaboration and self-regulating learning skills. What can be learned from Nagib and Rai Samsuddin's opinions is the fact that they both dwell on cooperation which makes their case a strong one as far as STAD as a cooperative learning technique is concerned.

Although different people have shared their views on STAD by way of defining or describing it, they all seem to pivot on the same issue - cooperation. For instance Seifert and Sutton (2009: 204) are quoted that in STAD:

*Students are placed in small groups (or teams). The class in its entirety is presented with a lesson and the students are subsequently tested. Individuals are graded on the team's performance. Although the tests are taken individually, students are encouraged to work together to improve the overall performance of the group.*

Similarly, (Zhuo, 2011: 987) stated "STAD operates on the principle that students work together to learn and are responsible for their teammates' learning as well as their own, and emphasizes having team goals that are dependent on the learning of all group members". Zuo's definition has so much resemblance to that of Tiantong and Teemuangsai (2013: 86) who in a similar vein describe STAD as a collaborative learning strategy in which small groups of learners with different levels of ability work together to accomplish a shared learning goal.

From the ongoing, which considered what various writers have stated on the technique chronologically from 1986 to 2013, STAD can be said to operate when and where there is positive cooperation among team members who embark on a mission with a vision. STAD can therefore be described as a cooperative learning technique in which small groups are formed irrespective of background, ability or any classification to ensure that each team mate puts in maximum effort (synergic effect) in helping one another so as to ensure that the aim of the team is achieved at the end of the day.

Furthermore, Kagan (1992) established that there are more than fifty forms of cooperative learning. By this statement Kagan was talking about the various techniques/strategies of the cooperative learning approach which started in the mid 1960's by Johnson and Johnson as learning together. A common denominator in all the cooperative learning strategies is that they share a common concept which is students learning together and each taking personal responsibility for himself/herself and the group members, which is akin to the STAD technique.

Historically, the STAD technique came into being as a way of effectively addressing the key components of cooperative learning [students learning together]. The technique was developed at John Hopkins University in 1978 by Robert Slavin and his team as part of a student learning approach with

other cooperative learning techniques, which included Teams-Games-Tournaments, Jigsaw II and Team Assisted Individualization which were developed by Devries and Edwards in the early 1970s, Aronson and Associates in the late 1970s and Slavin and Associates in the early 1980s respectively. As established by Zhuo (2011), STAD was developed by Slavin in the late 1970s. Till date, the cooperative learning technique that has been mostly researched into is STAD and it is also very adaptable to almost all subjects and grades.

STAD was compared to Team-Groups-Tournament (TGT) by Slavin in 1986 and his opinion was that STAD works best with material that has single, correct answers and is most likely to be used in mathematics computation, spelling, language usage, and mechanics. He further contended that as in TGT students are placed in four-member heterogeneous groups for teacher directed instruction and for assisting one another in mastering the basic material. The main difference that came out between the two techniques was that instead of tournaments as in the case of TGT, individually administered quizzes were used in STAD and in the case of the later, members were not allowed to assist each other. However, a similarity was identified between the two techniques in the sense that both STAD and TGT were aimed at providing grade level instruction in basic skill areas at the same general pace for all students.

Emphasis is made that in a STAD setting, students are assigned to four- or five-member learning teams and the composition of the team is high, average, and low performing students, and of boys and girls of different racial or ethnic backgrounds. The essence here is that STAD teams absorb every individual in the learning situation, making it highly nondiscriminatory which may be a possible reason for its effectiveness when applied in different situations at different levels and for different subject areas. On the part of the teacher, the following five steps are to be followed:

- Introduce new material to be learned
- Let team members study worksheet on the material until they master the material
- Let individuals take quizzes on the material
- Combine the scores to create team scores
- Give recognition to members of the winning.

STAD as a cooperative learning technique has three central concepts (Slavin, 1994 and 1995). The three central concepts as identified by Slavin are: team rewards, individual accountability and equal opportunities for success. The explanations to the concepts are given below;

**Team rewards:**

- These can take the form of certificates or other rewards which are given if a STAD team achieves above a designated criterion.
- The teams are not in competition with each other but rather, all or none of the teams can achieve rewards depending on their score.

**Individual accountability:**

- The success of the team depends on the individual learning of all team members.
- The activity focuses on team members tutoring one another and making sure that everyone in the team is ready for the quiz (or other assessment) that students take individually.

**Equal opportunities for success:**

- What students contribute to the team is based on their individual improvement from their own previous success.
- Ensures that high, average and low achievers are equally challenged to do their best and that the contributions of all members are equally valued by the team.

In tracing the background of STAD, which led to taking snapshots of how the technique operates, one issue continually stands tall and that is realising over and over again how the technique directly or indirectly weaves into the bigger approach -cooperative learning- and how the core principles of the technique and that of the approach overlap in ensuring that task teams work both individually and as groups in order to pull strength together (synergy) for the success of the members (individually) and the group collectively.

In summing up, Trilling & Fadel (2009) established that good teaching and learning need to be able to draw more students' attention, serve different groups of learners, and emphasize more on skill practice, thinking process and situational management. They added that in the 21st Century where learning consists of core subjects and themes that revolve around three core skills, viz: life and career

skills, learning and innovation skills, and information media and technology skills. It is their firm belief that these three skills will aid learners in acquiring knowledge and for that reason it behooves on teachers to create a situation where learners are prepared for future jobs, products yet to be invented and new skills geared towards their creativity and innovation. What Trilling and Fadel are calling for goes even beyond the learning and teaching being focused on now. They actually foresee life after learners have been taught today, so they are calling for exactly why STAD continuous to be a force to reckon with and so to go by what they established means making use of the technique in order to equip learners with skills and knowledge for today and the future.

### **Problem and Purpose of the Study**

In shedding light on the use of STAD, Trilling & Fadel (2009) identified that good teaching and learning need to be able to draw more learners' attention, serve different groups of learners, and emphasize more on skill practice, thinking process and situational management. What they emphasized on is basically the use of a cooperative learning approach that builds the learner holistically. They added that in the 21st Century where learning consists of core subjects and themes that revolve around three core skills, viz: life and career skills, learning and innovation skills, and information media and technology skills. It is their firm belief that these three skills will aid learners in acquiring knowledge and for that reason it behooves on teachers to create a situation where learners are prepared for future jobs, products yet to be invented and new skills geared towards their creativity and innovation. What Trilling and Fadel are calling for goes even beyond the learning and teaching being focused on now. They actually foresee life after learners have been taught today, so they are calling for exactly why STAD continuous to be a force to reckon with and so to go by what they established means making use of the technique in order to equip learners with skills and knowledge for today and the future.

The South African Department of Education (DoE, 2007: 1) outlines in the EFAL subject guidelines the following as the reasons why EFAL is important as a fundamental subject that holds to the success of all other subjects that are taught and examined in English. It is stated that learners should study EFAL as it:

- Sets a foundation for learning and is a life skill.
- Promotes literacy and comprehension, both verbally and non-verbally.
- Contributes to a holistic approach to learning and personal development.
- Develops critical thinking skills and higher level cognitive skills.
- Empowers learners to communicate confidently and effectively in social and workplace contexts.
- Contributes to forming and maintaining healthy and positive relationships.

The question that will naturally be in the mind of anyone who goes through the points outlined by the DoE will be: how is it going to be done? The answer is that it is for such reasons that, in teaching and learning, successive South African curricula have put learners in the centre of affairs instead of the teacher and have strongly advocated for teaching techniques that will ensure that learners come out of school well equipped for the job market and for the society at large. To bring the curtain down, STAD as a cooperative learning technique supports and promotes what has been outlined by the DoE in promoting EFAL as a fundamental by applying the technique appropriately. Hence, the purpose of this research is to investigate how EFAL teachers are using STAD as a cooperative learning strategy in teaching the subject in secondary schools in the Kwazulu-Natal Province.

### **Research Methodology**

#### **Research design**

The authors employed the quantitative cross-sectional survey design in order to collect data from a large group of respondents to give a snapshot of how they make use of the STAD cooperative learning technique in teaching EFAL.

#### **Sampling**

The KwaZulu-Natal Province Department of Basic Education (KZNPDBe) is made up of 12 education districts, making it not feasible to conduct this study in all the districts as far as money, time and energy to be expended are put into consideration. The researchers therefore opted to use the the



simple random sampling technique, specifically, the lottery system to select four out of the 12 districts for data collection. The use of the simple random sampling emanates from the assertion by Bailey (1978) that the sample size needs to reflect the population value of a particular variable which depends both on the size of the population and the amount of heterogeneity in the population. Considering the time and energy at hand and the assertion by Bailey; Ilembe, Sisonke, Ugu and Vryheid are the four districts that were selected through the lottery system in order to gather data for this study.

In KZNDBE there are 1585 high schools (EMIS, 2012), with 3170 teachers in charge of English (FAL). To get a sample that is representative enough, 50 percent (50%= 262) of the teachers were selected from the four districts for the study, using the multistage sampling technique. The number was deemed representative in view of the assertion by Fraenkel, Wallen and Hyun (2012:102) that a sample should be as large as the researcher can obtain with reasonable expenditure of time and energy.

**Table 1: Proportional Allocation of Schools**

District	Schools per district	Sent questionnaires
Ilembe	117	59
Sisonke	77	39
Ugu	143	71
Vryheid	186	93
<b>Total</b>	<b>523</b>	<b>262</b>

#### **Data collection instruments and procedures**

The survey questionnaire was used to collect data for this study because it is a widely useful instrument for collecting survey information and providing structured, often numerical data. It can also be administered without the presence of the researcher, and because it is often straightforward to analyse (Van Wyk, 2007) also made it a good and useful instrument for collecting data. The questionnaire as a data collection tool also allows respondents in a study to respond to the same set of questions on a particular topic in a predetermined way (Fraenkel et.al., 2012), that is, if it is highly structured or strictly closed-ended.

The field work started after the researcher had obtained clearance from the KZNPDDBE, the researchers visited the districts selected one after the other and used the accidental, snowballing and purposive methods in reaching the number of schools that had been randomly picked during the sampling process. The reason for the use of the three methods emanate from the fact that any school within the district that the researchers came into contact with was a point to start with (accidental sampling) as far as the school was selected in the sampling process. From then teachers were asked for directions to nearby schools (snowballing) and once the first and second methods had been used the researchers handed over two questionnaires to the teachers (purposive sampling) responsible for teaching EFAL. The researchers then asked teachers to complete the questionnaires and hand them over to their Principals or Heads of Departments (HoDs) for collection after one week. The survey questionnaires were administered from early October to the middle of November 2013 and they were collected from the Principals and HoDs after one week. The data collected was edited, coded and analysed using the Statistical Product for Service Solution (SPSS). The results were then presented as descriptive and inferential statistics.

#### **Ethical Considerations**

Punch (1986) suggests that field researchers exercise common sense and moral responsibility, always putting subjects first, the study next and then themselves [researchers] last. Heeding to the guidelines by Punch as well to KZNPDDBE and Unisa College of Education Ethical clearance requirements, the researchers adopted the following measures during the course of the study to ensure the study passed all ethical requirements and considerations. The researchers negotiated with the KZNPDDBE, heads of schools and EFAL teachers to ensure access to the various schools was obtained. The purpose of the study was explained in official letters to conduct the research. As part of the structured questionnaire for teachers, the researcher provided a preamble at the beginning of each questionnaire that informed respondents about the background of the researcher, the purpose of the

study, assurance of confidentiality of biographic information and experiences relating to their work as teachers. Prior to each qualitative phase of the data collection process, the researcher sent a consent letter to inform each of the participants to introduce the purpose of the study, assured them of confidentiality of information to be given as part of the study and secure their voluntary participation by means of the consent form which was read and signed by each participant before the commencement of each focus group discussion. Furthermore, the researchers ensured that all information solicited from participants in all data collection phases were kept confidential and used solely for the purpose of conducting this doctoral research and not disclosed to any party for whatever the reason might be. Finally, the researchers tried hard to acknowledge the source of all secondary materials used for the compilation of this research report, so as to avoid falling victim to plagiarism.

## Results

Emanating from the findings of this research, it is identified that the application of the STAD technique is embedded in its benefits in line with Slavin and Tanner's (1979) assertion than that collaborative efforts among students result in a higher degree of accomplishment by all participants. The following gives the bigger picture in the form of the results of the study. First of all, a mean test to establish the impact of teachers' qualification and/ or training on teaching and learning proved there is very minimal impact. It was identified from the study that there is an average mean=1.26 (SD 0.525) to mean =1.37 (SD 0.571). The average is slightly above  $p=0.05$  for significance, hence, a very minimal impact as stated earlier.

A probe was done to re-affirm the application and benefits of STAD to teaching and learning of EFAL by considering the subject outcomes. In answering this probe, 41.6% of respondents believe it is very important to use strategies to deliver messages and reply appropriately to sustain dialogue, 37.6% believe it to be important, 15.3% believe it to be moderately important and 2.5% believe it to be of little importance while 3% were unanswered. Overall, 79.2% of the respondents are in agreement that STAD enables task team members to use strategies to deliver and reply messages appropriately.

A clear indication was given that 36.6% of respondents believe it is very important to use reading and viewing strategies to determine meaning, 45% believe it to be important, 12.9% believe it to be moderately important and 2.5% believe it to be of little importance while 3% were unanswered. It was also evident that 38.6% of respondents believe it is very important to use strategies to write for a specific audience, purpose and context, 42.6% of respondents also believe it to be important, 13.9% of respondents also believe it to be moderately important and 2% believe it to be of little importance while 3% were unanswered. In short, almost all the respondents are of the view that it is important to use strategies in writing for a specific audience, purpose and context. The use of a strategy or strategies become imperative in view of the belief by Vakalisa (2011) that teachers need a broad repertoire of teaching methods in order to create an environment conducive for effective learning.

In this study, most respondents were of the view that the STAD technique enabled them to access and use suitable resources to improve learning. Up to 39.1% of respondents each believe it is very important or important, 15.3% believe it to be moderately important, 3% believe it to be of little importance while 0.5% believe it to be unimportant and 3% were unanswered. Additionally, a combined total of 87.7% agree that extra attention by EFAL teachers lead to improved performance of learners, while 10.9% disagree. The remaining 1.5% were unanswered. In essence, a large majority agreed that extra attention offered by EFAL teachers lead to learner improved performance.

Questions 40 to 51 of Section D on the survey questionnaire were specifically aimed at making respondents reflect on the benefits of STAD to teaching and learning of EFAL. Table 2 indicates the significance between the variables and the general response pattern. The section under discussion used True or False as scales with 1=True and 2=False.

**Table 2 Impact of attitude of teachers on teaching and learning**

Item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
40. Clears learners' misconceptions about English (FAL)	201	1.05	0.228
41. Gives a better understanding of concepts in English (FAL)	200	1.04	0.184
42. Builds learners' social skills	200	1.08	0.264
43. Makes learners responsible for their learning	199	1.05	0.208
44. Builds the urge to succeed in learners	201	1.04	0.207
45. Creates a spirit of team work among learners	200	1.05	0.218
46. Builds mutual respect among learners	200	1.09	0.287
47. Helps slow learners to learn from fast learners	199	1.08	0.273
48. Helps to put away shyness among learners	199	1.05	0.219
49. Enables learners to make maximum use of available resources	199	1.07	0.248
50. Enables learners to tap into team members' knowledge	200	1.04	0.196
51. Enables learners to tap into team members' skills	200	1.05	0.218

\*  $p < 0.05$  for significance

With means from table 2 ranging from 1.04 (f3) to 1.09 (f1), it is evident from the table that all the responses skew towards 1 (True) which has an average of 1.5 or more. It can therefore be ascertained that there is no statistically significant difference with variables being compared since the  $p = 1.5 > 0.05$ .

In summing up the benefits of using STAD in the EFAL classroom, data from this study shows that 26.2% of respondents agree they do not know what to do to get learners' attention during English (FAL) lessons, a combined total of 70.3% of respondents disagree and therefore do know what to do to get learners' attention during EFAL lessons while 3.5% were unanswered.

Johnson and Johnson (1994b) cautioned that group work comes with its own challenges and one of these challenges could be group composition. This research therefore delved into the challenges participants touched on in their bid to implement the STAD technique. Firstly, 26.2% of respondents admit that learners' attitude to group work is never a challenge when STAD is used as a technique in teaching English (FAL), 25.2% find it a little challenging, 16.3% find it somewhat challenging, 22.3% find it much challenging, while 7.4% find it a great deal of challenge and 2.5% were unanswered. Secondly, there was an indication that 19.3% of respondents admit that the use of teaching and learning materials is never a challenge when STAD is used as a technique in teaching English (FAL), 24.3% find it a little challenging, 14.4% find it somewhat challenging, 16.8% find it much challenging, while 23.3% find it a great deal of challenge and 2% were unanswered.

Further, 14.9% of the respondents admit that time allocated on timetable for EFAL is never a challenge when STAD is used as a technique in teaching, 22.8% of responders find it a little challenging, 12.4% find it somewhat challenging, 24.3% find it much challenging, while 23.8% find it a great deal of challenge and 2% were unanswered. The indication is that there is a fair distribution of views as long as time allocation is considered. However, when it comes to the EFAL syllabus, 13.9% of respondents admit that English (FAL) syllabus is never a challenge when STAD is used as a technique in teaching English (FAL), 21.3% of responders find it a little challenging, 12.4% find it somewhat challenging, 19.3% find it much challenging, while 30.2% find it a great deal of challenge and 3% were unanswered.

Lastly, an ANOVA statistical test was run to compare the number of years teachers have been teaching EFAL (Q4) and their highest professional qualification (Q6) to Section F (challenges in using STAD). A summary of the responses is presented on table 2.

**Table 3 Anova test on section F**

Section	Question	Df	Mean square	F	Sig
F: Challenges in using STAD	4	3	53.553	0.977	0.405
	6	7	151.085	2.758	0.010

The difference is statistically significant if  $P < 0.05$

In table 3, when question 4 is compared to the responses gathered from Section F of the questionnaire, the result is a p-value of 0.405 which is more than 0.05 indicating that there is no statistically significant difference between the number of years respondents have taught and the application of STAD. However, when question 6 was compared to the same section, the result was a p-value of 0.010 which is less than 0.00, the implication thereof is that there is a statistically significant difference between the highest professional qualification of teachers and the application of STAD.

In the nutshell, it is very important to throw light on the fact that any teaching strategy that teachers choose must put learners in a position to enable them possess the ability to be able to find solutions to problems that they may encounter in their studies by means of being creative as well as innovative in their thinking when it comes to real-life situations, what is termed praxis in educational circles (Grundy 1987) or in ordinary terms, transfer of learning should be possible after teaching has taken place as a way of ensuring that learning really means a relatively permanent change in attitude. In short, any teaching strategy that does not equip learners with skills, knowledge, experience and attitude for life outside the classroom must not be used by any teacher as such teaching strategies have no benefit for the learners.

### Conclusions

Slavin (1994) opines that cooperative [STAD] team members are able to share and succeed together by explaining cooperative learning as a didactic strategy whereby small groups, each with learners of different abilities and a variety of learning activities, are used to improve the understanding of certain subjects, with each member of the group being responsible for personally learning, what is being taught and also helping other group members to learn. This assertion encapsulates the tenets of the STAD technique and what is aims at achieving. Though the picture painted puts the learner at the center of the teaching/learning environment, it still behooves on the teacher to initiate what is to be done in the teaching/learning process, hence, the need to be abreast of events so as to excel and help learners achieve their aim for being under his or her care.

Vakalisa (2011) is quoted that “effective learning takes place when the teacher has a sound knowledge of the learning content, a broad repertoire of teaching methods, as well as classroom management strategies that create an environment that is conducive to effective learning.” (p.2) In this regard, it was ascertained in this research that EFAL teachers have knowledge of the STAD technique and were implementing it in their classrooms. Responses from the teachers also gave the indication that the use of the strategy proved to be beneficial in their teaching as a large majority of 93% of respondents believed that the strategy is beneficial with as few as 6% of respondents regard STAD as not beneficial to the teaching and learning of EFAL with 1% not responding to this section.

Finally, it is understandable that though teaching leads to learning, learning does not result from teaching only and again, there are other ways of learning without being taught. This assertion is summed up by Van Wyk (2007) who indicates that *“The researcher contends from a constructivist perspective that the primary responsibility of the teacher is to create and maintain a collaborative problem solving environment, where students are allowed to construct their own knowledge and the teacher serves as a facilitator and guide.”*(p.341) This indication thereof is that learners be equipped and enabled to freely participate in task team by asking and answering questions, making contributions, probing and seeking clarification when and where necessary while pushing the individual and group agenda to achieve the aim set for the group.

### Recommendations and Limitations of the Study

#### Recommendations

Firstly, teachers should be encouraged to develop skills so as to gain access to the inner world of their learners with the belief that when teachers possess the right skills, they can earn the trust of their learners. Secondly, teachers should use the active and participative teaching strategies to put learners in a more discursive mode and also to help them expand what they already know as they interact with other members of their groups. Thirdly, teachers should make sure they employ the right strategy or strategies in their teaching in order to succeed in their teaching and also aid learners to succeed alongside as the latter partake in the teaching and learning experience. Also, the technique should be employed in such a way that learners will understand they are not competing with other task team



members, but they are all learning to gain more knowledge and skills as they help their task teams to succeed in giving tasks. Lastly, to overcome the challenges teachers face in applying the technique, they should use strategies that encourage learners to find information, remember it, organize it, apply it and do creative things with it.

### Limitations

It is accepted first of all that, the findings of this study are based on EFAL teachers' perceptions, reactions and feelings, introducing the potential for distortion due to their desires to present themselves in a positive manner, or poor recall of their actual reactions to how they use the STAD technique in their teaching. Secondly, the findings of this study are based on responses of 262 EFAL teachers who took part in the cross-sectional survey. It is also noted that this research was conducted in parts of one province out of the nine provinces in South Africa. Considering the number of respondents and participants used in this study, it makes it a bit impossible to project the findings onto larger populations. Finally, the number of institutions and individuals needed to be consulted before embarking on the field work created some bottlenecks that impeded on the rate at which this study was supposed to be completed. On a bigger scale, these bottlenecks contributed in making the researchers expend more time, money and energy in getting things done compared to the timelines and budgets originally allocated. However, with passion, tenacity and endurance, the researchers were able to surmount all the bottlenecks to complete the research.

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## Barriers to Learning English as a Second Language in two Higher Learning Institutions in Namibia

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**Abstract** *The effectiveness of learning language requires that users of a language be provided with the right knowledge to subsist with its complexity and demanding nature especially in the area of writing. In this sense, this paper seeks to draw attention to some of the important features of writing and speaking skills in the English language at two universities in Namibia. Namibia has now been independent for 24 years. English as medium of instruction was introduced in education immediately after independence but some students' English proficiency is still relevantly poor, especially in writing and speaking skills. This paper investigates the barriers that prevent students to write and speak well English in two universities in Namibia. The study used qualitative and explanatory approaches to gather data through the lens of syllabi, teaching of writing and speaking skills inter alia syntax and morphemes. Factors such as time allocation to teach the English courses need to be re-looked at and syllabi need to be reviewed to address the gap from secondary to tertiary education which hampers the students' development in the English language. The conclusion drawn from the study was the fact that students' communicative competency is very poor. Therefore, it is in the opinion of this researcher that the following recommendations were made that a framework for improvement is needed from all sides that is: syllabi content, teaching of speaking and writing skills, students' admission criteria and time frame work allocated to these courses.*

**Key words** *English language; qualitative and explanatory approaches; communicative competency ;Namibia*

### Introduction and background

The effectiveness of learning language requires that users of a language be provided with the right knowledge to subsist with its complexity and demanding nature especially in the area of writing. In this sense, this paper seeks to draw attention to some of the important features of writing and speaking skills in the English language at two universities in Namibia. Namibia has now been independent for 24 years. English as medium of instruction was introduced in education immediately after independence but some students' English proficiency is still relevantly poor, especially in writing and speaking skills. This paper investigates the barriers that prevent students to write and speak well English in two universities in Namibia. Pseudonyms were used as University A and University B. English has been a problem in education in Namibia that contributes to learners' general poor performance in schools. As a result, the researcher of the study took two previous studies on the impact of English as second language learning in grade 10 and grade 12 in 2007 and 2010. The findings of these studies revealed that the cognitive language skills of learners (for example comprehension of texts and question instructions in content subjects) were very poor. Learners had problems with problem solving in content subjects and written language. For example the structure of sentences affected learners' abilities to express themselves clearly and adequately. Also, most old teachers who taught some content subjects had been trained in Afrikaans and had been teaching these subjects in English. This suggests that teachers' English proficiency was also relatively poor. Walfaardt (2001) researched on poor performance of learners in grade 10 and 12 in content subjects. Walfaardt (2001:239) found that the cognitive language skills of learners (for example comprehension of texts and question instructions in content subjects) were very poor. Learners had problems with problem solving in content subjects and written language. Also, most old teachers who taught some content subjects had been trained in Afrikaans and had been teaching these subjects in English that teachers were not confident to teach in English and needed in-service English training (Walfaardt 2001). When the researcher started teaching at tertiary level, she started to notice that most students had language deficiency which prompted her to investigate further what prevents students at tertiary level to speak and write well in English.

### Problem statement

When Namibia got its independence in 1990, the education system changed from that of Cape Education to Cambridge Education. Since then, there has been an outcry about the poor results of Grade 12 learners in general, because some of them (learners) do not make it to tertiary level (Media, Television and The Ministry of Education 2000). This contributes to high unemployment in the country. Some of those that complete secondary education lack a good command of the English language which is a pre-requisite for entry into tertiary education.

The conclusion drawn by Wolfaardt (2001:243) and Frans (2007 & 2009) that “English is a stumbling block to learners ‘performance in different subjects in schools’” makes one to believe that English has an impact on students’ performance at tertiary level. Against this background, this study seeks to answer the following question:

*What are the barriers that are preventing students from improving their oral and written skills in English?*

Lecturers play important roles in the education of students. However, when lessons are planned and presented, are learning materials and teaching approaches that enhance the learning outcomes specified in the syllabi taken into consideration? Are the students at the institutions provided with such opportunities?

### Literature review

Central to the research problem, the general objectives of this paper is to explore and understand what English syllabi say in terms of meeting what all syllabi emphasise on providing advanced English language in oral and written skills in all contexts of life, and to describe the experiences of lecturers and students in written and oral work. The objectives would be reviewed through the lens of the following concepts: syllabi, teaching of writing and speaking skills *inter alia* syntax and morphemes.

#### Syllabi

Eight English syllabi were studied and analysed and these were: Language in Practice, English in Practice, English for Academic Purposes, Professional Communication and Professional Writing at University A and English for General Communication, English for Academic Purposes and English Communication and Study Skills at University B. All the syllabi geared toward producing students who communicate well in English and seek able in a job market. The syllabi were also analysed whether they included units that deal with specifically teaching the elements of speaking using correct language and how to write correct grammar sentences. (Should this section be part of the literature review? I suppose this part belongs to the methods section of the paper?)

#### Syllabus in context

Lanfranco (2006) explained that a syllabus describes what a student is expected to know and do in class, able to demonstrate at the end of the learning activity, and lists what will be taught and tested. The paper examined whether Lanfranco definition correlates with the objectives and the content in the syllabi or whether the content in the syllabi enhances the learning of English as a second language.

Ahmend (1996:5) came up with an approach which he calls “task-based approach to syllabus design” for oral communication skills course in academic settings: the centrality of the classroom situation and institutional contexts. Ahmend (1996:6) argued that in an academic setting, the classroom situation is where the locus of instruction and learning serves as the starting point for identifying specific curricular needs and selecting relevant tasks, while the institutional contexts form the broader framework beyond the classroom situation and provide important input for designing a syllabus, particularly at the level of goals and objectives.

### Teaching of speaking and writing skills

This refers to how lecturers teach oral and writing skills in their classrooms. It seems that oral and writing skills are interrelated because if one speaks the language fluently, one can also write it well. The study looked at different ways suggested by scholars on how to teach oral and writing skills in English.

- Writing skills

Writing is the process of printing words using a pen and a piece of paper or on a computer to communicate. Colorado (2008:1-2) provides some reasons why writing is so important such as: to complete tasks; an important element of a student's education where students have to show more sophisticated writing skills and to complete more tasks through their writing, an important element of an employee's job and an important form of communication. In addition to this, Colorado (2008) claimed that many students have trouble writing with clarity, coherence and organisation which discourage them from writing if they are frustrated. Therefore, students need to be taught to write well. Hoch (n.d.) claims that, for a second language learner, writing is an extension of listening and speaking. Therefore, the students must be provided opportunities to build, extend and refine oral language in order to improve written output.

Wang (2012:2) proposed three aspects to improve the students' ability in writing:

1. A scientifically teaching plan should be designed that stimulate students' interest and motivation to write. For example, students can propose what content they would like to learn within a specific writing task. In addition the establishment of a mechanism of competition in class should be done where a combination of writing and oral communication will be enforced. For example, lecturers can arrange a contest in delivering tour guide or welcoming speeches. By doing, students learn the two skills simultaneously because they will be well prepared with full of emotion and want to fight for their honor. Furthermore, Wang argues that students as "audiences" also play their role in judging and marking.

2. Breaking the bound of traditional teaching to create a learning atmosphere with enthusiasm. Wang suggested that if we want the students to gain interest and joy from learning writing, we need to make them learn through use and make them acquire real skills. Wang (2012:2) gave an example of a power point which provides a large number of sample essays and cases in a classroom. This way, students will appreciate good examples and make their own comments or conclusions, and correct mistakes and errors in certain samples after reading thoroughly. Through this, students cannot only easily comprehend the knowledge in textbooks, but also exercise skills of appreciation and evaluation.

3. Finally, the introduction of new teaching methods like task-driven and project-oriented theories. Wang (2012:4) is of the opinion that lecturers should introduce a method that encourages students through showing, leading and guiding. Lecturers also need to intensify the idea of self-determination, exploration and cooperation in the process of teaching.

- Oral Speaking skills

Claudius, Angelo, and Iago (2001:1) conducted a research on the factors affecting the learning and practice of oral communication in English. The study revealed that the students' background especially their home environment; socio-economic status; their early schooling experiences and their general exposure to the English language affected their motivation in learning English and the overall usage of oral communication. Claudius *et al.* (2001:1) mentioned that other factors that give emphasis to oral skills in the course content include materials used for oral activities, lecturers' approach in the classroom and personal factors stemming from students' inadequacies in using the language in and outside the classrooms.



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- Teaching syntax

Syntax is the discipline that examines the rules of a language that dictate how the various parts of sentences go together, follow a sequence of words” Therefore students need to be taught word order or how to put words in order and phrases together to form sentences especially in a second language such as English (Yan,2005). Students written work were analysed on the following parts of speech: subject and verb agreement, copula, possessive, progressive form, active and passive form, auxiliary verbs and punctuation in writing skills and oral communication in English.

- Teaching morphemes

Dikuua-Fulkerson (2011:15) defined morphology as a grammatical and linguistic study of the way in which words are constructed by various morphemes (units of meaning) to create a language: monomorphemic which contains one morpheme and polymorphemic contains more than one morpheme. According to Yule (2010:69) there are two types of morphemes: free and bound which has two types, derivational and inflectional morphemes. Inflectional morphemes serve as grammatical markers that indicate tense, number, possession, or comparison. Inflectional morphemes in English include the suffixes -s (or -es); -s (or s); -ed; -en; -er; -est; and -ing. Suffixes and prefixes are linguistic units that are added to a root word either at the beginning or the end of the word for example: the word ‘undressed’ prefix **un** and suffix **ed**. The study investigated whether students lack the application of morphology in their writing. Hamawand (2011) mentioned that the study of morphology uncovers the lexical resources of language, helps speakers to acquire the skills of using them creatively and consequently express their thoughts and emotions with a clear and strong message.

### The theoretical underpinning

The theoretical frame work of this paper and the research, is based on Piaget’s theory of cognitive constructivist classroom (stage 4-formal operational stage). According to Piaget (2004), formal operational stage occurs between the ages of 11-15 and continues into adulthood. During this stage, individuals move beyond concrete experience and begin to think abstractly. Also, at this stage, individuals understand the world through hypothetical thinking and scientific reasoning. Formal operational stage is also marked by the realisation of consequences to actions which means a student has to realise that consequences are a result of not following instructions. In this case, Piaget considers the activities and approaches between lecturers, and students interaction. Piaget believes that a constructivist classroom must provide a variety of activities to challenge students, increase their readiness to learn, discover new ideas and construct their own knowledge.

### The theory of English as 2nd language

What is a “language”? A general meaning of a language according to The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (2010) is “the system of communication in speech and writing that is used by people”. This can be 1st, 2nd or even 3<sup>rd</sup> language. The second and third language learning differ from how a first language is learned. A first language or a mother tongue is the language a person has learned from birth. In addition to first language, second or third language is then learned. There are many reasons why second or third languages are learned, such as education, work related or for a new environment. Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams (2003:379) said that many linguists who study second language (L2) learning believe that it is something different from first language acquisition in that L2 learning depends on the following factors: age, talent, motivation, curriculum, instruction, whether you are in a country where the language is spoken or sitting in a classroom five mornings a week with no further contact with native speakers. Shuebottom (1999-2014) argued that students who are learning a second language which is from the same language family as their first language have, in general, a much easier task than those who aren’t. Shuebottom (1999-2014) gave an example of a Dutch child that he or she will learn English more quickly than a Japanese child because Dutch and English share similarities.

Fromkin, *et al.* (*ibid*) further argued that the most critical stage for the L2 learning is age. The younger a person is when exposed to a second language the more he/she is able to achieve native-like competence.

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In the case of Namibia, English is a second or even third or fourth language to the students. Walfardt (2001) argued that for a person to speak a second or third language properly, he/she should be taught by a person who can speak that language as it is his/her native language, otherwise problems such the one Namibia as experiencing will occur.

### **Approaches and research methods of the study**

#### **Explanatory approach**

Explanatory research is done when there is a hypothesis as to why something is happening. According to Casely and Kumar (1988) the explanatory method identifies the actual reason why an issue occurs which develops causal explanations. Casely and Kumar (1988) further said that the explanatory method explains things in detail and not just reporting but builds and enriches the reasons behind the theory. The explanatory approach was used to identify the reasons/causes why students at the institutions are poor in English communication competency. Therefore, this researcher chose this approach.

#### **Sample**

Forty students and sixteen lecturers were randomly selected to reduce the chance that the results would be due to factors related to the participants in the study. In addition to this, Chandran (2004:88) is of the opinion that a sample method is a way of selecting a portion of population that represents the whole population adequately. The sample was selected randomly to include people who had knowledge of the topic of this study. Two higher learning institutions, University A and University B were used in this study. The study was limited to three heads of department and one head of a language center who were responsible for planning courses for their departments. Eight course coordinators were sampled for this study because they coordinated and assigned duties within the course (course related activities). They also taught. At the end of every semester, course coordinators compile students' results and are expected to come up with the summary of the results (how students performed).

The lecturers were also randomly selected because they were the ones teaching these skills. The aim of including the lecturers was to get information from them as to how the students' language proficiency affected their teaching. Therefore, the findings were not generalized to include all tertiary institutions, all lecturers, heads of departments, students and course coordinators in Namibia.

This study was carried out at two tertiary levels of education in Khomas Region. Khomas is one of the 14 regions in Namibia and it was chosen because of the location of this researcher. The students at the two institutions come from the 14 regions of Namibia. Therefore, it is a diverse study which accommodates students from different cultural and language backgrounds. .

### **Data collection procedure**

The study used qualitative and explanatory approaches to gather data through the lens of syllabi, teaching of writing and speaking skills *inter alia* syntax and morphemes.

#### **Qualitative Approach**

The study used the qualitative and explanatory approach to gather information. Croker (2009:5) defines 'qualitative research' as an umbrella term used to refer to a complex and evolving research methodology. The approaches in qualitative research use a wide variety of data collection methods, such as observation, interviews, open-response questionnaire items, verbal reports and so on. Within each of these approaches and methods, a number of research techniques and strategies have been developed to help qualitative researchers do their day-to-day work, conceptualising the research project, collecting and analysing data, and writing the findings.

In addition to this, McMillan and Schumacher (2001:450) explain that qualitative research is an inquiry in which researchers collect data from face to face situations by interacting with selected persons in their settings. McMillan and Schumacher (ibid) further say that qualitative research describes and analyses people's individual and collective social actions, beliefs, thoughts and perceptions. In view of this, the

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qualitative methodology was used as it allowed the researcher to gain first-hand information about perceptions of participants on the issue. Considering that barriers to learn English as second language are context-based, the qualitative methodology was eminently placed to reveal the barriers that research participants faced and how they experienced them.

### **Instruments used to collect data**

#### **a. Questionnaires**

There were two types of questionnaires administered which entailed open-ended questions, one for the lecturers and one for the students.

#### **Lecturers' questionnaire**

The key questions asked include:

- to mention specific areas in oral and writing skills which they think are challenging to students.
- to give their suggestion to solve the challenges they mentioned
- the instructional methods they employ in teaching syntax and morphology.
- they were also asked to air their views on the time allocated to the English course they teach

#### **Students' questionnaire**

- students were asked if they have any problems regarding oral and writing communication in English
- they were asked to suggest any remedy they feel can solve the problem they face in oral and writing skills.
- students were also asked what they think about the time allocated to the English course they are doing.

#### **b. Interview questions were done in person**

Interview questions were administered for head of department and course coordinators. The key questions were asked are:

- what the heads of department considered when planning the English syllabi
- how they determine that the syllabi achieved their objectives
- they were also asked to describe the students' accuracy in oral and writing skills in English concerning syntax and the use of morphemes
- if there were challenges, they were asked what they do to advice lecturers on the challenges.

#### **c. Content Analysis?**

A check list was used for tick categories and interpretation was made to write a summary of the categories ticked. The key concepts asked were:

- whether there are clear objectives that were carefully designed and clearly present learning outcomes in speaking and writing skills
- whether there are instructional methods stipulated for oral and writing skills, teaching syntax and morphemes

#### **d. Class observation check list**



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Again, a check list was used to tick categories and interpretation was made to write a summary of the categories ticked. The focus on the key concepts was put on how poor, satisfactory, good and best the items observed were in the classroom situation in the following categories:

- oral presentation
- language proficiency
- sentence structure
- the use of morphemes
- grammar accuracy

### Major Findings

The content in the syllabi seem to be fully equipped with the information for students to learn and master English as a second language but there is a lack of specific teaching objectives in oral communication and written skills. The syllabi entail all basics English components up to high standard of English to be learned, it seems the time frame is very short especially for the courses that are offered for a semester only. Lecturers are faced with problems such as the time frame which is allocated to the courses. It appears that lecturers teach for examination only, not exactly what students must know. This is done as lecturers rush to finish the syllabus. Also the criteria of admitting students who obtained lower symbols (E to C) from secondary level is a matter of concern since the English proficiency of some of these students cannot be said to be up to standard. Students lack grammar accuracy when it comes to write correct sentences. Most syllabi did not make provision on how to exactly teach speaking and writing skills therefore the learning processes of these skills is poor. The syllabi at the institutions are somehow partially set in a way which does not address the language issue of second language students.

### Conclusions

The researcher had targeted the educational practitioners which include lecturers, The Ministry of Education, Namibia Qualification Authority and the two universities to use the research conceptually to the advancement of the future of Namibia in terms of:

- to identify and understand the problem being addressed in this research
- to understand why this problem needs to be addressed
- understand the different methods as suggested in this research to address the problem

Factors such as time allocation to teach the English courses need to be re-looked at and syllabi need to be reviewed to address the gap from secondary to tertiary education which hampers the students' development in the English language.

### Recommendations

The conclusion drawn from the study was the fact that students' communicative competency is very poor. Therefore, it is in the opinion of this researcher that the following recommendations were made that a framework for improvement is needed from all sides that is: syllabi content, teaching of speaking and writing skills, students' admission criteria and time frame work allocated to these courses; Students should be encouraged to correct language errors in marked work; When it comes to long writings, students should first do pre-writing before the actual writing because written communication helps students with spoken English resulting in verbal communication to be stronger and clearer; When a lesson is taking place, lecturers should very seriously look at students' syntax, to guide them and correct what they should say instead of turning a blind eye on it; The time allocation to the courses especially for the semester courses should be improved at least for a year for lecturers to thoroughly guide and pay proper attention to every individual student; Basic English should be thoroughly taught so that when students' progress to upper English courses, their English competencies would have improved; Lecturers should try to combine writing and oral communication skills in their lessons; Students should be given more written assignments and/or activities and encouraged to do correction of their mistakes on a regular basis; The institutions should be encouraged to introduce a compulsory study unit on written English

skills; Students should be given topics to debate or discuss on certain issues because debating or discussion enables students to develop critical thinking skills which in turn would lead to an argumentative aspect in their writings; Students should first do spoken activities before they embark on written activities; Spoken English should be encouraged outside classrooms; Syllabi should be designed in such a way that spoken activities are included; Spoken English skills should be assessed at University A; Students should be given supporting activities that include problem solving in communication activities, such as given a task to unscramble something. In this was speaking is being practiced; Students should do collaborative group activities, for example, they should be given a task to do a survey. They have to divide work among themselves and later they come up with one thing that everyone in the group worked for; traditional teaching should be done away with and the teaching should be base on websites and online learning; Students should do synthesising activities such as, they decide on the topic, the design, the parts and the roles; University A should come up with a similar programme as that at the University B where students who obtained an E symbol to go through a bridging course for one year. The same institution should consider those who obtained a D symbol and restrict them from doing English but for a year; University B's lecturers should be serious with their students regarding class attendance, late attendance, and students who do not carry study guides to class; Lecturers should make sure that students understand that sentences express thoughts about subjects and what the subject 'is' or 'does'. Lecturers should make sure students understand the concept of plurality (e.g. have-has, is-are, when to add an 's' to the verb in simple present tense and when not to). In addition, lecturers should make sure the students understand the concept of verb tenses by demonstrating what "*is happening*," what "*already happened*" and what "*will happen*" through the use of objects, pictures, and/or written sentences; Lecturers should put emphasis that spelling in written work improves students' spelling. Therefore they should encourage students to copy a spelling word from a correct model then attempt to spell the same word from memory.

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## Student teachers' views of social media in an open distance learning teaching practice course

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**ABSTRACT:** *The challenge for institutions of higher learning is to make provision for a technology integrated teaching and learning mode other than the conventional face-to-face method to accommodate the digital natives and empowering the digital immigrants. We cannot teach as we were trained during the 1980's compare to the current student profile which most of them born during the 1990's. This paper explores the use of social media to support economics education student teachers' engagement in teaching practice at an open distance learning institution. Only sixty nine student teachers (n=369) registered for the SDEC00N blog (subject didactics economics), which was a pilot study to use blogging as an educational tool to support them during teaching practice placements for the following academic year. Only Economics education students were invited by e-mail message, blog and discussion forum as announcements on myUnisa webpage to complete an online social media survey (SMS). Findings indicated that there was a positive correlation between the frequency of student use of social media and their relationship with their peers and instructors as well as how they describe the overall quality of instruction and the preservice program, the results also highlight that there are many questions still to be answered. As is so often the case with preliminary research the end result can be the formulation of more questions rather than answers. Before one can put these finding into practice ones needs to consider the limitations of this study that had preservice teacher candidates as its participants. Preservice students generally have a long history of positive educational experiences and high academic achievement. Thus, the conclusions may not be generalizable to the general undergraduate student population. Despite this, the results may be useful to instructors and administrators that work primarily with students enrolled in professional programs.*

**Key words:** *social media, open distance learning, teaching practice, blog*

### Introduction

The challenge for institutions of higher learning is to make provision for a technology integrated teaching and learning mode other than the conventional face-to-face method to accommodate the digital natives and empowering the digital immigrants. We cannot teach as we were trained during the 1980's compare to the current student profile which most of them born during the 1990's. These students are the Net Generation or the digital natives. These digital natives bring new challenges to the teaching and learning environment. Shortly after the turn of the millennium, a new way to characterize the change in how users interacted with websites began to appear. In 2004, the term "Web 2.0" became popular characterization of websites that allowed users to interact with each other as contributors to a website's content. These new features that facilitated user engagement, collaboration, and interactive information sharing were a significant departure from traditional websites that were limited to the passive viewing of information. The Web 2.0 has now been applied to a plethora of social media websites that rely heavily on the active engagement of their users to create, manipulate, and share content. The question is: how are we respond to this challenge and how can they create enabling environments for effective online teaching and learning spaces? Numerous research studies have indicated the learning effect of teaching blogs for online learners (McLoughlin & Lee, 2007; van Wyk, 2013a). This paper explores the use of social media to support economics education student teachers' engagement in teaching practice at an open distance learning institution.

### Literature review

#### *Using social media in teaching and learning*

McLoughlin and Lee (2007) argue that social media is characterized as Web 2.0-based e-learning resources that emphasize active participation, connectivity, collaboration, and sharing of knowledge and ideas among users. According the authors, social media resources can be divided into three distinct categories. The first category emphasizes content sharing and organizing sites. Examples of these categories are

Delicious, Digg, Flickr, YouTube, and RSS readers. The second social media category encompasses content creation and editing websites such as Blogger, Google Docs, Wikipedia, and WordPress. The third category includes social network sites (SNS) like Facebook, Ning, MySpace, Twitter, and Orkut, that serve as online communities that enable users to connect with old or new friends, and share ideas and resources. These social media can be very useful as e-learning tools which can serve for an educational purpose, and this case being explored as a supportive tool for Economics education students' engagement during their teaching practice placements.

Several authors collaboratively defined social network sites as web-based services that allow individuals or groups to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; van Wyk, 2013b). On the other hand, the initial objective of these sites was purely social as they provided a means to connect with old friends and make new friends. Emanating from this flow, several research studies conducted thus far, which indicates that students have integrated SNS into their academic life as a tool for communicating with classmates about course-related topics, coordinating study groups, and collaborating on assignments (Salaway, Caruso, Nelson, & Ellison, 2008; van Wyk, 2013a).

Using social media to support educational endeavors leverages the benefits of in-person learning communities with the benefits of using technology to support student engagement. Previous research has indicated that learning communities can have a positive impact on student learning and the level of university student interaction and cooperation (Tinto, 2000). Along with supporting the formation of professional learning communities, social media has the potential to reap the benefits of using technology for academic purposes (Zhao & Kuh, 2004). Research has indicated that there is a positive relationship between academic uses of technology and the occurrences of active and collaborative learning, and the frequency of student-faculty interactions (Laird & Kuh, 2005). Both of these benefits are considered to contribute to the level of student engagement, which has been determined to significantly impact student success (Kuh, 2001a, 2001b).

The dynamic nature of these social media tools allow learners to become active participants or co-producers rather than passive consumers of content, so that learning is a participatory and social process (McLoughlin & Lee, 2007). In addition to heightening student engagement, the effective use of social media resources can result in a constructivist learning environment which allows students to share their interpretations of the course content, and utilize their individual life experience and multiple intelligences, while working as a part of a collaborative team (Baird & Fisher, 2006).

As educational resources, social media tools can also be used to differentiate the learning process. The plethora of available social media resources allows learners to select and share learning materials that best meet their learning style and interests. While some may choose text-based content found through social bookmarking sites like Delicious or Digg, others may prefer to use photographic images or video content located on Flickr or YouTube to support their learning. By selecting multiple social media resources, instructors can create differentiated learning paths that can be bundled together to create dynamic learning modules. These personalized and customized learning experiences may be better suited to address the diverse needs of today's learners (Baird & Fisher, 2006; Christensen, Horn, & Johnson, 2008). The public nature of most social media resources can also be used to support authentic learning opportunities. While private learning spaces can often be secured when using these public tools, remaining in the public sphere allows learners to benefit from the contributions of other learners outside of the confines of the course, as well as with noted experts and practitioners within these content areas.

The dynamic and engaging nature of many social media resources may also encourage students to expend more time and energy on their academic activities as a consequence of the collaborative, constructivist, and authentic learning opportunities they can create (Kennedy, 2000, van Wyk, 2013a). As a result, when students are engaged there is a greater likelihood of increased rates of student persistence and improved academic achievement (Kuh, Kinzie, Cruce, Shoup, & Gonyea, 2007).

While many students have instinctively blazed the path towards using social media to support educational endeavors, educators are now beginning to realize that these tools have the potential to positively affect student engagement and consequently academic achievement.

### **Student engagement**

Student engagement represents both the time and energy students invest in educationally purposeful activities (Kuh et al., 2007). These activities include times spent interacting with their peers and



instructors as well as time engaging in active and collaborative learning activities (Kuh, 2001a). These items are essential not only because previous research has shown that these factors are positively related to academic success in college and university, but also because these elements represent student behaviors and activities that institutions can influence to varying degrees through teaching practices and creating other conditions that foster student engagement (Kuh et al., 2007). Consequently, by institutionalizing practices that increase the time and energy students spend engaging in these types of activities, student engagement may increase. This increase in student engagement may also increase the likelihood that students will persist in their academic coursework. Increased academic persistence would inevitably have a favorable impact on their continued progress toward degree completion and promote academic success in comparison to the low engaged student (Kuh et al., 2007; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005).

The nature of student-faculty interaction can have significant repercussions for student motivation and involvement, as having positive and personal interactions with instructors can enhance a student's intellectual commitment while providing the support needed to help students overcome academic challenges (van Wyk, 2012; Chickering & Ehrmann, 1996). Social media can be used to enhance and increase the number of interactions students have with their instructors by overcoming the barriers of time and location. As a result, the opportunities for students to ask questions, as well as get resources and feedback from their instructors may increase. In addition to often being more convenient, Chickering and Ehrmann (1996) note that technology can also create a less intimidating means of student-faculty interactions than asking questions in front of a large lecture hall of classmates.

Similar to the impact technology can have on student-faculty interactions, social media can also enhance the nature and frequency of student-student interactions. Student engagement is enhanced when students have the opportunity to work with their peers, share ideas and resources, and reflect on the different perspectives their fellow students bring to class (Chickering & Gamson, 1987). Social media provide a great benefit to the current generation of university and college students as these tools were created with the primary intent of facilitating sharing, discussion, and collaboration. As noted earlier, social media can be used to support the creation of supportive social networks and learning communities. The perception that a student is a part of a caring and supportive campus environment not only reduces feelings of isolation, but has been identified as a factor that contributes to increasing persistence rates and academic success for at-risk students (Kuh et al., 2007).

Besides enhancing the student-faculty and student-student interactions that are paramount to the creation of a supportive campus environment, social media can also be used to facilitate the active and collaborative learning experiences that can have a positive impact on student engagement. In their frequently cited paper that outlines the principles for good practice in undergraduate education, Chickering & Gamson (1987) eloquently note that:

*"Learning is not a spectator sport. Students do not learn much just sitting in classes listening to teachers, memorizing prepackaged assignments, and spitting out answers. They must talk about what they are learning, write reflectively about it, relate it to past experiences, and apply it to their daily lives. They must make what they learn part of themselves (p.6)."*

The interactive nature of many Web 2.0 social media tools allows learners to become active participants who co-construct the learning experience with their peers and instructor, as they share and reflect on their individual interpretations and experiences to create an educational 'mash-up' (Baird & Fisher, 2006; McLoughlin & Lee, 2007). While previous research has noted that there is a positive relationship between the use of educationally purposeful social media and student engagement (Laird & Kuh, 2005; Zhao & Kuh, 2004), a re-examination of these findings is needed not only because of the newness of some of these Web 2.0 resources, but also because many of these social media tools engage users in fundamentally different ways from previous education technology resources. More importantly, the proliferation of these resources, which can be accessed via laptops and mobile devices during class as well as before and after, highlights how the use of many of these social media resources has become a pervasive force in the lives of today's students (Salaway et al., 2008).

## Research Methodology

*Participants:* The participants in the study were six hundred and sixty three Economics education student teachers (n=369) who enrolled in the Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) initial teacher education programme at an open distance learning (ODL) institution of higher learning. Consequently, to gain entry into the initial teacher education programme, candidates must have previously completed an undergraduate degree with a record of high academic achievement. An invitation by a short messages

service (sms) was sent to these student teachers to register on the blog, Economics subject didactics. Only sixty nine student teachers (n=369) registered for the blog, which was using social media as an educational tool to support them during teaching practice placements.

*Data collection:* The Economics education students were invited by e-mail message, blog and announcement on myUnisa to complete an online survey, social media survey (SMS), that mimicked the questions posed on these online social and educational tools. It was designed with the sole purpose of assessing the extent to which students are engaged in empirically derived good educational practices. Consequently, the results from the SMS have been used to create institutional, national and international benchmarks of effective educational practices that support student engagement. Of particular interest to this paper, participants were asked to describe:

- *Their frequency of use of a variety of social media resources to discuss/complete an assignment or to work with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments;*
- *The nature of their relationships with their fellow students and their instructors;*
- *How they would evaluate the quality of instruction they received;*
- *How they would evaluate their educational experience in the teacher education program.*

The questions inquiring about the students' frequency of use of social media resources provided examples that included e-mail, blogs, discussion forums, Twitter, wikis, Facebook are common social media resources. The myUnisa was created as a learning management system (LMS) to communicate means to facilitate interaction and communication between the college, staff, and students that comprise the College of Education at the University of South Africa.

## Results

Of the 934 students enrolled in the preservice teaching practice course, 369 completed the student engagement survey. To note the frequency of use of a variety of social media resources to discuss/complete an assignment or to work with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments the participants were asked to indicate if they used e-mail, blogs, discussion forums, wikis, very often, often, sometimes or never (See table 1). While the majority of the respondents indicated that they had 'often' used an online media to work with classmates outside of class there was only a small majority that indicated that they 'sometimes' used online media to discuss or complete assignments.

Table 1 . *Frequency of Social Media Use*

Survey Question	Means	SD	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Never
Used online media (e-mail, discussion forums, blogs, wikis.) to work with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments.	3.68	.341	25.3%	34.9%	29.8%	10%
Used online media (e-mail, discussion forums, blogs, wikis.) to discuss or complete an assignment.	3.11	.653	21.9%	32.3%	34.2%	11.5%

To capture the nature of their relationships with their fellow students and instructors, the participants were asked to select a number from one to seven that best represents the quality of their relationships with people in the teacher education program (See table 2).

Table 3 . *Instruction/Program Quality*

Survey Question	Means	SD	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Overall, how would you evaluate the quality of instruction you have received in the teacher education programme?	3.76	.214	22.7%	56.1%	17.8%	3.3%
Overall, how would you evaluate your entire educational experience in the teacher education programme?	3.82	.262	24.9%	51.7%	18.9%	4.5%

When asked to evaluate the quality of instruction they received and the overall program quality, the participants were asked to indicate if the quality was excellent, good, fair or poor (See table 3). For both questions, the majority of the participants indicated that they felt the quality of instruction and the overall program quality was 'good'.

Table 4 . *Correlation of Frequency of Social Media Use and Instruction/Program Quality*

		Overall, how would you evaluate your entire educational experience in the teacher education program?	Overall, how would you evaluate the quality of instruction you have received in the teacher education program?
Used an online medium media (e-mail, discussion forums, blogs, wikis.) to discuss or complete an assignment.	Pearson Correlation	<b>.151**</b>	<b>.123 **</b>
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.011	.009
Used online media media (e-mail, discussion forums, blogs, wikis.) to work with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments.	Pearson Correlation	<b>.123*</b>	<b>.151**</b>
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.024	.005

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

To determine if there was a relationship between the variables a series of correlations were completed. The analysis highlighted that there were statistically significant relationships between the frequency of use



of social media resources and how the participants described the quality of instruction and overall program quality (See table 4).

Table 5 . *Correlation of Frequency of Social Media Use and Relationships with Other Teacher Candidates*

		Relationships with other teacher candidates
Used online media (e-mail, discussion forums, blogs, wikis.) to work with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments.	Spearman's rho Correlation Coefficient	.121**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.047
Used an online medium media (e-mail, discussion forums, blogs, wikis.) to discuss or complete an assignment.	Spearman's rho Correlation Coefficient	.089
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.147

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

In an attempt to understand the correlation between social media use and teacher candidate perceptions of their relationship with their peers, a Spearman's rho correlation was performed. While the results indicated that there was a statistically significant relationship between the frequency of social media use to work with classmates outside of class and how the teacher candidates characterized their relationship with their peers, a statistically significant correlation was not apparent when examining the frequency of social media use to discuss or complete assignments (See table 5).

Table 6 . *Correlation of Frequency of Social Media Use and Relationships with Instructors*

		Relationships with instructors
Used online media (e-mail, discussion forums, blogs, wikis.) to work with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments.	Pearson Correlation	.129*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.034
Used an online medium media (e-mail, discussion forums, blogs, wikis.) to discuss or complete an assignment	Pearson Correlation	.102
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.095

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Similar to the previous correlation analysis, the results indicated that there is a statistically significant correlation between the frequency of social media use to work with classmates outside of class and the teacher candidates' characterization of their relationship with their instructors. Once again the same correlation was not apparent when examining the frequency of social media use to discuss or complete assignments and their description of their relationship with their instructors (See table 6).

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## Discussion

With a greater number of students using social media to interact with their classmates outside of class to prepare assignments rather than using these same resources to discuss or complete assignments, the results highlight the 'social' nature of social media resources. These findings support previous research that indicated that students tend to use the Internet to communicate with other students (Hu & Kuh, 2001; Laird & Kuh, 2005) more so than to actually complete their coursework. Consequently, it is not surprising that there was a correlation between the frequency of social media use and the nature of the relationship teacher candidates had with their peers. Using social media to interact with their peers may provide students with greater opportunities to get to know their peers and in turn develop a positive relationship with them. In addition to enhancing the perception of a supportive campus environment, having a positive relationship with their peers can be essential to the creation of learning communities where students are at ease with one another so that they may work collaboratively, freely share opinions and respond constructively to the ideas of their fellow students. These conditions are a necessary prerequisite for the critical thinking that supports learning to occur (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; van Wyk, 2013b).

While this study did not specifically ask the participants if they used social media to interact with their instructors, there appears to be a correlation between the frequency of social media use to interact with their classmates outside of class to prepare assignments and the nature of the relationship teacher candidates have with their instructors. This surprising finding may support Laird and Kuh's (2005) conclusion that engagement in one area, such as student-faculty engagement, often goes hand-in-hand with engagement in other areas. This notion suggests that engaged students will take advantage of all of the available resources, including technological and social media resources (Kennedy, 2000), to enhance their educational experience. Unfortunately, the reverse assumption is that low engaged students may fail to capitalize on the opportunities that social media provides to increase their level of engagement. Regardless, student-faculty interaction is noted as one of the key contributors to high student engagement (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Kuh, 2001b; Kuh et al., 2007) and using social media to enhance student-faculty relationships can have positive educational consequences (Chickering & Ehrmann, 1996).

As in many professional training programs, such as preservice teacher education, the bar to gain admittance is often set quite high. As a result, the cumulative grade averages and graduation rates are also quite high. In this context it would not be useful to investigate if there was a correlation between social media use and academic achievement. Instead, questions regarding student perceptions of the overall quality of instruction they received and overall educational experience were asked. The results indicated that there was a correlation between the frequency of use of social media resources and how the participants described the quality of instruction and overall program quality. This finding may be a consequence of the positive relationships students noted that they had with their peers and instructors which often enhances almost all aspects of learning and academic performance (Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005) or that the use of these tools may have facilitated the creation of learning communities that has been shown to have a positive impact on student learning (Tinto, 2000). The results may have even been influenced by the impact of the active and collaborative learning experiences that social media supports (Chickering & Ehrmann, 1996) that previous research has demonstrated to have a positive impact on student engagement (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Kuh, 2001a; Kuh et al., 2007). While further exploration is needed to understand the relationship between these factors, the findings of this research demonstrate that a relationship exists. It is hoped that these results will encourage faculty members and instructors, as well as colleges and university policy makers to consider the use of social media as an effective and efficient tool to support teaching and learning.

## Conclusion

The intent of this preliminary research was to provide some insight into the impact the use of social media can have on the level of preservice student engagement. While the findings indicated that there was a positive correlation between the frequency of student use of social media and their relationship with their peers and instructors as well as how they describe the overall quality of instruction and the preservice program, the results also highlight that there are many questions still to be answered. As is so often the case with preliminary research the end result can be the formulation of more questions rather than answers. Before one can put these findings into practice one needs to consider the limitations of this study that had preservice teacher candidates as its participants. Preservice students generally have a long

history of positive educational experiences and high academic achievement. Thus, the conclusions may not be generalizable to the general undergraduate student population. Despite this, the results may be useful to instructors and administrators that work primarily with students enrolled in professional programs.

While the reliability and validity of the questionnaire used in this study was not established, the questions included were closely modeled on the format of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) instrument whose psychometric properties have been well documented (Kuh, 2001b). Similar to the impact of the NSSE, it is hoped that these results may be used to inform future research and eventually instructor and institutional practices that capitalize on the benefits of using social media to support student engagement. Once the higher education community has a better understanding of how and why students are using social media resources as part of their educational experience, this information can be used to support instructor professional development and the creation of institutionally supported social media resources.

The greatest challenge to future research and the usefulness of these results is in understanding the use or lack of use of social media resources by low engaged students. The conclusion that highly engaged students may be high users of educationally purposeful social media resources should not be astonishing to educators. There is a natural tendency for highly engaged students to make good use of all of the educational resources that are available to them (Kennedy, 2000). The challenge, is to determine how the educational community can leverage the social nature of these resources to support increased levels of interaction between high and low engaged students. Kuh et al (2007) suggests that because peers are very influential to student learning and values development, educational institutions should attempt to harness and shape this influence so that it is educationally purposeful and helps to reinforce academic expectations (Kuh et al., 2007). Unfortunately, because of the newness of some of these social media tools there is little guidance as to specifically how this can be accomplished. The benefits of using social media to support teaching and learning will not be fully realized until there is a better understanding of how the social nature of these social media resources can be used to entice low engaged or disengaged students to interact in educationally purposeful ways with their high-engaged peers and instructors so that it contributes to the success of

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## Language myths alive: Educators' beliefs about mother tongue use in three Zimbabwean rural primary schools

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**Abstract :** *There is a growing body of knowledge that supports the use of the mother tongue in education, raising the question why the cognitive advantages of the mother language should remain untapped for the benefit of primary school pupils in ex-colonial African countries. The Zimbabwean Language-in-Education Policy (LiEP) of the 1987 Education Act, amended in 2006, stipulates that prior to Form One, learners may access the curriculum in their mother tongue. Contrary to the stated policy, primary school teachers continue to use English as the language of education at the expense of the mother tongue from Grade One up to Grade Seven. The purpose of this study was, thus, to explore the factors which act as barriers to the effective implementation of the mother tongue policy in rural primary schools in Masvingo District of Zimbabwe. The qualitative case study was informed by the postcolonial theory paradigm. Multiple data collection methods were employed and these included the semi-structured questionnaire and focus group discussions for teachers as well as individual interviews for primary school heads. The study participants who were purposefully selected included three school heads and fifteen rural primary school teachers. Data were analysed thematically. The findings of this study revealed that participants held beliefs in uninformed language myths which support the dominant role of English as follows: English was viewed as the only language of education as it allowed for easier communication locally and internationally, the mother tongue was regarded as not capable of becoming the language of education, it was believed that learners had to learn in English to improve proficiency in the second language and that maximum exposure would prepare learners for secondary school education and subsequent acquisition of good jobs upon completion of their studies. Recommendations were made on the role of teacher education institutions on the implementation of additive bilingual education in primary schools.*

### Key words

*Language-in-Education Policy; mother tongue education; language myths; primary education; additive bilingual education; teacher education.*

### Introduction

There is overwhelming evidence in literature on the benefits of using the first language in teaching and learning for speakers of African languages (Alidou, Boly, Brock-Utne, Diallo, Heugh and Wolff, 2006; Mutasa, 2006; OSISA, 2008; Brock-Utne and Skattum, 2009; Ademowo, 2010; Desai, 2012; Makoni, 2012). The Zimbabwean Language-in-Education Policy (hereafter to be referred to as the LiEP) of the 1987 Education Act, amended in 2006, stipulates that learners may access the curriculum in their mother tongue up to Grade Seven. Despite the well intentioned policy, teachers are reluctant to implement the mother tongue policy. The majority of In Zimbabweans, are non-native speakers of English as the second language, hence, research findings indicate that learners remain disadvantaged particularly in Science and Mathematics subjects at primary school level (Mufanechiya and Mufanechiya, 2011; Chivhanga, 2012; Greenhalgh and Shumba, 2014). Whereas much has been reported about difficulties experienced by learners in accessing the curriculum in a foreign language, perhaps less has been written in Zimbabwe concerning educators' beliefs in language myths as a contributory factor towards non-implementation of the mother tongue policy in rural primary schools. The study is part of a larger research conducted to

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investigate factors that act as possible barriers to effective implementation of the Zimbabwean LiEP (First Author 2013).

### Conceptual analysis

Language attitudes are viewed as emanating from language myths, a category of barriers which seem to contribute towards exclusion of African languages from education (Benson, 2005; UNESCO Bangkok, 2008; Dalvit, Murray and Terzoli, 2009; Ngefacs, 2010). These language myths, which are more false than true, tend to guide the thinking of policy-makers with regard to how official languages ought to be learnt by speakers of African languages (Alidou et al., 2006). This paper identifies four language myths and reflects upon each one of them, with a view to revealing how they seem to be unjustified. The identified myths emerge from research and debate on language-in-education issues in ex-colonial countries as illustrated below.

#### The one-nation-one language myth

The first myth is a colonial concept that a nation requires a single unifying language, a myth that has influenced policy-makers in many parts of the world (Hornberger, 2002). Benson (2005:7) posits that the colonial concept of *one-nation-one language* can be regarded as a myth because the imposition of a so called “neutral” foreign language has not necessarily resulted in unity as evidenced by instability in monolingual countries such as Somalia, Burundi and Rwanda. Ouane (2003, cited in Benson, 2005:7) further argues that “In fact, government failure to accept ethnolinguistic diversity has been a major destabilising force in countries like Bangladesh, Pakistan, Myanmar and Sri Lanka”. In some African countries, this integration role played by ex-colonial languages is partly responsible for their high esteem and value (Moodley, 2000; Nkomo, 2008; Mustapha, 2011).

#### The myth that African languages cannot be used in education

The second myth is that local African languages cannot express modern concepts. As a result of this attitudinal misconception, the belief by Africans is that only the ex-colonial languages should be used as the media of instruction (Salami, 2008; Dalvit et al., 2009; Mustapha, 2011). This myth can be dispelled since all human languages are equally able to express their speakers’ thoughts and new terms and structures can be developed as needed (Benson, 2005; Prah, 2009). According to Alexander (2003, cited in Benson, 2005:7), “*The difference lies in which languages have historically been chosen for ‘intellectualisation’, or development through writing and publishing*”. Dalvit et al. (2009) further argue that European countries such as Switzerland, Belgium and Finland are successful examples of societal multilingualism and yet none of them use English as a language of teaching and learning.

#### The myth that using English improves English proficiency

The third myth which is crucial to this study is that using English as a language of instruction improves English proficiency. It is generally assumed that when the mother language is used in the initial stages of education, the result is regression in acquiring the intended European language (Adegbiya, 1994; Orman, 2008). On the contrary, research has demonstrated that this view may not be justified (Benson, 2005; Baker, 2006). Rather, the initial use of the home language provides a child with a solid cognitive base which helps in facilitating the acquisition of additional languages (Cummins, 2001, 2005; Alidou et al., 2006; UNESCO Bangkok, 2008; Koch, Landon, Jackson, and Foli, 2009; Yohannes, 2009). Such knowledge is crucial to dispel the myth that using English as the language of instruction improves English proficiency, and to demonstrate that using English as the sole language of instruction is not necessary (Sengoro, 2004, cited in Brock-Utne, 2007).

#### The maximum exposure myth

The fourth myth is that in order to learn a second language one must start as early as possible, implying an early transition to English. Those who advocate for an early exit from an African language to English seem to assume that if a child who speaks an African language learns in English then he or she will be as successful as English speaking children (Dalvit et al., 2009). In this regard UNESCO Bangkok (2008) avers that starting early might help learners to get a nice accent, otherwise those who benefit are the learners whose first language is well developed. Building a strong foundation in the first language helps learning of the second language much more than early or long exposure to the second language (Cummins, 2001, 2005; Salami, 2008; Linton and Jimenez, 2009).



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### **Problem and purpose of the study**

In the Zimbabwean context, the majority of learners come from poorly resourced schools in the rural areas and they have a scant understanding of English. Due to failure by rural primary school learners to access the curriculum in the mother tongue, the result is poor performance particularly in Science and Mathematics (Greenhalgh and Shumba, 2014). The major goal of this study was thus to identify and critically analyse the language myths that contribute towards implementation failure with regard to the 2006 LiEP for Zimbabwe. It was hoped that teachers and school heads would benefit if they are well informed that late-exit transitional bilingual education is more likely to lead to academic success as such an understanding may help them to implement the LiEP which recommends mother tongue use up to Grade Seven.

### **Research questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What knowledge and beliefs are held by teachers and school heads towards mother tongue education for rural primary school learners?
2. What recommendations can be given as intervention measures to minimize the challenge of non-implementation of the current LiEP?

### **Methodology**

Methodology employed is a qualitative case study of fifteen teachers and three school heads who were purposively sampled because of their long teaching experience in rural primary schools in Masvingo District of Zimbabwe. To explore the knowledge and beliefs of these educators in the implementation of a mother tongue policy, the researcher worked in a postcolonial theory paradigm since participants might be influenced by colonial experiences (Nchindila, 2010). Postcolonial theories promote methodologies that privilege the colonised and, hence, the marginalised, with a view to liberating and transforming them (Rivas, 2005; Viruru, 2005; Ratele, 2006; Phillips, 2011; Chilisa, 2012). The postcolonial theory was thus employed in this study with the aim of emancipating and empowering those who have been so linguistically colonised that they no longer believe in their own languages (Ngugi waThiong'o, 1986a cited in Chilisa, 2012). In this study, contributions to social change in school heads and teachers' responses to mother tongue use in rural primary schools came in the form of recommendations on possible intervention strategies that were proposed by the researched themselves through their own voices.

Three instruments developed by the researcher were used to collect data namely; a semi-structured questionnaire which yielded open answers from teachers, a focus group interview guide for teachers and an interview guide for school heads. The permission to conduct the study was sought from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. The researcher personally administered the questionnaires and conducted focus group discussions as well as face-to-face interviews with teachers and school heads respectively. All the data from individual interviews and focus group discussions were audio-taped and fully transcribed. The constant comparative method of qualitative data analysis was adopted in this research, whereby data from various data sources were qualitatively compared and contrasted in a bid to develop categories and look for patterns among the categories (McMillan and Schumacher, 2010; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). In line with the methodologies inclined to the postcolonial perspective, the researcher conducted a 'member check' audit with the participants in order to heighten the dependability and confirmability of the study (Lincoln and Guba, 1985 cited in Cohen et al., 2011).

Since this case study involved obtaining a great deal of personal and intimate information from participants, all participants were provided with informed consent statements that clearly stated the purpose of the study, that participation was voluntary and that their answers would be held in strict confidence (Gilbert, 2008; Silverman, 2010).

### **Results**

The opposing discourses towards the implementation of the LiEP, which allows mother tongue use in education, were evident in this study. Almost all the participants argued that if they were given a choice,

they would opt for English as the only language of education for various reasons, chief among them being that English was viewed as the language of communication both locally and internationally. The following statement from one of the teachers, which is typical of most of the responses, was expressed thus:

*You find that most of the countries actually use English as the medium of communication. You would find a barrier between our pupils and even ourselves with people abroad or even within our country, you find out you go to Matabeleland they speak Ndebele, and English is the medium of instruction that you would use actually when communicating with a person who uses a different language within the country.*

The majority of the participants believed that it was not possible to use the mother tongue in teaching some Mathematics and Science concepts. Most of their responses during focus group discussions were similar to the following statement which was uttered by one of the teachers who said:

*Some of the subjects like Science, Mathematics, u-m-m probably Physics, do not have terms that can be used to rate facts that are supposed to be put across in that particular subject, for example oxygen [...]. If it comes to photosynthesis we cannot u-m-m it's impossible to get a word that is suitable. We will be manufacturing words and we will take years to make that policy implementable.*

Participants also indicated that if teachers use the mother language, then learners would fail to get sufficient exposure to prepare them for English use at secondary school level. The following excerpt represents what was raised by the majority of the teacher informants who felt that English should be used because:

*Practice makes perfect and when practising in English they will be perfecting their understanding of the language, so if they don't practise that English, it will be difficult for them at secondary level to grasp the concepts there.*

Whereas, if the mother language is used as the medium of instruction at primary school level, its inimical role was expressed thus, "It can cause challenges to the secondary school teacher since transition of English speaking through the lessons can make pupils passive".

English was also considered a popular language which is in demand in the global community because of its official role, a function which could not be achieved through the use of any of the local languages. The superior role of English was acknowledged by two of the school heads in separate individual interviews as follows:

*The major advantage is that u-m-m when pupils leave school they want to be employed formally; they want to go to universities and colleges. They can't go to those important places of their lives without having passed the English Language, so they need to exercise speaking it and they need to pass it and need to know it fully in depth because they will need it in future for their careers.*

*Our school would prefer to use English as a medium of instruction. The reason is that u-m-m we will make our pupils fit in the society well because this language is an international language so children will end up in America and Britain, where ever.*

The indication from the teachers and the school heads' responses is that they clearly preferred English as the language of education, contrary to the demands of the 2006 LiEP. Thus, participants in this study believed in the use of English as the only language of education as it allowed for easier communication locally and internationally, that the mother tongue was not capable of becoming the language of education and that learners needed to master English effectively through maximum exposure to prepare them for secondary education and subsequent acquisition of good jobs upon completion of their studies.

In line with the expectations of the postcolonial theory, participants gave their own ideas on intervention strategies that can be employed to solve the challenge of implementation failure. It emerged that almost all the teachers and school heads who participated in this study strongly believed in the need for professional development and the provision of educational materials in order to combat the challenge of uninformed language myths.



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The following excerpts were typical of the views that were expressed by many of the participants who felt that:

*Students at universities and colleges should be equipped and acquainted with the changes so that they implement them when they get to schools. College and university lecturers should hold in-service and refresher courses for teachers.*

*They should also make sure that materials are available for us to be able to implement that policy, materials such as syllabuses and books.*

The research role of teacher education institutions was suggested by one of the participants as follows:

*Research further, find out from other countries which have been successful. Outreach programmes to make teachers aware, like what you are doing right now.*

The study informants, therefore, recommended the training of teachers as the most effective intervention strategy, followed by production of materials and further research as means of providing requisite knowledge and skills to empower teachers in the implementation of the current mother tongue policy.

### Discussion of findings

Participants in this study strongly believed in the exceptional role of English in unifying people from different linguistic backgrounds inside and outside the country. This colonial concept of one-nation-one-language is a myth experienced by many ex-colonial subjects in Africa, who regard the second language as playing an integration role (Moodley, 2000; Hornberger, 2002; Owino, 2002; Benson, 2005; Nkomo, 2008). Such a belief on the significance of English as a language of wider communication may be regarded as a possible barrier to effective implementation of the LiEP in Zimbabwean rural primary schools.

Results also revealed an attitudinal misconception on the belief that only English should be used as the language of education. Teachers and school heads in this study were of the opinion that by using an indigenous language for the purpose of education, learners would be disadvantaged since they believed that some Science and Mathematics concepts cannot be translated and subsequently taught in the mother language. Similarly, researches conducted in other African countries such as the Central African Republic, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa and Tanzania also indicated that the key stakeholders in education hold uninformed myths towards African indigenous languages (Benson, 2005; UNESCO Bangkok, 2008; Salami, 2008; Koch et al., 2009; Dalvit et al., 2009; Ademowo, 2010; Mustapha, 2011).

The myth on the belief of 'maximum exposure', as reflected in the study results, probably explains why participants were against the implementation of a mother tongue policy. Participants believed that mother tongue use would prevent the development of academic proficiency in the second language, English. Benson (2005), who cites studies by Cummins (1999, 2000), Ramirez et al. (1991) and Thomas and Collier (2002), affirms that research evidence to date indicates that the opposite is true. According to Benson (2005:8), "*The more highly developed the first language skills, the better the results in the second language, because language and cognition in the second build on the first*". The above findings were confirmed by the success of the Additive late-exit Bi-Lingual Education (ABLE) Project in South Africa (Koch et al., 2009).

Participants in this study exhibited serious knowledge deficiencies on the role of the mother tongue in education since they wrongly argued against it probably because they were not aware of the principle which is declared by Alidou et al. (2006:15) that "*--- a switch from mother tongue education to second language medium only is, contrary to popular wisdom, not necessary, nor the best way to ensure the highest level of proficiency in the second language*".

Results from this study also indicate that participants believed in early transition from the mother language to English, the argument for maximum exposure mainly being that learners would easily climb the employment ladder. Participants hoped that learning in English would assist learners to pass Grade Seven examinations which are written in English, get good 'O' Level results, enter institutions of higher learning where English is a requirement and eventually get good jobs. Similarly, researches conducted in Kenya, Cameroon, Nigeria and South Africa, among others, all revealed that stakeholders in education

believed in the myth that the longer the children are exposed to English and the earlier they exit from an African language to English as the medium of instruction, the better (Muthwii, 2004; Salami, 2008; Dalvit et al., 2009; Ngefac, 2010; Mustapha, 2011; Phillips, 2011; Mashiya, 2011; van Laren and Goba, 2013).

It was interesting to note that participants in this study were not at all concerned about the cognitive advantages which are possible only when pupils learn in their mother language. Rather, they were more worried about teaching in English as a way of exposing learners to the second language in order to prepare them for the future. We argue that negative attitudes may result from uninformed language myths, a factor which may be attributed to lack of knowledge and inadequate training in respect of the cognitive benefits of education in the mother tongue (Cummins, 2005; Alidou et al., 2006).

All the study informants suggested staff development as the most effective strategy to equip pre-service and in-service teachers with knowledge and skills on additive bilingual education. This intervention measure can be said to be appropriate since literature has shown that the training of bilingual education teachers has been successful in other countries, for example, Bolivia, Namibia and South Africa (Benson, 2005; Rassool, Edwards and Bloch, 2006; Mashiya, 2011; Van Laren and Goba, 2013). Nkomo (2008) supports the idea of the training of bilingual education teachers by stating that for mother tongue education to succeed in a postcolonial context, the LiEP should not be restricted to the classroom practice without considering what happens in the lecture rooms where teachers are produced.

Participants also suggested the production of educational materials in the mother language as another crucial approach to curb policy implementation failure, since the current scenario leaves Zimbabwean teachers desperate due to lack of requisite terminology for use in Mathematics and Science lessons (Nkomo, 2008; Mufanechiya and Mufanechiya, 2011; Chivhanga, 2012; Greenhalgh and Shumba, 2014).

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

The purpose of this study was to explore the factors that contribute towards implementation failure with regards to the use of the mother tongue in the education of learners in Zimbabwean rural primary schools. The study found that participants held beliefs in many language myths, which are uninformed beliefs on the effects of the first language in education. Accordingly, it was evident that participants had limited knowledge on the fact that the late-exit transitional bilingual education is more likely to lead to better academic success (Alidou et al., 2006). As a result of lack of such knowledge, they strictly insist on the use of English as the only language of education from Grade One, making it almost impossible for them to embrace a LiEP which recommends mother tongue use in education.

The study makes the following recommendations:

Great Zimbabwe University, whose niche calls for the promotion of Zimbabwean culture and heritage, is appropriately placed to train pre-service and in-service teachers on how to implement additive bilingual education. Donor funding can also be sourced in order to spearhead the production of educational resource materials in the mother tongue, particularly in Science and Mathematics subjects which were cited by the study informants as the most problematic. Research can be enhanced by going into partnerships with Universities that are already offering courses (modules) that deal with the pedagogic role of the mother language in bilingual education, for example the University of Cape Town and the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa.

There are some areas of further research. There is need to carry out an investigation on how language myths are sustained in societies, and how campaigns can be effectively conducted to convince stakeholders on the pedagogical benefits of mother tongue use in education, in accordance with current international research findings.

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## Exploring a multi-religious education curriculum: an imperative dialogue

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**Abstract:** *The multi-religious curriculum in Botswana was introduced in 1996 and 2006 at junior and senior secondary school levels respectively following the Botswana's Revised National Policy on Education of 1994 (Botswana Government, 1994). The key emphasis was education that affected positively the behaviours of young people. The paper shows how the present secondary school multi-religious form of Religious Education (RE) curriculum tackles the issue of the supposedly religious pluralism in Botswana public secondary schools. The paper points out that positive engagement is more than just being tolerant as this also brings about genuine religious pluralism in the teaching and learning of a multi-religious education curriculum.*

**Key words:** *religious pluralism, tolerance, multi-religious education, inter-religious dialogue, positive engagement.*

### Introduction and Background

The introduction of the multi-religious education curriculum is believed to be consistent with the pluralistic nature of Botswana society where different religions are allowed by law to celebrate their existence without prejudice. The multi-religious curriculum education is informed by the religious landscape in Botswana that has to a large extent changed in the last two decades. This change comes after a sustained period characterised by a mono-religious—Christian-dominated curriculum. In fact, the Christian faith has been at the centre of the RE curriculum since the colonial days. Previous RE curriculum reforms were aimed at converting people who were thought not to have been exposed to the Christian religion, while equally strengthening the faith of the already converted young people. Teachers were expected to be exemplars of Christianity as clearly indicated in the objectives of the former junior and senior secondary school curriculum (Chapman, 1981; 1975). In contrast, the present multi-religious curriculum provides ample room for the discussion of the conflicts that may have been caused by religion and/or where religion is wholly or partly held responsible, for example, Northern Ireland, the Sudan, (South Sudan), Central African Republic, East Timor, India, Indonesia, Kashmir, Middle-East and presently Syria, Afghanistan, Nigeria and Iraq.

What makes the multi-religious curriculum model 'acceptable' in a pluralistic Botswana society is the fact that the setting has multiple religious, cultural, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds that occupy the same physical space. The multi-religious curriculum espouses the philosophy of tolerance which is reminiscent of pluralism. Consequently, a multi-religious curriculum is aimed at providing an in-depth understanding of religious pluralism which is a way of preparing future citizens who are not parochial and discriminatory in terms of their interpersonal relationships. Thus, values such as respect for human spirituality, commitment to interpersonal relationships, moral responsibility, right to self-fulfilment, justice in society and order and respect for life in society are taught from different religious perspectives and dimensions. Put differently, religious plurality is an important component in education which educators are presently taking seriously in their pedagogies especially in liberal democracies. For example, in Botswana's long term vision commonly referred to as Vision 2016, one of its national pillars is tolerance (Botswana Government, 1997). In addition, being in a diverse community is an advantage because that may encourage discovery and creativity in relation to the intercultural interactions as well as being able to assist a nation in its economic path, consolidating peace and consequently contributing to a vibrant democracy (Nyati-Ramahobo, 2008a).

### Teaching a multi-faith curriculum: an imperative dialogue



Though there has been inadequate research on the issue of multi-religious curriculum carried out in Botswana schools, there seems, in the view of Dinama (2010) to be a lot of excitement by both teachers and learners regarding the prospects of being exposed to the different religions instead of one. The multi-religious curriculum aims at promoting respect through dialogue, mutual respect and free articulation of one's experiences and knowledge. Dialogue which is based on mutual trust is an imperative if learners are to access the correct and relevant information regarding different religions. However, trust does not happen by accident, but it is created, nurtured, valued and maintained by its beneficiaries. People's sense of security in relationships hinges on a foundation of mutual trust. When one feels free due to trust, walls of insecurity tumble down, hence true feelings and behaviours are openly expressed and exhibited. Mutual trust and respect are prerequisites for an open communication and honest dialogue about values, goals and expectations since they require freedom of expression especially one that is devoid of retribution.

Potter (1999) indirectly notes the importance of a dialogue by pointing out the need to respect and encourage different views and perspectives which is the hallmark of democracy. However, there are instances whereby the school or an education system may help to perpetuate injustices and inequality by creating and legitimising certain beliefs and practices (Jenkins, 1992). Whenever this happens dialogue becomes naturally stifled. This is the case, for example, with minority ethnic groups in Botswana (Chebanne, 2002, Hitchcock and Holm, 1985, Jotia & Pansiri, 2013, Molosiwa, 2009, Mooko, 2006). It is in this way that Rolly (2005) notes that "throughout history, education has been an instrument used to establish, to consolidate, to reform or overthrow a given social, economic and political order" (p. 22). When used in this way, education may be used for good or for worse, but mainly in a subtle way that is not easy to detect and recognise, and this is what Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) refer to as 'symbolic violence'. When operating in this manner, schools become sources of an illusion that blur the structures of power relations by making schooling to be a legitimate and neutral institution of which it is not.

However, it tends to be a challenge to maintain a balance between trust, tolerance and dialogue in a religious space that is divergent especially since most religions regard their truth claims as genuine, true and final. Under such circumstances it becomes difficult to guarantee that dialogues and conversations would be based on mutual trust especially since there will definitely be competing demands hence there is a strong likelihood of further polarisation. Nevertheless, dialogue does not necessarily mean that all would agree but that all would aim at attempting to understand the other party. The public spaces for dialogue are probably the school, neighbourhood, community organisations, inter-religious organisations and many more. Engaging in common religious activities or in the lives of one's neighbours within a community could help individuals understand each other. Inter-religious dialogue entails engaging members of different religions or strands within a religion in dialogue that is aimed at reducing inter-religious and intra-religious conflicts and this calls for an open-ended dialogue.

The aim of a dialogue is to cultivate positive relationships within a diverse set-up. In addition, knowing about a religion can reduce immensely biases, for example, if one happens to have friends or acquaintances that practice a particular religion that is different from theirs, they may be introduced to their lifestyles such as dress, foods, songs and prayers. Consequently, as one begins to be curious due to exposure to realities and information about another's religion they may become open and less rigid as they remove their fixed ideas which are usually a barrier to good relationships and where new religious outlooks become fascinating instead of being a threat and where religions are understood in their own terms (Gross, 1991).

Access to information is one of the key factors that contribute to the promotion of religious pluralism. In most instances, lack of adequate information about different religions is likely to lead to pre-judging of others hence failure to communicate fairly, sensitively and sensibly. This leads Fennes and Hapgood (1997) to comment that whatever judgements that one makes about any culture "must be based on complete understanding of its character, traits and complexity and not on the values of one's own culture" (p. 43). It is possible that normal situations could be mishandled by the less informed because of undue emotional reaction based on incomplete or sensational information and this can lead to a barrier in engaging in an effective dialogue.

Mangino (2013) notes that culture manifests itself in people when they pick behaviours from existing repertoire of behaviours and when they are making decisions in their lives. Furthermore, cultural biases are mainly a result of lack of being critical of one's own culture. However, in most cases people hardly interrogate their own prejudices which are a result of their own cultural biases and especially if different



parties hold a set of assumptions that tend to be diametrically opposed to each other. Rolly (2005) perceives culture in a rather critical way by not accepting the common perception that views culture as a feature that characterises a particular group of people, but that it is a social practice as experienced by people who share a common physical space, capable of reflecting on what happens around them and are aware of differences they encounter as they interact with those who are different from them. In consciously or unconsciously carrying out their prejudices they apply their norms and values onto others' cultures (Rolly, 2005) while exhibiting little understanding of the 'other', and in doing so they classify, set apart or split their world into what can be included and excluded (Bauman, 1991). This usually results in cultural disadvantages of certain groups of people. A case in point is in Botswana where the languages of the minority ethnic groups are not taught in public and private schools (Jotia & Pansiri, 2013, Molosiwa, 2009, Pansiri, 2008, Nyati-Saleshando, 2012).

Speaking from a South Eastern European position, and in relation to pluralistic societies Genoa (2005) observes that some countries in that region have already "developed and successfully applied educational practices which facilitate the functioning of a truly multi-ethnic legal and institutional arrangement" (p.4). The understanding is that full social inclusion easily leads to social cohesion, while "the existence of social exclusion often reflects a conflict between different sets of values" (Christian & Abrams, 2007, p. xii). Exclusion has negative consequences since "it results in several dysfunctional reactions including lowered self-esteem, greater anger, inability to reason well, depression and anxiety, and self-defeating perceptions and behaviours" (Christian & Abrams, 2007, p. 29) which are unhealthy for a nation-state. In this way, both respect for individuals and respect for institutional values would involve balancing the claims of personal autonomy with the goals and mission of an institution. Furthermore, RE needs a new interpretation in order for it to remain relevant in today's contemporary and globalising world even though it is not always easy in multi-ethnic and multi-religious environments. Rolly (2005) succinctly captures the mood by saying that "in the history of mankind, occasions are rare when people of different descent, language or culture co-existed peacefully" (p. 22).

### Understanding religious pluralism

In the view of Eck (2006) pluralism goes beyond diversity as there is need for engagement within a diverse society and the need to actively seek to understand the significance of existing differences. As for Eck (2006) pluralism is about individual identities, commitments and differences that are deeply held by those who believe in them and not in isolation but in relationship with one another. That is why there is need for active engagement when encountering the religious commitments of individuals and this active engagement can only happen through dialogue which is realised when people try to understand others and self through some introspection. In so doing, a diverse society is likely to be created since identities are understood within a context of dialogue whose aim is a better understanding of the other. However, in the case of Botswana, though pluralistic in nature, this seems to be a remote realisation since certain groups which were in the past commonly referred to as 'major' are favoured by the legal and social structures.

The existence of pluralism denotes active engagement and co-existence of the practitioners of different religions. Pluralism does not exist a priori in a plural society but it is something that has to be achieved since it entails active engagement with diversity. Religious pluralism involves inter-religious dialogue where there is an active engagement and where one is encouraged to hold on to their religion while learning about other religions and how the adherents of the other religion would like to be viewed and understood. That is why coercing others into believing would naturally be inappropriate. Furthermore, religious pluralism entails accepting the beliefs of other religions as legitimate and valid without acknowledging that they are necessarily true since the view is that all religions constitute different conceptions of the ultimate reality. As for Eck (2006), what is termed religious truth is created through social consensus and tradition and is not a discovered reality that exists independent of people's beliefs.

Furthermore, religious pluralism is not based on achieving agreement on matters of faith, conscience and cultural outlook but is premised on achieving a relationship through dialogue. What is common and what is different is likely to be revealed in a dialogue. This is possible through a reciprocal approach which entails open interaction and dialogue that is premised on sincerity and mutual trust as earlier indicated. As

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a way of appreciating inter-faith dialogue, a Christian minister Ariarajah (2000) makes this observation of his own religion:

While the church excels in humanitarian work, it has done little or nothing to help Christians have an informed understanding of what their religious neighbours believe, and why. It has taken no initiatives to help Christians understand how to relate to those who had heard the Gospel, but have chosen to remain Hindu, Buddhist or Muslim. Nor has the church taken any steps to encourage the Christians to engage together with persons of other faith traditions in the struggles for justice, reconciliation and peace (p. 2).

Religious pluralism may entail concerted efforts of different religious traditions to form a spiritual community, the argument being that religions have similar goals hence it has to be easy for them to collaborate on a common cause. Though religions may have a common denominator in terms of having a similar understanding of a deity, their emphasis on particularities makes it difficult for them to engage in dialogue. If one were to view religious issues as an outsider, they would quickly identify several common strands than the differences, yet it is the religions' emphasis on minute details that differentiates and equally sows seeds of mistrust amongst them. Gross (1991) posits that religious pluralism has to be thorough in its appreciation of religious traditions because the existing differences are supposed to be a source of fascination and enrichment rather than a problem, consequently, a sense of tolerance can be cultivated. Religious pluralism can only exist where there is freedom of religion and where religious traditions possess same rights of worship and public expression. In this context, the importance of the school as an all-encompassing institution is elevated so that it may assist in bringing about a sense of mutual trust and respect in relation to how "people from different ethnic groups and cultural backgrounds can live happily and successfully, and can help to create ... a cohesive, multi-cultural society" (Verma, Zec & Skinner, 1999, p. 14). This is largely missing in the case of the Botswana education system, (Jotia & Pansiri, 2013) hence there is a sense of "otherness" instilled in people's minds.

### **The Concept of 'Otherness' and Pluralism**

Otherness is viewing or treating a person or groups of persons as intrinsically 'different' from and alien to oneself (Hubert, 2000, p. 4) because they do not share values, beliefs, normative prescriptions and even motivations of a particular social group (Hutchinson, Abrams & Christian, 2007). In this way, certain individuals are "systematically excluded from particular domains because they are members of a specific social group" (Hutchinson, et al., 2007, p.36). In the case of Botswana, some minority ethnic groups are discriminated against while the ethical and legal systems approve of the practice (Ditshwanelo, 2007, Jotia & Pansiri, 2013, Werbner, 2002). As a concept, otherness exists as majority and minority social identities are constructed. In a majority of cases, these identities are constructed by society, whilst the ethical and legal systems legitimise them. Hubert (2000) aptly captures the common scenario when she observes that, "within a particular society the evidence for social exclusion must be sought in the complexities of social structures, and ethical and legal systems" (p. 3). This is so, since in any society the representation of different groups within any given society is usually controlled by groups that have greater influence because of their political power especially where identities are often thought as being natural, innate or something that individuals are born with. In the context of Botswana, the eight 'principal' groups have several privileges such as land rights compared to the 'minority' ethnic groups (Nyati-Ramahobo, 2008a, 2008b). Social identities reflect the way in which individuals and groups internalise established social categories within their societies, and this includes various identities such as those based on culture, ethnicity, gender, class and so on (Jenkins (2008). These identities shape people's ideas about how they view themselves and how they want to be seen by others, and the groups to which they belong to. Mead (1934) had earlier made the observation that social identities are created through people's on-going social interactions with each other and their subsequent self-reflection about who they think they are according to the existing social exchanges. In Botswana, there is still the majority-minority dichotomy which unfortunately is still entrenched in the constitution (Mooko, 2006, Nyati-Ramahobo, 2008a, 2008b). Identities are produced through agreement, disagreement, and negotiation with each other hence individuals adjust their behaviours and self-images based upon those interactions and self-reflections (Hutchinson et al, 2007). This network of interpersonal relationships in relation to various groups that possess the valuable skills, information and other assets that individuals can use to move up the social ladder, is what is referred to as social capital. Consequently, social capital naturally leads to human capital

– that is, “skills and knowledge that allow individuals to perform economically valuable labour” (Hassan & Bagde, 2013, p. 1009). In this way, societies therefore, create a sense of belonging, identity and social status by constructing social categories as binary opposites, based on “Us” and “Them” (Mason-Whitehead & Mason, 2007) because a social group would provide psychological meaning to the individual in assisting him or her to be able to define himself or herself. Here, there is an emphasis on an individual’s experiences of difference where one would be able to distinguish oneself from others (Mason-Whitehead & Mason, 2007). Societies therefore set up these dichotomies which are then so often times in everyday life presumed to be natural and hence taken for granted, yet that is not the case. Social identities are not natural since they represent an established social order that has been socially created, as well as a hierarchy where certain groups are established as being superior to other groups. Consequently, individuals internalise these dichotomies as natural. The creation of social identities is also and mainly based on power relations in society, since in every society there are those who possess power and have the ability to name the world on behalf of others. This leads Okolie (2003) to conclude that; “because groups do not have equal powers to define both self and the other, the consequences reflect these power differentials. Often notions of superiority and inferiority are embedded in particular identities” (p. 2). However, there has to be dialogue if pluralism is to be cultivated and this involves the flow of ideas between people in trying to listen and understand each other’s viewpoint. The challenge here is the ability to respect a view that is diametrically opposed to one’s own. In many instances, one would like the other to have similar beliefs as theirs and if they happen to be different they would like the other party to either abandon or revise their beliefs based on the understanding that the other party is in error with regard to their thought processes and practices. In the Botswana context, those who are religious especially Christians would usually like to convert non-Christians with the assumption that those who are not Christians live incomplete lives. This emanates from their emphasis on the exclusive truth claims of a deity who is said to be superior and universal.

As a matter of fact, it is not in the best interest of a multi-religious education curriculum for a central government to establish a religion and enforce its legal observation by law, especially in institutions such as schools where members are a captive audience (Dinama, 2011). This becomes a challenge to liberal modern nation states to keep a delicate balance between the need to promote a multi-religious environment while at the same time maintaining the monopoly over political and economic power. That is why neo-liberal states would enjoy a scenario where the citizenry is literally captive in various spheres and where religion may be used as a tool to maintain the status quo. Equally important, is that it will not be in concert with this type of curriculum to compel anyone to worship in a manner that is contrary to their conscience as seen in the Botswana public schools (Dinama, 2011).

Religion is largely an important aspect in almost all cultures since it is not separate from everyday life. With regard to a multi-religious curriculum it is important because its aim is to empower learners and teachers so that they are able to question the way certain things are done in society. The multi-religious curriculum aims at promoting respect for differences and appreciation of diversity. In this way, such a curriculum would enable learners to respond effectively to various forms of bias even within the school environment especially with respect to the many incidents of bias that occur all too often in classrooms and in the school yards. Outside school too, learners may respond to their environment in a way that is not threatening and overwhelming, for example, they may be able to detect music that encourages prejudice and hate. Unfortunately, most schools, for instance, have plans in place for responding to fires, fights amongst students and other similar situations that call for the quick assessment and decisive action while this is not the case with bias or prejudice-related motivated incidents. When bias-related incidents occur, many educators discover that they have not planned ahead neither do they have anything at hand to respond decisively. Some of the bias related incidents include violent assault, harassment, graffiti, derogatory language and hate speech. Dinama (2011) posits that when bias incidents do occur in the community, they reverberate at schools too which through their culture they too can encourage prejudice. In a pluralistic society, cultures are expected to exist side by side but it then becomes problematic when one culture claims dominance over others. A case in point is where some ethnic groups in Botswana have constitutionally been declared to be superior (Ditshwanelo, 2007, Hitchcock & Holm, 1985, Nyati-Saleshando, 2012). Similarly, if a curriculum emphasises a particular religion, it then conveys a message of exclusion to all those that do not belong to that privileged religion hence the realities and identities of those who are ‘less than’ are not affirmed.

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### Teachers in a diverse environment

Learners in a multi-religious curriculum are assumed to be at the centre of the pedagogical process and in such a situation pedagogy becomes compatible with the learners' culture hence an increased likelihood of enhanced students' learning (Bennett, 2001). This calls for educators to use culture as a tool in their teaching in order to accurately interpret the learners' thoughts, feelings and actions, thus consequently improving the students' capacity to learn and internalise knowledge (Liston & Zeichner, 1996). One way to reduce frustrations, anxiety, fears, and hostilities is to take students' culture seriously. However, this is not the case in the Botswana context especially with reference to the majority of the population that reside in rural areas (Molosiwa, 2009). Pansiri (2008) makes this observation that "the common features of rurality include: languages used in schools that exclude parents and children in the locality; school curriculum that holds to mono-culturalism and a homogenised view of child identity; education that is open to rejection of cultural diversity; and an education system that creates social inequality" (p. 447). Learners are more likely to experience low self-esteem if they feel that their culture or religion is being deliberately isolated and ignored. Similarly, students will naturally feel fulfilled if they realise that their world-view though not universally shared is still important if it is part of the classroom discussions and conversations. If diversity is encouraged in classroom settings, learners are likely to realise that their ideas and religious practices if they hold any, even though different from others cannot be regarded as inferior and weird.

On the whole, teachers need to have a strong sense of religious and ethnic identity and they could comfortably do this if they possess cultural competency skills (Gay, 2000, Ladson-Billings, 2001). This has to be the case because pedagogy implies that the teachers have a relational knowledge with those they teach in terms of understanding them. In this way, RE teachers become better prepared to encourage learners to develop a sense of diversity and mechanisms for dealing with pluralism. The aim here is religious competence which is the overall aim of a multi-religious education curriculum whose focus is on the complete development of the individual. Heimbrock, Scheilke and Schreiner (2001) observe that religious competence is the ability:

To deal with one's own religiosity and its various dimensions embedded in the dynamics of life-history in a responsible way but also to appreciate the religious views of others. It includes active tolerance, competence to act in ethically oriented ways, readiness for dialogue on religious matters. It includes the ability to deal with religious pluralism and differences in a constructive way (p.9).

This understanding is based on the precept that religions are naturally not mutual exclusive while they occupy both the inclusive and exclusive spaces hence knowledge and understanding need to promote learners' awareness of religious plurality. In addition, there is the understanding that different adherents of religions hold different perspectives on various issues. The aim is not to harmonise the divergent religious perspectives but to understand them. In a multi-religious curriculum, respect is an important value because if it is not practiced, some of the students will feel left out, and embarrassed by situations that are not of their own making and this might breed anger in them and loss of self-assertiveness. As indicated earlier, teachers should be aware of diversity within society as well as being conscious of the culture of the different students especially in relation to how it shapes their activities, values, beliefs and behaviours outside the classroom (Liston & Zeichner, 1996). In a multi-religious curriculum, students become aware of their culturally conditioned assumptions which they may realise as not necessarily right or true. The exposure to a variety of religions in the religious education curriculum and especially issues on African Traditional Religion has made some students to realise that their realities are worth respecting and are a part of a whole in religious values.

### Tolerance in a multi-religious education curriculum

Religious tolerance consists of valuing the right of a person to hold beliefs or views that another may not subscribe to and it does not entail always agreeing with each other. Tolerance may also involve a sign of understanding someone while completely disagreeing with him or her. It is more about respecting each



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other's rights in relation to the right to be different regarding the practice of religion or none at all. Religious tolerance involves refraining from discriminating against those following a different religious path. That is why a successful educational process is characterised by promoting a sympathetic understanding of religions and specifically when a multi-religious curriculum takes the issue of acceptance as central.

Where tolerance is cultivated no particular religion has the right to impose its 'one size fits all' morality for everyone since that will certainly and inevitably result in resentment, hatred, anger and at worst violence. Homogenising beliefs would distort the role of religions and their distinctive identities. Dupuis (1990) makes a case drawing from catholic theology especially from Vatican II documents that acknowledge the universality of Jesus amongst the different religious traditions through the Holy Spirit and the validity of those traditions. However, in this context and amongst Christians, the particularity of the Christ-event is seen as having universal value, applicability and consequence in the whole universe. Viewed in that way, the Christian religion then naturally patronises other religious traditions and expects them to conform to its standards with the expectation of using these standards as a yardstick in terms of morality, beliefs and practices. Dupuis (1995) then concludes that in this way, other religious traditions become "pale and incomplete realisations of what Christianity embodies in its fullness" (p. 4).

Consequently, it would be out of tune for RE educational programmes to be assimilationist in nature especially in liberal democracies like Botswana. However, the nation-states like Botswana have been assimilationist in their approach as shown in the principal-minor ethnic groups dichotomy (Ditshwanelo, 2007, Jotia & Pansiri, 2013, Molosiwa, 2009). In addition, such nation-states have at times used religion for their own survival especially where they would overly lean towards a preferred religion due to their own vested interests and in doing so society has always been manipulated socially, economically and even politically. This has had adverse negative consequences since assimilation and enculturation within an education setting can shatter learners' self-image and a sense of identity especially in a situation whereby they are forced to interpret the world using the standards of a 'forced' culture or religion. In the context of Botswana, non-Tswana speaking ethnic groups have been effectively pushed into assimilating the culture of the dominant culture of the Tswana speaking ethnic groups (Ditshwanelo, 2007, Molosiwa, 2009, Pansiri, 2008, Nyati-Saleshando, 2012). Such a move has naturally led to lack of an inner sense of self-security and fulfilment by learners from 'minor' groups. Where there is emphasis of one religious tradition, the learners are likely to be forced to accept, assimilate and even identify with it and this then amounts to a form of forced conversion. After all, students are a captive audience. The previous religious education curriculum in Botswana expected all students to be Christians and those who were not pretended to be converts in order to avoid being discriminated against. The academic staff was expected to be religious and especially the RE teachers. This led to one group of the school community dominating the rest who were not practising Christians and there was lack of openness.

When people are open enough with each other, the existence and identity of others is affirmed. After all religious people have different perspectives with regard to what they hold as true. If the suggestion is that all religions possess some exclusive truth and are of more value than others, that in itself may obviously cause enormous problems and pursuance of exclusivist religious positions. It is natural that many adherents of religions usually hold that their religious traditions are superior and that in itself usually encourages hostility especially when they emphasise that other religions are not valid, untrue and inferior. Due to this realisation, Gross (1991) makes the claim that the worst offenders in this regard are monotheistic religions. The point is taken further by Heimbrock and colleagues (2001) who observe that the lives of religious people are exemplified by how they live their everyday lives, since they are usually expressed outwardly through their beliefs. This is the case because religion is one of the activities that occupy the human mind and that it largely influences the behaviours and attitudes of many especially its adherents. In Botswana, this is common-place through the Christian teachings that are fundamentalist and characterise several charismatic churches that have of late mushroomed the country.

### **Casting doubts on the success of teaching religious pluralism**

To some, free enquiry which has its roots in liberal thinking may trouble the unquestionable beliefs held by learners and their families. Coming from diverse backgrounds and expected to be tolerant is not easy at all. However, Grimmitt (1993) and Reiher (1993) share the view that for RE to be successful, especially of a multi-religious content, the school and religious communities both need to be involved in the teaching of religion as a way of assisting the young people “to establish their own individual identities within this context of pluralism” (Reiher, 1993, p. 27). The challenge is that the faith communities may not be adequately equipped with basic pedagogical skills to deal with educational matters since that is not their area of specialisation. In addition, the aims of the two may not be the same. For example, while education of a liberal nature may allow dissenting voices to be heard, religion which may be practised by parents may not since any such voice of discord may qualify a member for excommunication or isolation. After all, if faith communities could adequately handle such issues then educators would not be concerned with bringing the issues of tolerance into the classroom. Educators get involved because their conclusion is that the faith communities are unable to handle these issues adequately due to their biased aims as well as lack of content of the subject matter and pedagogical knowledge. Similarly, faith communities are suspicious of the intentions of secular educators; they doubt their adequacy and efficacy in dealing with religious matters mainly for fear that they could be instilling lack of religiosity in the young. Each party is suspicious of the other.

The problem lies in the fact that pluralism as articulated is not necessarily a religious concept but a secular one that has been influenced by liberal thinking which generally stresses autonomy, rationality, encouragement of enquiry and pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, and these are elements that may be missing in most religions with the exception of Buddhism. There is a contradiction herein relation to openness and tolerance in liberal democracies, for instance, in nation-states like the USA and other “major” liberal democracies especially in Europe which overly lean towards Christianity. For example, in the USA oaths by senior members of society when assuming office swear by the Bible, and in their dollar coin there are these words; “In God we believe”. In Botswana, all public events are usually preceded by a Christian prayer and at times even ended by one. In England, a law was passed in 1886 that required all members of parliament to take an oath on the Bible – a practice that has been there until now and which former colonies like Botswana also adopted. It has been, through time, been difficult for Western liberal democracies to shake off the influence of religion.

The objective of a multi-religious curriculum is exposure to multiple religions so that learners could better understand and appreciate the perspectives of the practitioners who might be their neighbours, friends or acquaintances and it is this exposure that exclusivist religions are uncomfortable with. In connection with this view, Grimmitt (1993) notes that education is largely value-laden and that some values may not be compatible with those of religions. Adherents of many religions and especially monotheistic ones have the fear that putting religions on an equal footing could degenerate into relativism that would lead to some of their beliefs and basic teachings being compromised and watered down while trying to accommodate diversity. Grimmitt (1993) asserts that adherents of several religions usually view treating of religions as possessing equal truth claims as a distortion of their own religious claims that they would normally profess as absolute and possessing exclusive truth. In Botswana, for example, the fear has always been that if students could be exposed to different religions that could herald religious conflicts, even though it has not been clearly established that a full-scale war started in classrooms.

Eck (2006) is critical of the concept of tolerance since it is at times deceptive because it may not involve what she describes as active engagement with people from different religions. According to her, active engagement entails engaging in an inter-religious or intra-religious dialogue with adherents who occupy the same physical space and this is more than mere tolerance. In addition, tolerance may not require one to know anything about the other party but one has to be contented that they are different; this would consequently result in stereotypes, fears and half-truths still remaining intact about others. If there is no active engagement with those who are different from us tolerance may contribute little to remove ignorance about one another (Eck, 2006). After all, pluralism does not call for individuals to relinquish their religious identities nor does it call for that which is common to all but instead it acknowledges the deepest differences within society. Gross (1991) takes the point further by making the observation that tolerance is the basis of religious pluralism though on its own it is not adequate and that is why it is imperative to move beyond tolerance by exploring and investigating other viewpoints empathetically in



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order to develop a transformative process. It is therefore important for teachers to possess certain skills such as cultural and religious competencies when teaching pluralism within the context of a multi-religious curriculum.

### **Teachers' possible skills and activities in teaching pluralism**

It seems that just knowing about and understanding concepts and issues within a religion may not necessarily help change the learners' behaviour or attitude. There has to be some specific skills that need to be put in place in order to realise this ideal and this can be done when deliberate attempts are made to understand how tolerance through pluralism can be internalised through the study of RE. In supporting effective and positive classroom environment students need to feel respected, cared for, believed in because they are precious, while also taking into consideration their emotional, social and physical needs. What goes inside the classrooms is to a large extent influenced by what takes place outside of them, because there are social conditions that affect and influence schooling (Liston & Zeichner, 1996, Molosiwa, 2009). It is against this background that Liston and Zeichner (1996) argue that teacher preparation should take that reality into consideration. That is why, "future teachers cannot, on their own, solve the many societal issues confronting the schools, but they should certainly know what those issues are, have a sense of their beliefs about those issues, and understand the many ways in which those issues will come alive within their school walls" (pp. x-xi). That is why Liston and Zeichner, (1996), further suggest that it is necessary for both the students and the teachers to "engage in social and political conditions of schooling" (p. xi).

Brown and Stephens (1996) make suggest that religious pluralism can be taught by engaging learners in discussions that entail logical criticism across all religious traditions as a way of seeking insights and understanding. A deliberate attempt has to be made in understanding each religious tradition as practised by its adherents instead of comparing one religion with another. Furthermore, young people could be exposed to multi-cultural literature so that they may appreciate the fact that various cultural groups have made unique and significant contributions to civilisation and hence the need to respect all cultures. In this way, learners would then be equipped with tools of judgement that would lead to informed choices and decisions as they cover a variety of moral and social issues such as tolerance, fairness, equality and respect in relation to other people's beliefs including those from minority groups (Ditshwanelo, 2007, Hitchcock & Holm, 1985, Nyati-Saleshando, 2012). From a practical point of view, students could visit various sites as well as invite religious practitioners to talk about their beliefs and practices. As part of the dialogue that is anchored on differences, the teacher may also establish a 'peace table' where learners could learn how to 'fight fair' and whereby conflict and its solutions are acted out and portrayed in a more natural and realistic manner. In addition, various issues that are portrayed by the media need to be interrogated so that learners could begin to acknowledge how they have partly been shaped by the media. Similarly, they would be expected to question the inherent biases influenced by the media in the process. However, there is still the need to cultivate a sense of sensitivity while engaging in these classroom activities lest as Potter (1999) cautions there will be the risk of "violating or trivialising the sacred characters that believers' attribute to certain religious practices" (p. 125).

The present textbooks and any other teaching and learning materials used in educational institutions could be examined in order to establish if they promote pluralism. In their daily teaching, teachers could develop cross-curricular themes from related areas such as Moral/Values Education, Social Studies, Cultural Studies and History. Though taxing in their preparation, the expected teachers' activities and skills are likely to lead to effective classroom interaction that could promote pluralism since there would be an acknowledgement of differences among students as well as celebrating the uniqueness of everyone in the class. The discussions alluded to should accommodate the articulation of feelings, including biases learned at home and in the street.

### **Conclusion**

With an open multi-religious curriculum, learners tend to be empowered since they understand the significance of existing differences hence act as agents of change. Heightening the learners' awareness in the diversity of religions helps in the possibilities for change. Similarly, teachers need to possess skills that would assist learners to become empowered in relation to internalising religious and other forms of

human differences. An understanding of religious pluralism could help learners to live respectful and peaceful lives with those who differ with them in relation to faith or lack of it. Thus, the main aim of a multi-religious education curriculum is to encourage a spirit of co-existence where mutual-trust, respect and tolerance would be based on an understanding of those whom one shares the physical space with. Understood in this way, pluralism in a multi-religious education curriculum is an imperative since in its efforts it attempts to deliver a form of education which is accessible to all learners irrespective of religious, ethnic, cultural, economic and social background. Lastly, exposure to a multi-religious curriculum has the potential to prepare the young to live in a national as well as a globalised world.

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## Learning From 'Good' Practice: What Could African [Universities] Possibly Learn From The Bologna Process And European Students' Mobility?

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**Abstract:** In June 1999, European Ministers of Education and representatives of higher education gathered in Bologna, Italy, and agreed to work towards achieving the European Higher Education Area through a package of structural reforms. This move heralded the Bologna Process (BP). Although the BP has been criticized variously across Europe and elsewhere, however, it appears to be the most profound change encountered by European Higher Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The Bologna Process has inspired a number of moves towards restructuring of higher education globally, notably in the United States, Canada, Latin America, Southeast Asia, the Caribbean, and the Arab countries. In this paper, the author assesses developments within Africa's higher education in order to establish in what ways African Higher Education reform initiatives have responded to various global challenges posed by the emergence of the BP. The paper specifically addresses four key questions: i) Has Africa achieved the African Higher Education Area, AHEA? ii) What transparency tools are available within AHEA to enable the interpretation and conversion of academic work from one African country to academic work in another? iii) What mobility frameworks relative to the terms of the BP, are there for the African students? And finally, how does African Union (AU) governments' commitment to higher education reforms differ from those of the European Union governments? The author emphasises that learning from good practice is a step in the right direction, and therefore concludes that Africa could still maintain her Africanness while adopting the good practices of other regions such as that offered through the Bologna Process. Doing so, would enable Africa to forge a compatible approach towards the positioning of Africa's higher education to compete with other education systems at the global arena.

**Key word:** Bologna Process; Transparency tools; Students' mobility; Good practice; African Higher Education Reforms

### Introduction: Emergence of the Bologna Process (BP) 1998 – 2009

In June 1999, European Ministers of Education and representatives of higher education gathered in Bologna, Italy, and agreed to work towards achieving the European Higher Education Area through a package of structural reforms (Bishop, 2006; Lunt, 2005; Zgaga, 2003). This move heralded what is now popularly called the Bologna Process (BP). Although the BP has been criticized variously across Europe and elsewhere, however, it appears to be the most profound change encountered by European Higher Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and portends enormous implications for the rest of the globe (Yavaprabhas, 2009; Yavaprabhas & Nopraenue, 2008). It equally "set in motion the most significant European cooperation process ever to take place in the field of higher education" (EACEA, 2012, p. 15). Despite both internal and external criticisms (Visser, 2007; Yavaprabhas, 2009) Europe appeared determined, and has forged progressively ahead from Sorbonne in 1998 to Leuven in 2009 to work to position European higher education to be responsive to the needs of an ever-changing continent. Notably, what Europe hopes to achieve through the BP is "a single European Higher Education Area (EHEA) which enables increasing mobility of students and graduates by way of reaching more compatible degrees" (Visser, 2007, p. 4).

That the Bologna is succeeding is no longer in doubt. It is obvious that the global attention, which the BP has received in the past years, is a success grade. The Bologna Process has among other things instigated reactions from across very many regions of the world, for example, in the United States, Canada, Africa, and Southeast Asia (AUCC, 2008; AU, 2007; Adam, 2009; Labi, 2009). Whereas the BP has truly instigated genuine initiatives in some non-EU countries as the US, Australia, and Canada, however, with the exception of South Africa, Mauritius and Tanzania (Balzer & Martens, 2004; CoA, 2008; Okeke, 2011) it remains very doubtful how Africa as a continent is responding to the ostensible challenges posed by the emergence of the BP. Instead African scholars (Teferra, 2005; Yavaprabhas, 2008; Khelfaoui, 2009; Obasi

& Olutayo, 2009; Okeke, 2010f) have busied themselves critiquing what the BP has and has not achieved for Europe. Nonetheless, an argument, which this writer has sustained in numerous previous publications (see [author name], 2009b, 2009d; 2010c, 2010f; 2011) notes that in the context of the inherited Western-type education, African higher education institutions and governments cannot afford to be inattentive to developments within European education. Doing so, would inevitably result to both academic and other developmental marginalization of Africa as a whole.

It is important to note that the BP does not offer to any country, region or continent any prescriptive one-jacket-fits-all approach. Instead developments within the confines of the BP are Europe's own internal reactions to global changes brought about by the advent of Globalization. This Euro-reaction through educational adjustments to global changes has had obvious impacts on educational developments globally too. In spite of obvious internal challenges facing the Bologna Process (Barros & Garcia, 2007; Dunkel, 2009; Luichies, 2010; Witte, 2012), yet, the BP appears to offer to the rest of the globe an imperative synergy necessary for intra-continental educational development for economic advancement. In table 1 below, we see the progress that has been made since 1998 through some progressive and concerted efforts by European Ministers of Education and the European Commission.

Challenges of visa and work permits, pension systems and recognition

**Table 1: Showing progressively well-concerted efforts by Europe towards achieving the Bologna Process-European higher education area [EHEA]**

1998 SORBONNE DECLARATION	1999 BOLOGNA DECLARATION	2001 PRAGUE COMMUNIQUE	2003 BERLIN COMMUNIQUE	2005 BERGEN COMMUNIQUE	2007 LONDON COMMUNIQUE	2009 LEUVEN COMMUNIQUE
<b>Mobility of students and teachers</b>	Mobility of students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff	Social dimension of mobility	Portability of loans and grants. Improvement of mobility data	Attention to visa and work permits	Challenges of visa and work permits, pension systems and recognition	Benchmark of 20% by 2020 for student mobility
<b>A common two-cycle degree system</b>	Easily readable and comparable degrees	Fair recognition Development of recognized joint degrees	Inclusion of doctoral level as third cycle	QF-EHEA adopted. National Qualifications Frameworks launched	National Qualifications Framework by 2010	National Qualification Frameworks by 2012
		Social dimension	Equal access	Reinforcement of the social dimension	Commitment to produce national action plans with effective monitoring	National targets for the social dimension to be measured by 2020
		Lifelong learning	Alignment of national LLL policies. Recognition of prior learning (RPL)	Flexible learning paths in higher education	Role of higher education in LLL. Partnership to improve employability	LLL as a public responsibility requiring strong partnerships. Call to work on employability
<b>Use of credits</b>	A system of credits (ECTS)	ECTS and Diploma Supplement (DS)	ECTS for credit accumulation		Need for coherent use of tools and recognition practices	Continuing implementation of Bologna tools
	European cooperation in quality assurance	Cooperation between quality assurance and recognition professionals	Quality assurance at institutional, national and European level	European Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance adopted	Creation of the European Quality Assurance (EQAR)	Quality as an overarching focus for EHEA
<b>Europe of knowledge</b>	European dimensions in higher education	Attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area	Links between higher education and research areas	International cooperation on the basis of values and sustainable development	Strategy to improve the global dimension of the Bologna process adopted	Enhance global policy dialogue through Bologna policy fora

One striking quality of the Bologna Process; perhaps a quality that has ensured its relative success is the intergovernmental approach it adopted. For instance, although the BP was initiated by the European



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Ministers of Education, the BP operational mechanisms are interwoven with the EU policies and processes (Witte, 2012). In the next section of this paper, we shall observe what the BP has achieved for Europe.

### **What the Bologna Process has achieved for European higher education?**

It must be noted that those with the discernment to twig only through what is bad, will see absolutely nothing when what to see is only good. Certainly, we must agree that the emergence of the Bologna process has changed the face of European higher education in an unprecedented manner. One way to measure the impact of the BP is in the context of the global reawakening, which it has generated. The BP dynamism has enlivened the imperativeness of national, regional and continental dialogues in many countries. It has equally succeeded in forcing countries like USA, Canada as well as Australia with little or no history of learning from the outside to begin to pay attention to developments within European higher education (AUCC, 2008; CoA, 2008). Particularly, the Canadian education authorities acknowledges that considering the force with which the BP is impacting globally, it becomes appropriate at this time to respond to this emerging European initiative by at once seizing its related opportunities and facing its challenges (AUCC, 2009; 2009). At present the BP, which took off through the initiative “in 1998 by the four signatories of the Sorbonne declaration: France, Italy, Germany and the United Kingdom” (Khelfaoui, 2009, p. 21), today has 47 European member states all working towards the unification of European higher education. Most importantly too, it must be sincerely acknowledged as EACEA (2012, p. 7) has done that “the scale of a project that, on the basis of voluntary cooperation, agrees and implements common objectives for the higher education systems of 47 countries is unprecedented”. Europe deserves to be applauded for the developments the Bologna Process has brought into the European higher education, some of which include the following.

#### *Enhanced access into higher education:*

Going back to table 1 above it would be observed that the Prague Communiqué of 2001 recognised the importance of the social dimension of education. Social dimension of the BP acknowledges the diversity that is within the European population that may impact access to higher education. It intends to extricate all obstacles against equitable access to higher education but also those against successful completion amongst both male and female student populations (Balzer & Martens, 2004; Dunkel, 2009; EACEA, 2012). Enhanced access to higher education involves issues of admission criteria, establishment of alternative pathways to higher education and the recognition of learning outside the formal learning. According to EACEA (2012, p. 9), “in terms of access into higher education, enrolments in higher education increased between 1999 and 2009, although this development was not uniform”. In addition, there were also “other measures devoted to widening participation and providing support include the provision of short cycle degrees, active support for students in high schools to enable them to make informed choices about entering higher education, and support for students in higher education” (European Union, 2008, p. 163). Observations were also made that during the said period the emergence of the BP has resulted in tremendous increases in enrolment by gender. For instance, during the period 1999 and 2009, more women enrolled into higher education in Europe (TOBHE, 2009; EACEA, 2012). Although challenges in terms of access still persist, however, the increase in enrolment patterns for both genders indicates an enhanced access to higher education within the Bologna Process boundaries. If current initiatives in Africa towards the African higher education area, are not leading to enhanced access for African students, then the above lesson is something Africa has to emulate.

#### *Establishment of instruments to facilitate study progression:*

One of the objectives of the Bologna process is the establishment of a credible mechanism for transparency within the emerging unified European higher education system to enable the achieving of convergence (Barros & García, 2007; Adam, 2009; Dunkel, 2009; EACEA, 2012). We can observe from table 1 above that right from the Sorbonne Declaration of 1998 to Prague Communiqué of 2001, the establishment of a trust building tool in the form of credit system was paramount. Consequently, the Bologna process has established three very important and currently working mechanisms of trust namely: a three-cycle system [Bachelor, Masters and Doctoral], the European Credit Transfer System, and the Tuning approach. A credit system “reflects the total workload required to achieve the objectives of a programme, which are specified in terms of the learning outcomes and competencies to be acquired” (Woldetensae, 2011, p. 7). The idea of the credit system is to facilitate comparability, which in turn would

enhance mobility across borders. On the other hand, the Tuning approach according to (Woldetensae, 2011) reflects a process of harmonisation of higher education programmes by defining learning outcomes of the curricula by subject area. It is observed that the Bologna Process has made tremendous achievements in this regard in that currently about 95% of participatory universities have adopted the three-cycle programme structure, while 90% of these universities are already using the European Credit Transfer System, ECTS (Luichies, 2010). This unification of the programme structure within European universities appears to be one of the major achievements of the BP because according to the EACEA (2012, p. 10) the “implementation of the ECTS as a transfer and accumulation system is almost completed” within universities in signatory countries.

*Progressively enhancing students' mobility:*

Available data shows that the emergence of the BP structure has laid a very solid foundation for a progressively enhanced students' mobility across the Bologna countries. For instance, the EACEA (2012) notes that although this target has not been reached, however, countries within the Bologna agreement have succeeded in bringing about some levels of methodological improvements to enable students' mobility especially in the area of credit transfer. It must be noted that countries within the BP agreement are currently undertaking various measures to improve students' mobility within the EHEA. These measures include:

- i. The establishment of European level programmes aimed at unifying existing degrees and creating new ones in order to facilitate euro-students' mobility across the EHEA. Such programmes include the Erasmus, the Tempus, the Central European Exchange Programme for University Studies (CEEPUS) and the Baltic Programme NordPlus (Adam, 2009; Dunkel, 2009; EACEA, 2012).
- ii. There are also mobility enhancement strategies and programmes, which are developed by various European countries at the national levels targeting students from specific geographic regions of the world. This information is particularly important for skeptics (Obasi & Olutayo, 2009; Hoosen, Butcher & Njenga, 2009; Khelfaoui, 2009; Okeke, 2010c) who have suggested that the Bologna Process is designed to cause further brain-drain within lesser developed countries.

There are obvious challenges to students' mobility that are currently being addressed by the BP member countries. Some literatures (Barros & Garcia, 2007; Adam, 2009; Okeke, 2010f; EACEA, 2012; Witte, 2012) mention some of these challenges to include the following:

- i. Lack of funding
- ii. Lack of support for international students
- iii. Lack of emotional support particularly among those students having to separate from their families over a long period of time
- iv. Lack of information
- v. Dissonances between foreign students' and host country's national curriculum
- vi. Language barriers

Despite these challenges, some progress is still being reported as shown above, and generally Bologna activities have presented to Africa the urgency for actions at continental level if Africa is to positively remain relevant in global matters. EACEA (2012, p. 165) suggests that “national level strategy can serve as an impetus and support to institutional strategies”. As nations compete for students' generated revenues, it is important for countries wishing to buy into the Bologna strategies to emulate such approach. This is because the competitive nature of higher education revenues warrants that countries must develop initiatives and strategies to attract the global students' population.

**African responses to the Bologna initiatives**

The Association of African Universities (AAU) in 2007 initiated a proposal for the launching of what it referred to as the African Higher Education Area (AHEA) (African Union 2008a; Yavaprabhas 2009). This supposedly continent-wide initiative to oversee the affairs of Africa's higher education institutions in terms of policies and practices was in response to various changes taking place at the global arena. One of these changes was the emergence of the Bologna Process (BP). There is also the need for Africa to respond collectively to the challenges, which various elements of globalisation such as the General Agreement of Trade in Service (GATS) commitments in higher education pose to Africa's HEIs. Of course as noted by the Ministers of Education of the African Union “globalisation and a competitive

world economic order characterised by rapid knowledge generation and technological innovation constitutes for Africa, in equal measure of threat of marginalization as well as opportunities for benefiting and catching up" (African Union, 2008b: 6). It is common practice for scholars to heap blames for Africa's developmental woes to the experiences of Imperialism. Although it may amount to great injustice neglecting such experiences within Africa's higher education discourse, however, many years after most African nations separated from colonial rules it becomes continuously difficult to cling-on to such discourse. Perhaps, time has emerged for African scholars and leaders to get more serious towards finding solutions to the very many challenges facing African education today.

In addressing Africa's response to the Bologna initiatives four clear questions emerged in this paper. However, it is important to note that the questions do not function as parameters for judging Africa's approaches to continental matters. Issues raised in the questions serve to critically direct analysis and discussions in this paper. The questions include the following: i) Is Africa achieving the African Higher Education Area, AHEA? ii) What transparency tools are available within AHEA to enable the interpretation and conversion of academic work from one African country to academic work in another? iii) What mobility frameworks relative to the terms of the BP, are there for the African students? And finally, how does African Union (AU) governments' commitment to higher education reforms differ from those of the European Union governments? Higher education in Africa is faced with huge and complex challenges including:

- i. The disparities between tuition fees paid by both the domestic and international African students within African universities (Okeke, 2011)
- ii. The proliferation of local and foreign higher education institutions in Africa (Okeke, 2010c; 2011)
- iii. Gender disparities and mismatch between the acquired and the required skills among graduates (Hoosen, Butcher and Njenga 2009)
- iv. Imbalances in terms of the number of students studying sciences and humanities, and rigid admission criteria
- v. Lack of modalities for credit transfers between universities and other post-secondary institutions; lack of recognition of prior learning; brain-drain; and the threat posed by HIV/AIDS (African Union, 2007; Yavaprabhas, 2008; Hoosen, Butcher and Njenga 2009)
- vi. Funding, disparity in enrolment, infrastructure, governance, graduate employability, capacity-building, equity access and quality assurance (Teferra, 2005)
- vii. There is also the need for Africa to respond collectively to the challenges, which various elements of globalization such as the WTO/GATS commitments in higher education pose to Africa's higher education
- viii. African governments' continuous lack of sincere commitment towards the development of African higher education.

With these challenges in mind, it is noted that various attempts have been made [while some are still on-going] by the joint committees of Ministers of Education of the African Union, officials from higher education institutions in Africa, as well as other stakeholders including non-governmental organisations within and outside the continent, toward achieving some sort of harmonisation frameworks for African higher education. The earliest of such efforts was in 1981 at Arusha, Tanzania famously referred to as the Arusha Convention, "which was a UNESCO initiative for promoting continental cooperation through the academic mobility of lecturers and students" (Hoosen, Butcher & Njenga 2009, p. 10). Although this Convention has been revised and improved (AU, 2007; Woldetensae, 2011), one common feature of the agreement, as with the first, was that it has continuously lacked any form of legally binding force to commit the signatories to the agreed framework. For instance, although the Arusha Convention was a legal framework agreement that gave general guidelines, which were aimed to facilitate some continental-level cooperation (AU, 2008a), however, such agreement was never a binding political agenda. As a result, no Member-state was held accountable for failure to implement any section of the Convention as no Member-state was bound to implement. That trend has continued even with the revised and improved version of the Convention.

Numerous other African initiatives have taken place ever since through gatherings such as the Second Meeting of the Committee on Sustainable Development, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 26 – 29 November,

2001 (UN 2001); Regional Convention on Recognition of Studies and Degrees of Higher Education in Africa (Shabani 2004); Accra Declaration on GATS and the Internationalisation of higher education in Africa (CHE 2004); Harmonization of Higher Education programme in Africa, which was the main focus of the Conference of Ministers of Education of the African Union (COMEDAF+) held between 29 and 31 May, 2007 at Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (AU 2007); Validation meeting for African Quality Rating Mechanism and Harmonization Strategy for Higher Education held 25th to 27th March, 2008 at Novotel Accra, Ghana (AU 2008a); Conference of Ministers of Education of the African Union (COMEDAF III) 18th to 20th November 2008, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, where the main agenda was the establishment of the pan-African university (AU 2008b); The AU/NEPAD African Action Plan known as the 10th Africa Partnership Forum (APF), which took place in Tokyo, Japan 7 – 8 April, 2008 (AU/NEPAD 2008); The Dodowa Declaration on African Quality Assurance Network held 15th – 17th April, 2009 at Dodowa, Ghana (AAU 2009); and the Strategic orientations for higher education and research in Africa (UNESCO/WCHE, 2009).

There was also the 1st Pan-African Conference on Curriculum, Literacy and Book sector development, which was the main focus of the Conference of Ministers of Education of the African Union (COMEDAF IV) Steering Committee 24th – 25th September 2009, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (AU 2009). Although the proposal for the establishment of a Pan African University (PAU) by the COMEDAF III was a step in the right direction, however, the focus of the initiative only on science, technology and engineering appears to weaken the strength of the initiators to truly address Africa's dire need for the revitalization of knowledge. Secondly, the PAU initiative appears bourgeois and elitist, and as such failed even at the proposal stage to demonstrate how it could cater for the needs of the very many remote-dwelling Africans. There have also been some recorded initiatives at the regional and national levels in few countries within the African continent worthy of mention in this paper. Notable examples are the establishment of National Qualifications and Quality Assurance Frameworks in South Africa, Mauritius as well as in Tanzania (Woldetensae, 2011).

The East African Community (EAC) established in 1999 by Kenya, Tanzania, Burundi and Rwanda to oversee the harmonisation of their own higher education systems (TOBHE, 2009). It is noteworthy that one of the achievements of the EAC is the launching of a common higher education curriculum in the medical, technical and agricultural areas for institutions within the EAC. High level of integration progress has also been reported among the French-speaking countries on the Maghreb region notably Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. These countries have clearly adopted a Bologna Process approach to integration by agreeing to realign their national universities programmes in line with the Bachelor-Masters-Doctoral structure. Put together,

*much of the recent collaboration between these nations has been undertaken with a view towards developing a Euro-Mediterranean Higher Education and Research Area. A founding document for the proposed education area, known as Catania Declaration, was signed in January by Euro-Mediterranean countries, as well as Egypt and Jordan (TOBHE, 2009, p. 2)*

The West African Monetary and Economic Union (WAMEU) made up of fifteen member nations has also responded to some of the changes brought about by the Bologna Declaration (Yavaprabhas, 2008; African Union, 2009; TOBHE, 2009; Okeke, 2011; Woldetensae, 2011). Recently for instance, the WAMEU member-states adopted a resolution to facilitate academic level mobility among citizens of the WAMEU nations by easing immigration and admissions restrictions for prospective students. There are many more instances of both national and regional levels initiatives that space have not allowed for mention here.

Notwithstanding these initiatives however, there have been some general weaknesses that continuously hunt efforts towards integration in Africa's higher education whether at the national, regional or continental levels, which include but not limited to the following:

- i. Lack of visionary leadership within higher education institutions and education departments in Africa
- ii. Lack of visionary political institutions of governance on the continent to directly impact social development



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- iii. Abject dissonances within the visions and missions of various higher education institutions in Africa
  - iv. Non-commitment to true internationalisation of higher education programmes by many African higher education institutions
  - v. Highly uncompromising higher education ideologies among African educators and institutions in Africa
  - vi. Corrupt practices within some education institutions on the continent that result in the production of the wrong caliber of professionals to take charge of affairs of education at ideological levels
  - vii. Disgraceful social instabilities resulting mostly from hatred and unnecessary wars within the continent
  - viii. High level economic disparities and poverty, among individuals and nations on the continent
  - ix. Indifference attitudes to the necessities for change among some prominent scholars and institutions in Africa
  - x. The general lack of genuine and sincere commitment from African heads of governments and the African Union

Thus in responding to the earlier questions raised above, it is obvious that Africa is as yet to establish any credible framework as observed in table 1 towards achieving continentally acceptable higher education area as with the BP. It is still very difficult to measure whether any achievement has been made in the area of transparency tools within the proposed African Higher Education Area (AHEA) to enable cross-country interpretation and conversion of academic work of African university students. It is true that few universities mainly within South Africa have established some prior learning recognition frameworks, but that is just a country-wide initiative, which is not without flaws. There is currently no genuine mobility framework relative to the terms of the BP that exist for African students anywhere on the continent. Although ‘internationalisation’ is nowadays frequently used by many African universities, yet, it is noted that

*whereas across the Atlantic, say in Europe, the phrase international student is used to differentiate between the student from the EU country and others from outside of the EU...the African conception of the phrase appears to be different. A student who is classified an international student within an African university is one who does not hold any of the elements of citizenship as defined by the immigration law of the country where the university is located. Such is not peculiar to any one country or region within Africa but appears to be an unquestioned practice throughout the entire continent (Okeke, 2011, p. 439)*

It is not the intention of this author to politicize the aim that he has set to achieve in this paper. However, it appears unavoidable to comment on African Union (AU) governments’ lack of genuine commitment to higher education reforms in Africa. Most African countries appear to be currently preoccupied with all manner of evils against its citizens ranging from coups, election and boundary disputes, political killings and other human disappearances, corruption, kidnappings to open battle conflicts and wars. There is a genuine feeling of lack of commitment to better living standards for Africans by their leadership. Such has been a major reason why majority of African leadership do not really border about the welfare of the citizens they have vowed through oath to protect. Most importantly, in comparison to the quality of the European Union Ministers and Secretaries of Education, it is arguable whether some of their African counterparts do really possess the requisite attributes necessary for the task of educational advancement when their experiences are required at the level of deliberations. The above weaknesses have therefore made imperative the fact that Africans must look towards the Bologna Process for some lessons. Perhaps that appears to be what the Ministers of Education of the AU meant when they suggested that “it is advisable for African Union to pursue its own African harmonization process, drawing on the lessons learned in Europe” (African Union, 2008a, p. 56). The final part directs attention to these lessons.

### **Some lessons Africa should learn from the developments within the Bologna Process**

*BP portends a progressively unifying and genuine process of continental academic advancement:*

The BP operations resonate through finding solutions to variety of acknowledged and well-defined European-based problems. It has to be agreed (as shown in table 1) that in spite of its shortfalls, the processes, which started in Sorbonne in 1998 down to Leuven in 2009 have been genuine, progressive

and unifying. Particularly, the Bologna Process has transformed the face of European higher education because a solid foundation is laid for a European higher education, which is designed to serve the ever-changing variety of European societies' needs. It is worthy to note that all the 47 participating nations are committed to the Bologna declaration leading to various modifications in the structures of higher education in European universities (EACEA, 2012). Most importantly, it is the BP, which has led to EU continent-wide identification of a number of issues that have informed the social dimension of the European higher education. A further look at the table above will reveal that during the 2009 Leuven communiqué a new target date was established in what was referred to as the *Vision 2020*. European nations and institutions do not have to wait for a legally-binding agreement (argued as major weakness of the Arusha Declaration) to adopt the principles of the BP. Instead, the relative success that the BP has recorded is made possible by the sincere and genuine sense of commitment by European nations to see to it that European higher education is responsively capacitated towards solving societal needs irrespective of the consequences of this to other continents. That is a good lesson Africa must learn.

*Challenges within global higher educations are made common by the flood of Globalisation:*

The Bologna Process (BP) represents "an attempt to coordinate responses to major challenges facing European Higher Education through a package of structural reforms" (Lunt, 2005, p. 89). Most of these challenges are brought about by the emergence of globalisation, thus making imperative the need for excellence, cooperation and competition through a well-coordinated European level higher education. According to Teferra (2005, p. 4) "most of the problems the European Area grapples with, are also everyday realities in Africa, which necessitates the need to draw valuable and relevant lessons" from the BP. Some critiques (Khelfaoui, 2009; Obasi & Olutayo, 2009; Teferra, 2005) may argue that Africa's share of these challenges may differ in magnitude with those of Europe. However, what is important (which is worth learning) is the nature and manner with which Europe is responding to the challenges facing European higher education. European nations and institutions have responded jointly through the BP to challenges, which they have unanimously understood as common European problems. If African higher education is to be adequately and responsively positioned towards solving Africa's societal needs the BP is a lesson, which Africa must not turn a blind eye to. That is why Teferra (2005, p. 4) argues that "common regional responses to growing common challenges, as in Bologna, remain the obvious alternative for Africa".

*'In unity we stand' as a BP lesson worth learning-Ubuntu re-enacted:*

As with most African nations, the capacity of some European countries to address the numerous challenges of nation-building is very weak. However, in the spirit of the larger EU Commission the BP offers a united opportunity to some weaker EU member-states to benefit from a well-coordinated and genuine continental academic advancement. Although this opportunity is not without blemishes as Luichies (2010) has rightly noted however, evidence as we have already discussed in this paper shows that the BP has succeeded in bringing about some levels of methodological improvements to enable students' mobility especially in the area of credit transfer (EACEA, 2012). This united approach to problem-solving appears to be informed by the imperativeness of globalisation, which extends most national problems across international boundaries such that the internal problems of a particular nation implicate the internal security of another. This again is a lesson that Africa must learn, more so because most African countries are experiencing profound difficulties in their individual abilities to tackle various challenges particularly posed by the rampaging force of globalisation.

The above point appears plausible argues Teferra (2005) because the ability of most African countries to deal with national problems let alone regional ones, is currently very limited. It becomes necessary therefore for African nation-states to borrow a leaf from Europe's BP formulae; doing so would be in the spirit of *Ubuntu*, which invigorates that spirit of love and care. Africans must show genuine interest in the affairs of fellow Africans as a starting point, meaning that

*everyone must be carried along; that justice must prevail; that communalism must prevail over individualism without which the spirit of such philosophy [as Africanisation] stands defeated. It upholds the spirit of Ubuntu [in South Africa, a Zulu word and an Eastern Nigeria synonym of Igwebuikwe, an Igbo word], which implies humanity, unity, and togetherness of Africa's peoples (Okeke, 2011, p. 433).*



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African peoples can draw genuinely from the spirit of *Ubuntu* because it encompasses some basic principles of humanness, caring, sharing, respect, and compassion (Broodryk, 2006; Okeke, 2011), in confronting the very many educational and other social problems besetting academic advancement on the continent. Adopting a sincere and pragmatic continental approach to common African problems as demonstrated by the Europeans (as always) through the BP, would enable Africans to develop constructive strategies to deal with Africa's abilities to confront global matters.

*A lesson from BP's transparency tools – the credit transfer system and tuning approach:*

Although the BP has been severally criticized by many for what it has and has not achieved (e.g. Adam, 2009; Dunkel, 2009; Khelifaoui, 2009; Labi, 2009; Obasi & Olutayo, 2009), however, it must be noted that the Bologna Process is Europe's direct reaction for common European answer to common European problems (Teferra, 2005). Part of this reaction is the realization of the need to establish a compatible academic system leading to the adoption of the *credit transfer system* and the *tuning approach*. Known as the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), this is one of the transparency tools established to enable the comparability and compatibility of programmes within European higher education (Woldetensae, 2011). Within the EU, the mechanism was aimed to facilitate the mobility of EU students; it was also adopted as a quality assurance mechanism against which international students from non-EU countries' qualifications are being assessed. The ECTS allows for the description and quantification of programmes and certificates thereby enabling the obstacles associated with the mobility of European students in particular being progressively eased. On the other hand, a tuning approach, "is the process of harmonizing higher education programmes by defining learning outcomes of the curricula by subject area" (Woldetensae, 2011, p. 7). Tuning aims to identify reference points for generic and subject-specific knowledge and skills that allows for agreed learning outcomes to be established. Two major advantages of this approach are, first, it serves as a reference against which various European curricula would be measured, and second, it is meant to facilitate programmes transfer by EU students between institutions.

Although some institutions in South Africa such as the South African Qualification Agency (SAQA) and the Council on Higher Education (CHE) play related roles, while various universities have adopted the recognition of prior learning policies, however, these are nothing but internal quality assurance control mechanisms that are operationalized only in South Africa. Notwithstanding, these attempts do not represent any continental approach to continental educational problems. While various harmonisation and quality assurance attempts are on-going, both the Credit Transfer System and the Tuning Approach could provide for Africa, a unified continental approach to common continental problem. Adopting both tools could offer important potential towards facilitating African students' mobility and for the harmonisation of higher education programmes in Africa. It is imperative for a common mechanism to be developed at a continental level that would allow for common comparison of programmes and qualifications across institutions in Africa.

*The European Commission approach to the Bologna Process as exemplary lesson:*

In addressing the question on how the African Union (AU) governments' commitment to higher education reforms may differ from those of the European Union, an institutionalist approach becomes imperative (Rhodes, 1997; Reinalda & Verbeek, 1998; Balzer & Martens, 2004). Balzer and Martens (2004, p. 7) discern three forms of governance namely "governance by coordination from exclusion to inclusion; by opinion formation from redefining the Commission to adding new targets; and by instruments through financial capacities" that have enabled the European Commission to effectively participate in the BP initiatives. While space does not allow for a detailed analysis of these forms of EU-BP collaboration, Balzer & Martens (2004) note that there are two lessons, which the approach offers to other regions hoping to draw credence from the BP. The authors noted that governance by coordination and opinion formation appear to be highly and surprisingly influential especially when by virtue of its authority the EU could have invoked some legal instrument (something proponents of the Arusha had wished to see) to enforce the BP principles on member-nations. It is therefore argued in this paper that it was wrong to suggest that the Arusha Declaration has failed to achieve its objectives because the agreement was not a legally-binding document.

A second lesson that the AU member-states must learn from the EU-BP partnership is EU's ability to successfully incorporate the BP initiatives into its institutional structures in spite of the fact that the Commission was excluded from the original agenda (Barros & Garcia, 2007; Reinalda & Verbeek, 1998; Adam, 2009). It must be noted that earlier before the Prague Communiqué of 2001, which formally invited the EU to the Bologna Process, the Commission was completely excluded by the initiators of the Process. Currently, the EU serves as vehicle on which the BP operations revolve. Moreover, the EU has also successfully incorporated the affairs of the BP as integral to its programme of activities (Balzer & Martens, 2004). The African Union (AU) must undertake a study of the EU approaches to the BP in order to understand how its supportive governance and educational policies have enabled the BP to progressively achieve its objectives. In addition to that the AU must have the right caliber of personnel; those with the attributes to move African education forward, within its ranks if it intends to achieve this great task. However, within an inherent legacy in which some members of the AU leadership and their cohorts emerge through incredulous processes, it becomes worrisome whether the AU ranks is capable of producing the right caliber of personnel to enable it perform such role as with the EU.

### Concluding remarks

The objective of this paper was to explore some of the BP lessons that could inform continental-level education policy initiatives and developments capable of responding to the needs of the African societies. The Bologna Process was adopted for this analysis not because the author thought that the BP is flawless; far from it. The rationale for mirroring the BP in this paper is because it represents Europe's most profound attempt at providing purely European solutions to problems besetting Europe's higher education. A second reason for adopting the BP in the analysis presented in this paper is because of the fundamental impact the BP has had not only on Europe's higher education systems, but also on the higher education systems across its continental borders. The BP has had far-reaching implications for the education systems in Australia, Canada, the United States, and Southeast Asia that Africa can no longer afford to turn a blind eye or comfort itself with intellectual critiquing. Discoursing on what the BP has or has not achieved should no longer be the priority of African scholars; for the BP has among other things changed the face of the European higher education leading gradually to the much-desired European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Most importantly, arguing whether the BP represents a new form of Imperialism does not change the reality, which such Euro-initiative offers to Europe in particular.

Historically, Europe has always moved to proffer solutions to Europe's internal problems even when it involves finding such solution from other continents as with the trans-Atlantic slave trade that was necessitated by the need for slave labour, and as with Imperialism made possible by the contradictions within the Capitalist mode of production. Casting blames on Europe for finding solutions to its internal problems (as we can see through the emergence of the BP) does not represent any sensible approach to finding solutions to Africa's numerous problems; some of which were created by Africans themselves. Africa's fore-fathers and fore-mothers may be excused for their roles in facilitating the so-called Europe's underdevelopment of Africa many centuries past. However, with the 21<sup>st</sup> century advancement cutting across every continent, and with countless numbers of higher education institutions across Africa, it would be an inexcusable error if Africans fail to provide solutions to the numerous problems crippling the African societies. Africans must develop the habit of learning from good practices, part of which has been offered by the emergence of the Bologna Process. The challenges besetting African higher education systems are profound. Finding solutions to such challenges aren't going to be very easy either. However, a fundamental requirement for progress in this regard is for Africans to begin to cultivate the *spirit of sincerity of purpose that allows the human mind to be susceptible only to achieving good*. African higher education scholars, other higher education stakeholders and the AU leadership should emulate the good spirit and integrity to achieve that reverberates among the BP initiators, which enables the BP to be succeeding in spite of some obvious difficulties confronting it.

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## Teacher Educators' Educational Orientations: Do They Support Learner Centred Education?

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**ABSTRACT:** *The desire to embrace learner centred approaches at all levels of Botswana's education system has been echoed in almost every curriculum document produced in since Botswana's independence. Although efforts have been made to entrench these approaches in the education system, teachers and teacher educators have found this to be elusive. Often, they fall back to the more familiar teacher centred approaches. This paper reports on a study to ascertain the educational orientation of teacher educators in colleges of education in Botswana and how this orientation influences their educational practices. Using a dichotomous typology of educational orientations developed by Hadley (in Quam 1998:17-36), whether ones educational orientation is pedagogic or andragogic, a questionnaire was administered to a selected number of teacher educators in colleges of education to ascertain their orientation. The findings revealed that most teacher educators who completed the questionnaire had a pedagogic rather than an andragogic orientation. A pedagogical orientation is associated with teacher centred practices and an andragogical orientation is associated with learner centred practices. Findings from interviews with student teachers confirmed these findings. Based on these findings a number of recommendations are made to address this situation.*

**Key words:** *teacher education practice, pedagogy, andragogy, exploratory qualitative-quantitative descriptive research design*

### Introduction

Current approaches to teaching practices of teacher educators in the colleges of education in Botswana are in general not congruent with the practices mandated by the government's educational strategy as espoused in the 1994 Revised National Policy on Education and the various teacher education programmes and subject syllabi. These documents encourage, advocate and reflect the Botswana government's deliberate attempts to shift education practices at the Secondary School level away from an educator-centred to a learner-centred philosophical approach to teaching. This change has been mandated (Botswana 1994; Letshabo 2000:298) but it has not changed the traditional way that secondary school teachers engage in their teaching tasks. A parallel model in the teacher education programmes has also not been developed to support this shift. Teacher educators, who prepare teachers for the secondary schools teach about learner-centred methodologies, but they prefer to present their lessons in an educator-centred authoritarian way. They fail to change their approaches or model the didactic practices they teach about. Furthermore, although they deal with adult learners, their teaching approaches are incongruent with the needs of these adult learners (Sims & Prophet 1997; Tabulawa in Deurwaarder 2000:114).

### Teacher Educator Orientations And Practices In Colleges Of Education In Botswana

In Botswana, teacher education and training is offered by six colleges of education, who train teachers for the Primary and Junior Secondary School levels respectively and the University of Botswana, who trains teachers for the Senior Secondary School level (Brown & Schulze, 2001:15; Hopkin 2000:361). All the six colleges are affiliated to the University of Botswana, and they play key roles in the government's educational strategy. The University of Botswana is responsible for prescribing and monitoring the academic standards, programme delivery and the practices of teacher educators in the colleges of education (Hopkin 1999:697), and as the affiliating body it validates the colleges' awards. This monitoring role of the University in effect prompts teacher educators to engage in their teaching practices in set ways in order to realise the established standards. In

Botswana, the monitoring of teacher-educators' practices has mainly been through quality control measures (Brown 2005), which is done primarily through external examining, moderating final year examinations and teaching practice, and through formal scrutiny and approval of courses and programmes (Hopkin 2000:362). However, these measures focus extensively on teacher trainees' performance and do not take direct account of how teacher educators execute their teaching tasks. Tabulawa (1999), Tafa (2001), Lesedi (1998) and Prophet (1994) have argued that the teaching methodologies most commonly applied in teacher education and training institutions in Botswana are teacher-centred and do not cater for the specific well defined learning needs of the pre-service teacher trainees as adult learners. The teaching situation in the teacher education sector is based on "...predominantly transmission methods of instruction" (Marope 1997b: 22), *which* are pedagogical in nature and do not often suit adult learners. These and other concerns have pushed the teaching practices of teacher educators increasingly into the public spotlight and often are central in national public policy debates. This paradox and inconsistency in the teaching practices of educators in the teacher education and training environment in Botswana points to a lack of awareness of adult teaching and learning principles. Any endeavour to change this situation will have to take account of the educational orientation of the educators (*Armitage et al, 2005:92,*), i.e. the collection of beliefs about the student, the teacher and the process of teaching and learning that manifest themselves in the choice of methods to use in teaching and learning. This study therefore investigates the nature of the educational orientations of teacher-educators in the colleges of education in Botswana, how it influences the teaching approaches and practices adopted by these educators and how this relate to the BNES, in order to find measures to align teacher educator orientations to national education imperatives. The apparent dilemma for the teacher educators is: preparing student teachers to adopt pedagogical approaches to use them when they finally graduate as teachers of children, while on the other hand, they have to make sure that the student teachers' present and future needs as adult learners are met. The educational orientation questionnaire developed by Hadley (Quam 1998:17-36) specifically indicates whether one's orientation to teaching and learning is pedagogic or andragogic. A pedagogic orientation would result in the use of more teacher-directed teaching methods while an andragogic orientation would result in the use of more learner-centred and individual-centred teaching methods. The adoption of adult education principles as revealed by the educational orientation of the teacher educator and exhibited through the teaching methods they use, underpin the theoretical framework of this research.

### **Educational Orientations And Belief Systems**

A number of scholars have attempted to explain the educational orientations of the teacher educators and the reasons why they adhere to educator-centred approaches. Some suggest that the belief systems held by educators about, *inter alia*, teaching, learning, epistemology as well as the deep-rooted ideas about didactics developed from their own educational experiences as learners impact on whether or not educators implement education innovations or adjust their educational practices (Knowles 1992, Richardson 1994). As a consequence of their influence on an educator's educational activities, Quam (1998:15) concluded that the collection of beliefs that an educator holds about the process of learning and teaching, the learning outcomes desired, and the purposes of schools, define the educational orientation of that educator (Furinghetti & Pehkonen 2002:141; Harris 2003:3). To this end, Malcolm (2000:25) suggests that even though one's teaching practice may be seen as partly planned and partly spontaneous, an educator's approach to it is shaped by the educator's personal belief systems (Rogers 1996:48). Thus, a teacher who engaged in teaching as an act of "transmission" may have framed this belief the moment he or she was told that teaching is like that, or the moment he or she perceived teaching to be this way. Therefore, any calls for change in teachers' professional practices are associated with calls for fundamental changes in their belief systems (Deurwaarder 2000; Richardson 1994). The National Commission on Education in Botswana acknowledges the position that belief systems influence the educator's perceptions, plans and actions (Botswana 1993), but it fails to urge for greater consideration of these beliefs in educational planning.

### **Dimensions Of Educational Orientations: Pedagogy Versus Andragogy**

There are two basic (dominant) dimensions into which an educator's educational orientation may be divided, namely: pedagogically directed orientation and andragogically directed orientation (Furinghetti &

Pehkonen 2002; Hadley in Quam 1998:18). These dimensions represent approaches to teaching and learning operating at two opposite ends of a continuum based on the different assumptions about the teaching and learning of children and adults (Arends 2004:5; Harris 2003:1). Andragogy is described as the “art and science of helping adults learn” as coined by Knowles (in Reischmann 2004). In the context of this research andragogy refers to those educational beliefs, practices and methods that lead learners to become self directed and autonomous as well as for educators to be “facilitators” of learning rather than as “presenters of content” (Reischmann, 2004). Pedagogy as a part discipline of Education in turn refers to those educational beliefs, practices and methods that relate to the accompanying of children and adolescents that results in their acquisition of skills, knowledge and attitudes that they will need in the future as they develop into responsible adults (Holmes & Abington-Cooper, 2000).

### **The nature of pedagogy and andragogy**

A pedagogical approach may be described as a teacher dominated learning situation (Reece & Walker 2005:62) where the students are rather passive, submissive and obedient to the teacher's instructions (Deurwaarder 2000:114; Curzon 2005:21; Arends 2004:7; Gage in Curzon 2005:22). The teacher has full responsibility for making decisions about what is learned, how it is learned, when it is learned, and if learning took place (Bullen 2004:11). The assumption is that learners need to know only what the teacher teaches them. This teaching and learning situation actively promotes dependency on the instructor (Bullen 2004:11; Woolfolk 2004:275). The experience that learners bring with them to the learning and teaching process is of little use and is often not tapped, resulting in the isolation of the new and the old learning (Deurwaarder 2000:113). The main model of the teaching-learning interaction espoused in pedagogy is one-way sequential and hierarchical transmission of accurate information, structuring of the learning environment, and rewarding of performance (Deurwaarder 2000:113; Reece and Walker 2005:64). This leads students to see education as a process of acquiring subject matter content, which will have an instrumental value only at a later time in life. A dynamic competing and alternative idea to pedagogy, in terms of instructing adult learners, is andragogy (Bullen 2004:1). Andragogy is a system of ideas, concepts, and approaches to adult learning. (Reece & Walker 2005:62; Knowles in Bullen 2004:1). The notion of an alternative model to teach adults as against children was justified by empirical evidence that as adults mature, they become increasingly independent and responsible for their own actions (Bullen 2004:2). They are also often motivated to learn by a sincere desire to solve immediate problems in their lives (Curzon 2005:60), and they have an increasing need to be self-directing (Armitage et al 2004:28). The pedagogic model does not account for such developmental changes on the part of adults, and thus produces tension, resentment, and resistance in adult individuals (Knowles in Bullen 2004:2).

### **Factors influencing decisions to teach from a pedagogical or andragogical perspective**

The advocates of either pedagogy or andragogy not only make assumptions about learner characteristics, they also assume that these necessarily imply a particular style of teaching and learning. In the literature, some of the factors that influence educators to teach from a specific perspective are cited as: *relevance to learners* - the argument that pedagogic/andragogic assumptions about learners are universally valid (Reece & Walker 2005; Jarvis in Bullen 2004); *institutional philosophy* - the extent to which educators' decisions about a teaching approach must reflect the underlying philosophy of the educational institution; *the mass-production approach to education* - in many parts of the world the education sector is being pushed, for many years, to produce more at less cost, i.e. a factory model (Deurwaarder, 2000:116); and *the role of teaching experience* - teachers in their mid-careers are likely to be more experimental in their teaching, seek new challenges, give “meaning” to their work or some may wish to change their careers completely (Harms & Knobloch: 2005) and may adopt innovative methods when compared to those who have just joined the profession or those who have been teaching for many years. Although an educator's approach to teaching is often traced in research to different origins, it is less easy to discern what influence teachers' decisions about which teaching method to apply. There is, however, evidence to suggest that a number of factors combine to influence and mediate an educator's decisions on how to teach: The individual's understanding of his or her purpose in the fulfilment of the learning goals (Armitage et al 2005:94); the context in which the teaching takes place (Deurwaarder 2000:113; Tabulawa 1997:56); the individual's relationship with the group; consideration of resources, time, equipment and materials available; the lesson objectives and learning content; balance, variety and maintenance of student interest, characteristics and abilities (Reece and Walker 2005:66); as well as the educator's breadth of experience, competence and qualification, and willingness to experiment. Educator experience was found by Wilson

(2005:189-190) to be negatively related to the educator's willingness to try new ways of teaching. The more years the educator is in the profession, the less likelihood of experimenting with various teaching methods. Another factor cited in the literature is that the views of society and the community values influence how (and what) a teacher teaches. This is evidenced by beginning teachers attempting to model that what society accepts as good teachers (Arends 2004:22).

### **Pedagogically versus andragogically oriented teaching models and methods**

This pedagogic-andragogic dichotomy gives rise to a set of teaching models that represents four categories of teaching methods that teachers apply in the teaching and learning process (Rogers in Reece & Walker 2005:64). These include the *presentation methods* (e.g. lecture, discussion, demonstration); *participatory methods* (e.g. question and answering, debate, gaming, discussion, case study, brainstorming, small or large group work); *discovery methods* (e.g. projects, experiments, assignment); and *evaluation methods* (e.g. test, quiz, role play). This category classification divides teaching methods on a five point continuum, ranging from the lecture method at one extreme, followed by demonstration and discussion to independent study at the other extreme. These strategies vary in the amount of time and managing as well as operating work demands on the educator. In this system of classifying teaching methods the presentation methods are purely pedagogic since they place the teacher at the centre of the teaching and learning process. On the other hand andragogically oriented methods of teaching are learner-centred in nature (Jarvis 2005: 122-136; Reece & Walker (2005:62) and are inter alia represented by brain storming, group discussion, case studies, role play, simulation, computer assisted learning, experiential learning, and self directed learning. The frequency of use of these categories of teaching methods was investigated in order to confirm the educational orientations of teacher educators during this research.

### **The influence of teacher belief systems on pedagogic and andragogic decisions**

Studies of learner beliefs indicate that if learners are exposed to and are aware of andragogic principles, they may have a greater affinity to believe in themselves and their ability to acquire new knowledge or learn new skills. In teacher education in Botswana graduates of college of education have been found to be unable to take up innovations (Prophet, 1994, Marope, 1997). Conner (2004) suggests it may be necessary for student teachers to unlearn the pedagogically oriented belief in teacher-reliance if they are to meet their own learning needs and demand teacher educators to do the same. Brookhart and Freeman (1992:37) suggest that both pre-service and practicing teachers have deep-rooted ideas about teaching and how learners learn. Much of these ideas have developed from their own educational experiences as well as from beliefs expressed in the society. These past educational experiences strongly relate to the teaching and learning strategy that beginner teachers employ in the classroom (Pajares 1992:307; Richardson 1996:107). In studies in Botswana, Deurwaarder (2000:114) concluded that change in classroom practice will not occur if no attention is paid to the belief systems held by the teacher. Teacher beliefs about good teaching are so deeply rooted that surface changes, such as changing outer conditions, like the curriculum or teaching materials, cannot influence them Leder et al (1990:12). Harris (2003:3) found that when confronted with the actual classroom experiences, novice teachers generally reverted to their original belief systems about teaching and set aside knowledge from their training. The technical aspects of their teacher preparation were of little use to them. They structured their teaching based on perceptions of themselves and their students, rather than relying on the knowledge learned through the teacher education programme. These findings leave open the possibility that teacher educators in colleges of education in Botswana may have similar influences on their educational practices.

### **The role of learner centeredness**

Learner centeredness is promoted in the literature as another distinguishing characteristic of adult education and teaching. It is considered a high professional and moral principle for adult educators to involve learners in identifying their needs (Sheared & Sissel 2001:38; Mancuso 2000:4; Snipe 2001:89). But to what extent are learner-centred practices actually used by adult (teacher) educators? In a study by Kember et al (2001:393), educators viewed adult students as being at the andragogic end of the continuum, but their teaching methods stemmed from their conception of good teaching as transmission of knowledge and facilitation of learning. They designed their teaching to be congruent with the relative strengths and weaknesses of students. In the research by Beder (2001:46), teachers of adults expressed learner-centred intentions and orientations but portrayed a type of instruction that predominantly used teacher-prepared lessons; elementary-school-style elicitations, and virtually no substantive learner input. It



also remains an open question whether adult learners actually prefer learner-centred approaches. Beitler (1997:218) found that mid-career adult students were more concerned with teacher character than appropriate teaching methods. They, for example, preferred teacher direction in courses with a clearly defined body of knowledge to master, such as accounting. In the study of Donaldson, Flannery and Ross-Gordon (1993:147-165), adult students' conceptions of good teaching included a mix of teacher-directed and learner-centred characteristics. These issues individually and collectively could be influenced by the teaching orientations of the educators. (Leach 2001:25-45; Sissel et al. 2001:17-27).

### **The influence of pedagogy versus andragogy on teacher education practice**

In pre-service teacher education settings this interplay between andragogy and pedagogy highlights the dilemma that is faced by teacher educators who prepare adults (student teachers) to be teachers of children. Teacher education and adult education, as entailed in andragogy, are underpinned and guided by the same related principles. This relationship is underscored through a comparison of the adult education principles developed by Knowles, (1980) and Rogers (1996) with the teacher education principles developed by Northfield and Gunstone (1997) and by Bollough (2000:21). The relationship is with particular reference to the purpose, motivation and methods used in both adult education and teacher education. Northfield and Gunstone (1997:48-72) identified the purposes of teacher education as for teachers to learn and apply important ideas about teaching and learning and to present teacher education in ways that achieve a balance between the existing context and role of teaching and the possibility of improving teaching and learning. Those who join teacher education programmes as student teachers are adults and should therefore be: respected for their own self worth; helped to use their own experiences as a major source of their own learning; and be assisted to recognise the need to continually reflect on their learning, seek new knowledge and devise new methods of teaching and learning throughout their lives. Calderhead and Shurrock (1997:208) noted that the transition from student to student teacher to teacher was dependent upon the value position of the teacher educator. If the teacher educator has a value position that is andragogic, he or she is likely to adopt methods and practices that respect the student teacher, use the student teacher's experience as a source of learning as well as involve the student teacher in planning and evaluation of learning.

### **Research design**

The central aim of the investigation was to *describe* the educational orientations of teacher educators and the influence of these on their choice of teaching methods and practices. The most suitable design to solicit these mainly process and context specific data was a combined exploratory qualitative-quantitative descriptive research design (De Vos, 1998:37-38). For this purpose a survey was conducted of the educational orientation of teacher educators in all six Botswana colleges of education using a structured Educational Orientation Questionnaire adopted from Hadley (Quam 1998:36-41). This was to investigate the hypothesis that teacher educators in Botswana have a pedagogic rather than an andragogic orientation. A conveniently drawn sample of 123 out of a population of 405 teacher educators participated in this *quantitative phase* of the investigation. All participants of this explorative research have experienced the phenomenon under investigation and were therefore judged information-rich (Cluett and Bluff, 2000:56).

For the *qualitative phase* semi-structured group interviews were also conducted with a stratified random sample of student teachers at two of the six colleges of education in Botswana to seek their opinions on the educational orientation of their lecturers. Student teachers were asked to indicate the most common teaching methods their teacher educators use. The interviews were conducted mainly at two sites: one college from the two colleges of education offering the full time 3 year Diploma in Secondary Education (DSE) programme and one college from the four colleges of education offering the full time 3 year Diploma in Primary Education (DPE) programme. A total of 50 final year student teachers out of 250 students from Francistown College of Education and Tonota College of Education were interviewed. The conveniently drawn sample is 20% of the students in their final year at the two colleges under study and 6.4% of the student population in their final year in all the six colleges. This percentage is an acceptable representative sample for a research of this nature (Brown & Dowling, 1998). This group of pre-service teachers was deemed adequate and information-rich (Brown and Schulze 2001:3-4) because they had



experienced the methods that teacher educators use in the process of teaching and learning. Their views were vital to corroborate, or refute, the teacher educators' views on teaching methods and approaches used. The ages of the student teachers range from 19 to 45 years. They have made a deliberate choice to pursue a teacher education programme and therefore perceive themselves and are perceived by others as adults, in line with the characteristics of an andragogue (Jarvis 1995: 43-46).

### **The Educational Orientation Questionnaire**

In the quantitative phase, data was collected through the use of the adapted Educational Orientation Questionnaire. The Educational Orientation Questionnaire (EOQ) is a standardised questionnaire that was developed by Hadley (Quam, 1998:36-41) to determine the educational orientation of adult educators at Boston University in the USA. The EOQ has been applied to determine the educational orientation of adult educators in different research contexts (Hopkins 1981:43a; Beder and Carrea 1988:75; Grubbs 1981; Jones 1982). These examples illustrate that the instrument is a well developed and widely accepted tool for measuring the educational orientations of educators. The EOQ was adapted by the researcher for this research in order to determine the educational orientations of teacher educators. In adapting the EOQ, the researcher had to make modifications to the instrument so that the statements measuring educational orientations are restated to capture educational orientations of teacher educators specifically, instead of adult educators in general. The questionnaire has 60 statements that relate to the six dimensions of educators' educational orientations (i.e. attitudinal dimensions of a teacher educator's role) as follows: (1) the purpose of education, (2) the nature of learners, (3) characteristics of learning experiences, (4) management of learning experience, (5) evaluation, and (6) the relationship of the teacher educator to learners as well as among learners. The abovementioned dimensions are also the basis on which Knowles's adult education principles are based (Harris 2003:1-7). On these six dimensions, the questionnaire estimates the nature of the educational orientations of teacher educators, whether they are andragogic or pedagogic, as explained above. The responses to the statements are scored on a five point Likert scale, ranging from: strongly agree, agree, uncertain to the statements, or, disagree to strongly disagree. One half (30) of the items measured andragogic characteristics. These items indicate an educational orientation that is akin to respondents using adult education principles. The other 30 items on the EOQ measured pedagogical characteristics. They indicate an orientation akin to the respondents' using pedagogic (child or youth) education principles. The researchers modified and revised the statements to suit this research, but retained their numbering as they appear in the original EOQ. The relationship of the statements in the questionnaire with the adult teaching principle(s) of Knowles (1980) was indicated. A detailed description of why the statement is positively andragogic or positively pedagogic is also given in the table. Data from the questionnaires was analyzed by means of cross-tabulation using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) programme. Respondents who had mean scores greater than 3 were considered positively andragogic, while those with a mean score of less than 3 were considered to be positively pedagogic. A mean score of 3 was considered neutral on the pedagogic-andragogic continuum. Means were also statistically analysed for significance against teaching experience at a college of education (5 years or less, 6-9 years, more than 10 years).

### **The semi-structured group interviews**

The three sections of the interview schedule recorded the college, gender year group and subject group of the interviewee; required respondents to rate their lecturers on the eight adult education principles as proposed by Knowles (1980) and required interviewees to indicate the most common teaching methods used by teacher educators. The open directional questions asked respondents to rate how often their lecturers: used student teachers' experiences of the teaching and learning process as a starting point when teaching; respected their opinion; involved them in planning their own learning; allowed them to evaluate their own work; involve them and their peers in their own assessment; let them know why they are learning a specific topic, skill or concept; get a chance to evaluate their lecturers' teaching; and allow them to observe their lecturers teaching pupils. The responses were recorded against a continuum of very often, often, rarely and never. Respondents were also required to give reasons and examples to support their answers. They also had to indicate *how often* each of the three categories of teacher centered; learner centered and individual student-centered teaching methods are used by their lecturers. These questions were to capture the frequency of use and the diversity of the interviewees' evaluation of these two aspects in order to verify the educational orientation of their educators and therefore establish whether teacher

educators use adult education principles in their teaching or not. Thematic content analysis was done to identify prominent patterns and themes which were pooled together to form categories and were used to answer the research questions. The results were then compared to those of the EOQ by noting the general and specific perceptions of student teachers within a college type and subject groups. The results were also compared and cross-checked to what is reported in literature. This was to increase the validity and reliability of collected data through the questionnaire.

### Analysis and discussion the quantitative results

The quantitative part of the study investigated if there is a significant difference in the educational orientations held by teacher educators with different levels of teaching experiences in the colleges of education in Botswana. Responses to the factors that were used to measure the educational orientations are shown in Table 1 and Table 2 respectively.

**Table 1: Educational orientation factor analysis of positively pedagogic behaviours - responses to some questions that showed strong pedagogic behaviours**

Variables	% Responses			
	Strongly agree/ agree	Un-decided	Strongly disagree/ disagree	Total
<i><b>Positively pedagogic behaviours</b></i>				
Education should focus on what is sure, reliable, and lasting	81.3	10.6	8.1	100
Students need a strong teacher who can direct their learning	86.9	9.8	3.3	100
Learning is an intellectual process of understanding ideas, (concepts) and acquiring skills	94.3	3.3	2.4	100
Giving examinations regularly motivates students to learn	58.5	13.8	27.7	100
It should be the lecturer's responsibility to evaluate student achievement and assign grades	89.4	2.4	8.1	100
Competition among students encourages keen learning	73.2	6.5	20.4	100
A lecturer should help students understand the values of our society	97.5	1.6	0.8	100
It is the lecturer's responsibility to motivate students to learn what they ought to learn	86.2	4.1	9.7	100
Clear explanation by the lecturer is essential for effective learning	98.4	0.8	0.8	100
A good lecturer makes the decision on what is to be taught, when, and how	65.8	7.3	26.9	100
A lecturer should not change his or her expressed decision without good reasons	64.2	16.3	19.5	100
A lecturer should be sure that his or her questions steer students towards the truth	82.1	12.2	5.7	100
The major qualifications of a lecturer are his or her grasp of subject matter and ability to explain (demonstrate) it clearly and interestingly to others	82.1	6.5	11.4	100
A lecturer should require assignments and grade them	83.7	11.4	4.9	100
Grades should reflect the student's grasp of the subject matter	84.6	6.5	8.9	100
Good teaching is systematic, so the lecturer should set up a clear plan and schedule that he/she must stick to	79.6	10.6	9.7	100

Each statement in Table 1 reflects a positively pedagogic orientation. Table 1 indicates that, in general, the majority of educators are in agreement with the statements. This level of agreement to these statements

reflects a strongly pedagogic orientation, i.e. the majority agreed with statements regarding positive pedagogic behaviours.

**Table 2: Educational orientation factor analysis of positively andragogic behaviours - responses to some questions that showed strong andragogic behaviours**

Variables	% Responses			
	Strongly agree/ agree	Un-decided	Strongly disagree/ disagree	Total
<i><b>Positively andragogic behaviours</b></i>				
Teaching effectiveness should be measured by students' increase in examination of their own feelings, attitudes, and behaviour	18.7	24.4	56.9	100
Effective learning occurs most often when students actively participate in deciding what is to be learned and how to learn it	16.2	4.9	78.9	100
Organisation of the content and sequence of learning activities should grow out of students' needs, and with their participation	6.5	11.4	82.1	100
The best sources of ideas for improving teaching and education are students	21.1	13.8	65.0	100
A lecturer by his or her behaviour should show each student that his/her abilities and experiences are respected and valued	3.3	6.5	90.3	100
A lecturer's primary responsibility is helping students choose and develop their own direction for learning	11.4	4.1	84.6	100
Educational objectives should define changes in behaviour, which the student desires, and the teacher helps him or her undertake	6.5	9.8	83.8	100
Students are quite competent to choose and carry out their own projects for learning	43.1	13.0	43.9	100
A lecturer should help student free themselves of fixed habits and patterns of thought that block their growth	3.3	8.1	88.6	100
It is better for students to create their own learning activities and materials than for the lecturer to provide them	27.6	12.2	60.2	100
Education should increase students' critical evaluation of our society and courage them to try new, creative satisfying behaviour	0.8	5.7	93.5	100
Maturity depends more on continuing growth in self-understanding than on growth in knowledge	16.2	12.2	71.6	100
The primary concern of a lecturer should be the immediate concerns of the student	21.1	15.4	63.5	100
The goals a student sets for himself or herself are the basis of effective learning (not the lecturer's goals)	20.3	14.6	65.1	100
A lecturer's mission is to help each student learn what he /she decides and to aid the student in achieving his or her personal goals	27.6	10.6	61.8	100
Without a cooperative climate encouraging students to risk and experiment, significant learning is unlikely	8.1	22.8	69.1	100
To use students' experiences and resources for learning requires group activities rather than such methods as lectures	6.5	9.8	83.7	100

The statements in Table 2 measured the andragogic aspects of educators' educational orientations. Each statement reflects a positively andragogic orientation. In general, the majority of educators are in *disagreement* with the statements. The majority (19 out of 30) of the statements had over 50 percent of the respondents disagreeing with them. The disagreement means that the majority of educators *reject* an andragogic perspective to their teaching. These results indicate that most teacher educators at colleges of education in Botswana have a pedagogic orientation. Over 60 percent of the educators agreed to the statements which depicted a pedagogical orientation to their teaching, regardless of their years of work experience, at a college of education.

The overall pattern of responses in respect of educators' work experience at a college of education also reveals that there are significant differences between teacher educators with different years of teaching experience regarding the pedagogical and andragogic orientation factors. The majority (60.2%) of these participants had over 10 years experience working as educators at the College of Education level. The majority of participants (58.5%) were from the colleges which train teachers for the primary school level since those colleges are in the majority (four out of six). Application of Tukey's post hoc tests, which calculate the variance in the mean scores of more than two groups (Hall, 1988: 1), led to the assertion that teacher educators with less than 5 years teaching experience, or with above 10 years teaching experiences are significantly more motivated to adopt a pedagogical orientation in their teaching than teacher educators with between 5 to 10 years teaching experiences. This means that teacher educators that have less than 5 years teaching experience were significantly more motivated to reject an andragogic orientation in their teaching than educators with between 5 to 10 years of teaching experiences. Likewise, educators with over 10 years teaching experience were more likely to reject an andragogic teaching approach than educators with between 5 to 10 years teaching experience.

By virtue of this, educators continue to teach the way they were taught as students. Another explanation, however, is that many of the educators in the colleges were teachers of children in previous employment. They may have difficulty making the transition from teaching children and youths to teaching adults. As several studies have also shown (Furinghetti, 1996; Pehkonen & Torner, 1996; Power & Dalglish 1997; Leder et al, 2002:114), changing this deep-rooted history often means changing the belief systems of these educators. This may also be related to career transition factors. Previous research in career development and transition of teachers has suggested that educators often consider career change after five years of work. During this period, many of these educators experiment a lot on the job. This could be because those in their mid careers are more confident and tend to experiment as compared to those who have just joined the colleges or those who are older and have already entrenched routines. This may be one reason why educators with less than 5 or over 10 years of teaching experience have less enthusiasm to change their teaching approaches.

### Analysis and discussion the qualitative results

It was generally felt among interviewees that educators used the student teachers own experiences of the teaching and learning process as a starting point, especially when teaching, "*...a topic students are familiar with*" or "*as an introduction to a topic.*" However, the notion that the teacher educators capture and use their learners' experiences while teaching was challenged. Some interviewees remarked that they had no such experience. This is well echoed by one respondent: "*...They rarely use my experience. I struggle a lot, such that I catch up and be at the level that is expected...sometimes you would even think that they do not consider it at all; that all of us are young people.*"

Many of the respondents claimed that the educators only give the impression that they respect their opinions, by saying that they want to hear from them: "*But not much time is given to this.*" A number of the interviewees seem to think that one reason for the lack of interest in their experiences is their educators' lack of respect for them as learners.

"*...Lecturers come with what they know/what they believe is correct, so when a student comes up with something that the lecturer does not have, it is regarded wrong.*"

In general involving learners in the planning of their own learning appeared to have had low priority for teacher educators in the two colleges. This sentiment is well echoed by one respondent, who noted:

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*"...Most of the times we are given what is already planned, lecturers rarely have us participate in what they are doing for us. This is strange because we are supposed to learn from them..."*

Most respondents said that they are rarely or never allowed to, or involved in evaluating their own work as explained by one who remarked *"Evaluation is done by the lecturer in the absence of the student"*

In terms of the practice of involving learners and their peers in their own assessment the responses were mixed with many saying that this is rarely done while others felt that this was done only during Micro-teaching.

Despite the notion among some student teachers that their educators seldom or never inform them prior to the start of a lesson why they are learning a certain topic, skill or concept, the general view among the interviewees is that their educators do tell them why they are learning a topic, skill or concept.

Almost all student teachers interviewed said their educators rarely give them a chance to evaluate their teaching or observe them teaching others. Many of the student teachers pointed to contradictions in their educators' teaching practice: *"...What we are told to do is not what is being done to us. It's very rare for lecturers to let us air out our views concerning their teaching. It's like what they do is perfect."*

The above observations and the general views and experiences in shared by the student teachers the teaching and learning process suggest that an andragogic approach is not embraced by most educators.

A number of the student teachers indicated that their educators used both teacher-centred and learner-centred methods of teaching. It was clear however that teacher-centred methods dominated the educators' teaching practice. The majority of student teachers from the sample colleges indicated during the interviews that the two teacher-centred teaching methods *very often* used were (a) lecturing, and (b) controlled or guided discussion. These were followed by occasional tutorials and mentoring. In contrast, the student teachers indicated that the common learner-centred methods like group discussions, listening and observing, and brainstorming are *often used*, but their frequency was minimal compared to the lecture and discussion methods. The *least used* learner-centred methods of teaching were debate, role play, buzz groups, gaming, simulation, field trips and workshops. The only widely used individual learner-centred method most frequently used is assignment. Experiential learning is rarely used.

The data from the qualitative findings shows clearly that students interviewed in both colleges felt that individual student-centered teaching methods are not popular among their lecturers and that the educators emphasized teaching methods that have a pedagogic orientation. This finding is consistent with findings from the quantitative phase of the study which found the prevalence of a pedagogic orientation in teacher educators' teaching.

### Summary

Findings that have emerged from both the quantitative and qualitative investigation have indicated that the majority of teacher that responded to the EOQ had a pedagogic rather than an andragogic orientation to teaching and learning. This assertion is further supported by the qualitative results from interviews with student teachers who affirmed that the majority of their educators had pedagogical rather than andragogical tendencies in their educational practices. Further evidence of this is shown by the responses of student teachers when asked about the frequency of use of teacher-centred, learner-centred or individual student-centred teaching methods by their lecturers. It has emerged that the most frequently used methods were those that are teacher-centred and therefore pedagogically oriented.

### Conclusions drawn from the research

This research set out to investigate the possible reasons why the current approaches to educational practices by teacher educators in Botswana are not congruent with the national educational strategy of imparting learner centred teaching methods. It was postulated that one possible reason for this was related to the educational orientations of the teacher educators. Based on the findings of this research, it can be concluded that indeed this is a possible reason since the majority of teacher educators have been shown to have a pedagogical rather than an andragogical orientation in terms of beliefs and practice. This assertion is supported in the literature as indicated by Pehkonen and Torner (1996) who argued that teachers' teaching behaviour is directed by what they believe to be true. The findings are also consistent



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with the researchers' initial postulation that teacher educators in colleges of education in Botswana have pedagogical rather than an andragogical educational orientation.

It can also be concluded that experience may have a positive or negative effect on educational orientations. Positive in that those in their mid-careers are likely to experiment in their educational practice than those with little or a lot of experience. This experimental phase does not seem to last, before they revert to their original orientations. This conclusion is consistent with that made by Wilson's (2005) who researched the application of andragogy in a post-secondary school setting in the United States of America. She found out that length of teaching experience had a negative correlation to acceptance of change. The more experienced the educator is, the greater likelihood of resisting "*changing the way they have always done things*". It can therefore be concluded that the longer a teacher educator is at a college, the less likely he or she is to change her or his teaching style. It can also be concluded that that experience further entrenches deeply held beliefs since these beliefs are often based on what the experienced educator "*perceives*" to work best

When looked at more closely, teaching experience plays a much more important role in influencing education orientation of educators than either subject specialisation or type of college that the educator teaches in.

### Recommendations arising from the research

All teacher educators at colleges of education should be exposed to andragogic principles and approaches to teaching through in-service workshops and short courses. All academic staff joining colleges of education should in their first year of joining the colleges be inducted into the use of andragogical approaches to teaching and learning. In this way, the newly recruited teacher educators will not need to only rely on their secondary or primary school teaching experiences where pedagogic approaches predominate. To ensure that teacher educators use of learner-centred and individual learner-centred methods, the Quality Assurance Instrument (QAI) for colleges of education should include a standard that monitors the use of these methods in teaching and learning. The Teaching and Learning Policy for Affiliated Colleges of the University of Botswana should be implemented forthwith, since at the heart of the policy is the principle of "Learner-centeredness". The policy therefore is consistent with the principles of andragogy.

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## Mirroring the teacher: What does the minimum requirement for teacher education qualifications say about character education?<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** *This paper interrogates the position of the new policy document on minimum requirements for teacher education qualifications regarding character education for trainee teachers. The paper seeks to understand whether any legal and pedagogical framework exist in the document to support the teaching and learning of character education by students in training institutions. Character education encompasses the multiple layers of influences that enable the individuals to become morally responsible and self-disciplined citizens. The paper presents evidences from international literature to highlight the imperativeness of character education for initial teacher education as germane for the production of the right calibre of quality teachers for the South African schools. The paper suggests the need for a proper mandate and pedagogical framework on character education for teacher training institutions. Some curricula issues involved in character education are presented. Noting that the public holds schools and teachers accountable for societal demeanour, the paper concludes that policy-informed well structured character education would culminate in the raising of the right calibre of teachers that may be responsive to societal needs.*

**Key words:** *character education, National Qualifications Framework Act 67 of 2008, Minimum Requirement for Teacher Education Qualifications*

### Introduction

It is an age-long saying that teachers are role models. But perhaps the hard question begging to be asked right now is: what are teachers modelling? The importance of teachers as role models in the socialization of the child is well documented in teacher education literature (Sava, 2002; Ozel, 2007; Lumpkin, 2008). Teachers serve as role models through how they perform their duties and by the manner they conduct themselves. Literature on the impact of teacher attitudes, behaviours and personality on pupils' overall academic, social and personality wellbeing is also huge (Harden & Crosby, 2000; Narvaez & Lapsley, 2008; Seyyed-Hassan, Roghayyeh & Mustafa, 2008; Kagoda, 2011). Pupils learn from their teachers in more ways than one; they learn from the way teachers dress, speak and act.

In spite of this understanding, teacher education reform initiatives in South Africa appear to focus more on curriculum reforms and on various aspects of curricular specifics including subject competences. The main focus appears to relate to how to prepare the teacher to effectively deliver a particular content knowledge and on how to ensure that he/she is available to perform this pedagogical role. Similarly, teacher education programmes also reflect this demand. As a result, there is usually an unwitting neglect of the importance of character education for trainee teachers as germane to the quality of values-education that are given back to the society through the pupils. Sadly, the quest for more bodies to fill the vacant positions in our schools has resulted in teacher training institutes being flooded by all categories of persons with both natural and superficial interest in teaching (Stoll & Beller, 1998; Robinson, 2003; Thakrar, Zinn & Wolfenden, 2009). This paper argues in favour of a well-designed and specialised character education for initial teacher education programmes in South Africa. It is hoped that this contribution will provide insights to teacher education policy-makers on the imperativeness of a well-structured character education programme for teachers who are continuously being looked upon by society as role models and as counsellors.

### Theoretical construct

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<sup>1</sup> The earlier version of this paper was presented at the National teacher education conference held at the University of Pretoria, September 2012.

This paper derives from the microsystem theory. The microsystem layer of the child's ecological development represents the layer that is closest to the child, and includes the structures that the child has direct contact with (Beckett & Taylor, 2010). This includes people and institutions the child interacts within the environment. Examples include the immediate family members, schools and teachers. The striking importance of this layer, also known as the proximal processes (Gabarino, 1992; Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 1997; Beckett & Taylor, 2010) is that as the interactions proceed, the type of influence they will exact on the child's development will depend to a large extent on the content and structure of the microsystem. With respect to the teacher, it would seem appropriate to suggest that what the teacher offers the growing child depends clearly on what is available to him or her. And where it borders on moral values by which the components of character resonate, the teacher can only give that in his or her possession. This analysis challenges providers of teacher education to ensure that the individual teacher is adequately equipped academically and morally.

### **The minimum requirements for teacher education qualifications**

Although the National Qualifications Framework Act 67 of 2008 policy on the Minimum Requirement for Teacher Education Qualifications emerged to address most of the challenges facing South Africa's (teacher) education, it fell short when it comes to addressing the personality of the teacher. Some of the acknowledged challenges facing teacher education in South Africa include: the lingering legacies of Apartheid; poor teacher education quality; persistent presence of teachers with poor or limited conceptual knowledge; lack of physical resources in some schools; poor support for pupils at home; insufficient teacher support; and until the emergence of Act 67 of 2008, absence of formal legislation on effective teacher education (DoE, 2000; Robinson, 2003; DoE, 2007b; CHE, 2010; DHET, 2011).

It is however, observed that though the issue of the apparently declining teacher character appears to be an unvoiced concern of many South Africans, yet literature appears scanty with regards to the imperativeness of character education for trainee teachers and teacher educators. Notwithstanding, if education is aimed to change society then teacher education alongside the teacher educators would have to be fundamentally changed; such change would have to be total. As one who has been involved in teacher education since September 1989 I understand teacher education as a process leading to the acquisition of two forms of character: performance character; and, moral character.

A genuine combination as well as evidenced display of this two in a person who has received training to teach makes him or her ideal for the job, which goes under the name of the *Teacher*. For the avoidance of doubt, *performance character*, refers to certain dispositions including behavioural, emotional and cognitive (Davidson, 2012) that are mostly acquired through some prescribed training. Such training is required to enable an individual achieve such values and/or skills as ambition, critical thinking, diligence, determination, perseverance, positive attitude, work ethic, resilience, self-discipline and self-direction (Davidson, 2010). It must be noted that at the heart of performance character is what Davidson and Lickona (2007: 2) refer to as "mastery orientation". Such habits are required in human actors for them to achieve human excellence in such performance environments as the school and at workplace. Moral character on the other hand, encapsulates all dispositions that are required for ethical functioning. It comprises such qualities as honesty, trust, respect, fairness, and responsibility (Stoll & Beller, 1998; Lumpkin, 2008).

Other components of moral character include differentiating right from wrong, sense of decency, decorum, reasoning, sincerity, humility, self-control, and sense of humour. Put together, these refer to as moral principles or virtues, and education would best serve South African society when teachers teach and model these principles, while assisting their students to internalise and practise such moral virtues.

With the above explanations in mind, it is safe to say that while the National Qualifications Framework Act 67 of 2008 policy on the Minimum Requirement for Teacher Education Qualifications emphasised performance character, it was unintentionally silent on the issue of moral character. This argument is tenable for three reasons. The first reason derives from how the new policy-document responded to the issues and challenges raised in the research and in the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) reviews. For instance, unlike previous documents, e.g. the Norms and Standards in Education, NSE (2000), the new policy:

*describes clear and specific requirements for the development of learning programmes and guidelines for practical and WIL structures; encourages teacher educators to become engaged with curriculum design, policy implementation and research; requires all teacher education programmes to address the critical*

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*challenges facing education in South Africa today; it requires new programmes to incorporate situational and contextual elements such that would assist teachers in developing competences that enable them to deal with diversity and transformation; and, the new policy-document retains the roles of a teacher described in the NSE 2000, but emphasises that the roles must be interpreted as functions carried out by the collective of teachers in a specific school (DHET, 2011: 6 & 7).*

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As it were no mention was made in the new policy-document on how to impact the ‘dwindling’ character of the 21<sup>st</sup> century South African teacher. The second reason for the position of this paper derives from the principles underpinning the design of the programmes leading to the teacher education qualifications. The new policy-document notes that “teaching is a complex activity that is premised upon the acquisition, integration and application of different types of knowledge practises or learning” (DHET, 2011: 7). The document then typifies the components of learning that are linked with the acquisition, integration and application of knowledge to include the following: “disciplinary learning; pedagogical learning; practical learning; fundamental learning; and, situational learning (DHET, 2011: 8).

While space does not allow for any detailed discussion on the above components, it is important to note that none of them did say anything on how the teacher character could be improved. Yet, the importance of character education resonates through the fact that “teachers are among individuals who spend numerous hours with students and can have an influential impact on the shaping of the students’ good manner” (Seyyed-Hassan *et al.*, 2008: 106).

A final reason for the position of this paper derives from the eleven (11) minimum set of basic competences required of the newly qualified South African teacher. These basic competences are well-documented in the Appendix C of the new policy-document. Although mention is made of “positive work ethic, display appropriate values and conduct themselves in a manner that befits, enhances and develops the teaching profession” (DHET, 2011: 53) it would be wrong to suggest that such requirements encapsulate anything moral character. In addition, there is no evidence in neither the principles underpinning the design of teacher education programmes nor was there any evidence in the components of learning that are linked with the acquisition, integration and application of knowledge to suggest implicitly or explicitly that moral character education is part of the new policy-document.

A policy framework on moral character education for initial teacher education is therefore necessary as discussions are on-going on how to make the South Africa’s teachers to be better responsive to the needs of the South African society. This necessity is informed by the fact that “unless character development is directly addressed, the moral maturation process will not likely occur” (Lumpkin, 2008: 46). The rest of this paper will highlight the imperativeness of moral character education for initial teacher education.

### **Explaining moral character education**

We have noted the two components of character: performance and moral. Overall, character refers to the totality of continuously developing moral and ethical qualities, which individuals demonstrate as they live their everyday lives (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004; U.S. DoE, 2007). Such qualities may be represented by the individuals through their personal, social as well as civic values, or through the combination of all of the three qualities. Character according to Lumpkin (2008: 45) “encompasses being good and doing right while behaving unethically is the antithesis of displaying character”. In explaining character education attention is paid to the influence that the multiple layers of the families, schools, teachers and other social institutions exact on the individuals including children and adults (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004). The idea of character education within the context of teacher education reminds us of the imperativeness to empower teachers through a well-organised training programme aimed at equipping them well enough with the ideals of character.

Character education therefore is a consciously engaged process by which teachers attempt to empower their pupils with the right moral virtues that enable them to live virtuously within the society. Such education emphasises the idea that teaching character is teaching the whole individual (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004) in such a conscious manner to enable him/her to live a positively transformed life. It must be noted that character education encompasses very specific and direct approach to teaching moral and values education with a target on specific forms of values and behaviour (Hunter, 2000). As part of a planned curriculum, character education then becomes a variety of deliberate attempts through our teachings that enable children to understand, appreciate, and care about as well as act upon the established core ethical and citizenship values.

Within the context of initial teacher education programme in South Africa, character education when introduced and fully embraced becomes a process that allows for the development of the whole individual. Such process would be aimed to equip the individual with the moral ingredients of civil, democratic, social and emotional values that enable the individual to appreciate his/her own worldview while acknowledging and respecting the diverse worldview of others. Emphasising the importance of character education Lickona (2004: 30) concludes that

*character education is a good thing, an essential thing for us to do. Focusing on character in our families, schools, and communities will make a difference...for those involved. If the effort becomes widespread enough, it will make a difference for our whole country and perhaps, to the extent that we become a better people.*

### **Justifications for moral character education as part of teacher education**

Teaching is a unique and complex profession. Unlike other professions, teaching is about the only job that requires the teacher to act in a certain manner. Anyone who opts for the teaching profession engages in a lifelong process that demands him or her to behave in a certain way. The job of the teacher is to tell the truth and to behave uprightly at all times. For that reason, the person who wants to be a teacher has to be equipped with the necessary ingredients to assist him/her to live exemplary and in a way the society expects teachers to behave. The following therefore offer justifications for a well-structured, policy-informed character education to be part of the programmes for initial teacher education.

#### *As a prerequisite for professional competence:*

It is simply true that societies the world over expect that teachers behave and act in a certain way. It is conventional wisdom that when one who is known to be a teacher behaves in a manner that is deemed irresponsible he/she is repulsed by members of the immediate society. The perceived roles of teachers in the South African society require that they teach and model character. Lumpkin (2008: 49) argues that “teachers with character serve as role models for telling the truth, respecting others, accepting and fulfilling responsibilities, playing fair, earning and returning trust, and living a moral life”. Lumpkin further argues that when teachers are in possession of character, they are able to teach their students how to engage in moral-reasoning process that will assist them to make morally-principled decisions about their lives. It is therefore necessary to make character education part of the requirements for teaching. Teachers that can achieve character in their pupils are those who have been equipped to teach and demonstrate the importance of character. We cannot argue the fact that our society requires teachers who are well-behaved; many decades past, this element was part of the inherent quality of the teacher. Perhaps, research is imperative in this regard to establish whether the contemporary teacher still sees him/herself as one whom society would constantly expect to behave better.

#### *The proximal teacher-child relationships:*

It is increasingly obvious that teachers are more and steadily becoming a primary agent of socialisation that most children encounter daily. Studies have shown that in some instances teachers appear to be the only socially and emotionally balanced (Boud, 1990; Beckett & Taylor, 2010; Davidson, 2010); materially, as well as spiritually fit and healthy (Gough, 1998; Davidson & Lickona, 2007) adults that some children encounter all day long. Moreover, the ever-increasing responsibilities of the teachers make imperative the formal teaching of character education to the becoming teacher. For instance, in the past, teachers were not assigned such responsibilities as mentors, therapists, parent-substitute, counsellor, and so on. Today however, all that have changed and the expectations from both the parents and society at large appear to put the teacher at the centre of these responsibilities. Some teachers may argue as personal experiences have shown that they do not want their pupils or anyone else to see them as role models. However, Harden and Crosby (2000: 10) argue that whether teachers want to be seen as role models or not, “it is difficult for learners not to be influenced by the living example set before them”. The implication of Harden’s and Crosby’s position is that teacher education must be equipped to enable the production of the right calibre of teachers who would proudly serve as role models for the pupils.

#### *Social upheavals in contemporary families:*

South African families, as in other countries, experience social disturbances. One such social upheaval is the ravaging effect of HIV and AIDS (Posel, Kahn & Walke, 2007; Dworkin, Colvin, Hatcher & Peacock, 2012), which has resulted in the emergence of child-headed homes and other dislocations



within the affected families. Other developments within the families that challenge the general wellbeing of the growing child include the increasing incidences of broken homes, increasing cases of child-parent resulting from teenage pregnancies, increasing cases of one-parent families, among others. Studies (Hunter, 2000; Lowe, 2008) have shown that children raised within such social circumstances constantly experience both emotional and behavioural imbalances in most instances. In the absence of a matured and responsible adult within their immediate families, teachers may become the substitute-parent and as such are required to be well-prepared for such arduous task.

*The social milieu within the larger society:*

These are challenging times for parents, teachers, the government and society at large. The situation within the society is without doubt, very bad. We listen to and read from the news many instances of violence against children and women. It is reasonable to say that government can provide everything but character. The responsibility for character training rests naturally on both parents and teachers. However, the social upheavals in contemporary families as I have shown above, weakens the strength of most families to deliver this responsibility making the position of the teacher increasingly important. Lumpkin (2008: 49) argues that in most instances, "society is best served when teachers teach and model and students develop character and moral virtues". This is by no means prescriptive, however, it is suggested that with concerted efforts through some formal learning, it is possible that society may become better.

*Societal expectations on teachers as the custodians of wisdom:*

Personal experiences have shown that members of the society still place their trust in the teachers' ability to live exemplary life. Teachers are expected to always be of good character because most "parents as well as the general public expect educators to teach character and virtues that can help shape and mould young people into contributing members of society" (Lumpkin, 2008: 47). Perhaps empirical studies are required to find out whether families still believe in the ability of the teacher to assist in managing the recalcitrant behaviour of a particular child. Notwithstanding, given the fact that this expectation of the teacher as the custodian of wisdom and as disciplinarian still persists, it is therefore important to equip the teacher ready and able to perform such role whenever asked to do so by the public.

*The perceived depravity within teacher education:*

Many years ago, it was easy to identify a teacher simply because there was conventional wisdom in the saying: 'by their fruits we shall know them'. Back then, teachers were easily identified by the manner of their dressing or appearance and sense of decency or general decorum. Teachers were also identified by their level of comportment both in private and in public places. It was very easy to identify a teacher simply by his/her spirit of perseverance in all aspects of public and private lives. Most importantly, individuals wanting to take up teaching were strictly scrutinised in the first instance; for not everyone was called to teach. Such individuals were then accorded the right (qualified teachers status) to teach others after a long period of prescribed training, and having been found fit in terms of both the performance and moral character.

Today, all that has changed. The only prerequisite for admission into the teacher training institute is academic credentials, just as the only requirement to take up job as a teacher is a teaching qualification. However, the responsibilities of the teacher are quite huge; they require more than just an academic qualification. A good school is more than just having many teachers with the approved teaching and academic qualifications. Moreover, personal experiences have shown that when parents set out in search of a school for their children, they want to see beyond the qualifications of the teacher in any given school. Many a times, complaints are raised by teachers in the host schools on the character of some of the trainee teachers in their schools. Experiences have also shown that given the option, some of the host schools would opt out of the work-integrated partnership in many instances for reason of character. Evidences abound to suggest that the greater majority of students who are currently undertaking training in most teacher training institutes have questionable character. Cases of students' misbehaviours during some of the examinable tasks including written essays, class tests, semester examinations as well as research projects suggest that the above justifications for a policy-informed character education remain a good option. This last issue also presents a character-based research agenda aimed to evaluate students' voices in this regard.



### Curriculum issues for character education

Narvaez and Lapsley (2008) argue that because there is no guarantee that students will experience positive moral formation outside of school, the task of preparing adept individuals requires a more intentional programmatic instructional focus. This suggestion then raises some pertinent questions for us about the teaching of character education to the becoming South African teachers: what makes for character education studies and at what level should it be taught? Who should teach it and are there additional training needs for that matter? Should character education be mainstreamed within existing modules or should it be a standalone course for teacher education? What about participation from the community: should school principals, teachers, parents and the larger community be involved in deciding what constitutes the content of such education? Should character education be made mandatory for all those who intend to teach? Will there be need for legislation on character education, and what should such legislation say?

Of course no change can happen without any resistance. To start with, acknowledgement must be given to what may constitute the unvoiced feeling of some critics of character education. For instance, critics may argue that there is,

*little room in the school curriculum to educate for moral education. Many will say that moral education is the responsibility of parents together with faith communities and that in any case in a multicultural society there is no agreed way to determine what is good and bad character (Arthur & Revell, 2005: 5).*

While the above argument may be plausible, however, the justifications for character education as part of teacher education are overwhelming. Perhaps it is also pertinent to acknowledge as experience has shown, the fact that teachers appear to be repulsive to issues of add-ons to already choked daily official schedule. While it is safe to say that the demands for character education in schools should not be classified as additional burden, teachers should in fact see themselves as performing “parental function implicit and constitutive of the teacher in loco parentis” (Arthur & Revell, 2005: 5), which has hitherto been abandoned. So let us try to provide some explanations to the questions raised above.

*What makes for moral character education studies; what level should it be taught?*

A well-structured teacher education for moral formation would contain ethical sensitivity, which will include learning to read and express emotions; caring by connecting to others; learning to work with groups and individual differences; taking the perspectives of others; controlling social bias. Ethical judgement that may include learning to develop general reasoning skills; understanding ethical problems; identifying judgement criteria; reflecting on the process and outcomes; planning to implement decisions; and developing optimism. Ethical motivation, which will include learning about respecting others; developing conscience; acting responsibly; helping others; making peace and cooperating; valuing social structures; and developing ethical identity and integrity. Ethical action, which will include learning about communicating well; resolving conflicts and problems; taking initiatives as a leader; developing courage; developing perseverance; and working hard (Narvaez, 2001).

Although the above content-areas have been described by Narvaez (2008) as the integrative ethical education process model, however, how this will proceed within the South African context remains an issue for the curriculum experts, teachers and legislators. What is important is that the learning of such behavioural skills should form part of students’ continuous learning programmes while still on the teacher education programme. Strategies should however, vary according to the level or year of programmes.

*Who should teach it: Are there additional training needs for that matter?*

Every teacher educator should be involved in the teaching of moral character and should be working in tandem with other professional colleagues. In-service programmes and workshops specifically designed should be mounted in support of the professional development needs for all those involved in the teaching of moral character education.

*Should it be mainstreamed within existing modules or be a standalone?*

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One problem with mainstreaming important skills within existing programmes for professional development is that issues are often taken-for-granted. For that reason the suggestion is that it should be designed as a standalone with aspects of formative, summative and/evaluative tasks for students. It should be allocated its own space on the official school time-table and some persons should be held accountable.

*What would be the roles of the community?*

Community in this paper is perceived to include the following: school principals, teachers, parents, and, other members of the larger community. Of course every member of the community should render a voice on what should constitute moral character that is necessarily partly informed by the shared values and norms of a given community. Therefore the voices of various members of the community should and must be heard about what may constitute the content of such education. However, such community approach has to be informed by concerted community-based character-driven research.

*Should character education be made mandatory for all those who intend to teach?*

Character education for moral formation is as important as academic certification. This is because targeting the intellect while neglecting the moral may arguably lead to a very dangerous transmogrification of the individual into a societal menace. A well-educated irresponsible person is a menace to that society. Character education that targets moral formation has been noted in research to have encouraged enabling classrooms in which students are ready to learn, while teachers appear to perform their works within such classrooms with little or no stress (Boud, 1990; Friedman, 1995; Bebeau *et al.*, 1999; Narvaez, 2008). It is therefore necessary to make character education mandatory for all categories of students in teacher education institutes.

*Is there any need for legislation on character education?*

Absolutely yes! Various existing legislations that impact teacher education; students and teachers rights and responsibilities; and other education regulations suggest the imperativeness of some form of legislation in order to establish some clear guidelines.

### **Implications for research**

The issue of moral character is a very sensitive one. The suggestion here is that actions toward its formal introduction and teaching at any level of schooling must be fully backed by research-based evidence. At this preliminary stage, the following may be necessary: A community-based research to establish various voices of the community as a whole: the community's moral and values concerns; the roles community expects teachers to play with regards to education of children and teacher conduct; and the changes the community members may expect to see education bring in terms of the behaviours of its children.

Research may be required to establish what members of the community may want character education to address and how it should be addressed. Research is needed to establish the views and knowledge held by the classroom teachers and other teaching professionals on character education for moral formation. Data in this area is important as it will assist in decision and policy-making on professional development of the teachers in South Africa.

Perhaps, research is imperative in order to establish whether the contemporary South African teacher still sees him/herself as one whom society would constantly expect to behave better, and as a custodian of wisdom.

Perhaps research is also required to establish whether members of the society still place their trust in the teachers' ability to positively change behaviour.

Lastly, research may also be required to evaluate all categories of students' voices in order to ensure that a democratised approach to character education will be put in place.

### **Concluding remarks**

The issues raised in this paper are no idle ones. What may assist to improve the social and ethical demeanour of the teacher appears to be paramount for this author. Teacher education is designed to produce a unique type of person; one in whom the intellectual and character formation of the child is basically placed. A good teacher is more than just completing approved programme of study and obtaining academic qualifications. The aim of teacher education is not just to produce persons to feel

existing teaching positions in the classrooms. It also includes the training of persons who would assist children in a formal setting to become smarter and of good behaviour. Such children require moral character in order to behave in an ethically acceptable manner and to succeed in life. For teachers to succeed in such laborious task they require to learn some prescribed skills designed to enrich their abilities to deliver. The public holds schools and teachers accountable for societal demeanour. It is therefore thought that a policy-informed well-structured character education would culminate in the raising of the right calibre of teachers that may be responsive to societal needs. Individual researchers, research institutes, academic institutions, non-governmental organs, and relevant government departments are therefore invited to this clarion call.

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## The impact of feedback on the quality of assessment in a diverse schooling community

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**Abstract:** *One of the most crucial educational challenges requires educators to develop learners with critical, creative and conceptual minds. Put differently, the development of the learner's ability to solve increasingly complex problems in particular subjects as well as in daily life should be a central pre-occupation of the work in the classroom. This paper argues for teachers' deeper apprehension of the need for learning to progress towards specific levels of skill and understanding by using formative assessment and feedback as teaching tools. Formative assessment helps both teacher and learners to identify and understand the gaps between learners' actual and desired performances. The paper addresses how an enhanced understanding of the formative monitoring of learner progress, attention to cognitive domain considerations in the creation of formative assessment and the place of formative assessment in a larger educational system are able to meet the challenge of developing well-rounded and innovative learners. The focus in this paper is on the use of formative assessment practices: the value of effective questioning in eliciting evidence of understanding; the role of peer- and self-assessment; and how clear task- and assessment criteria can build in reflective thinking practices. Recognising the full range of learner achievement in a diverse teaching and learning community through constructive feedback allows learners to learn from the experience of the group. The motivational effect of such feedback, inspires learners to achieve their best. In this way the learner becomes a strategic and effective learner.*

**Keywords:** *formative assessment, feedback, motivation, prior knowledge, reflective thinking, peer- and self-assessment*

### Introduction

#### The impact of feedback on the quality of assessment in a diverse schooling community

One of the most crucial educational challenges requires educators to develop learners with critical, creative and conceptual minds. Put differently, the development of the learner's ability to solve increasingly complex problems in particular subjects as well as in daily life should be a central pre-occupation of the work in the classroom. There is a need for teachers to have a deeper apprehension of learning to progress towards specific levels of skill and understanding by using formative assessment and feedback as teaching tools. This paper addresses how an enhanced understanding of the formative monitoring of learner progress, attention to cognitive domain considerations in the creation of formative assessment and the place of formative assessment in a larger educational system are able to meet the challenge of developing well-rounded and innovative learners.

The focus in this paper is on the use of formative assessment practices: the value of effective questioning in eliciting evidence of understanding; the role of peer- and self-assessment; and how clear task- and assessment criteria can build in reflective thinking practices. Recognising the full range of learner achievement in a diverse teaching and learning community through constructive feedback allows learners to learn from the experience of the group. The motivational effect of such feedback, inspires learners to achieve their best. In this way the learner becomes a strategic and effective learner.

This paper draws on empirical research done between 2008 and 2010 (Booyse, 2010) and a literature review from 2008 to 2013 which aimed to find answers to what the impact of feedback is on the quality of assessment in a diverse schooling community.

The research considered that, in an educational system where teachers might not be well-prepared enough to deal with continuous mediation of learning, integrating teaching-learning-assessment as interrelated aspects of a single process will be challenging. The research also considered the impact of diverse schooling communities on how teaching and learning need to take place.



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### **Research design and process**

This qualitative study was situated mainly within the epistemological framework of social constructivist thinking which concern itself with the process of how people construct meaning (Pilling-Cormick & Garrison, 2007:18; Rossingh & Chambers, 2011:62) and understanding. Constructivism employs strategies which include problem/project-based learning, open-ended learning environments, flexible learning, and structured, authentic tasks (De Villiers, 2006:4).

The study included focus group discussions, open questions for a whole group discussion and a three-month project in classroom assessment (Booyse, 2010) to determine the impact of feedback on the quality of assessment. The design also included an inductive approach to construct meaning from the participants' views, feelings and even fears about assessment and assessment practices.

The population for the research was 287 practising teachers holding a 3-year diploma in education with a Relative Education Qualification Value (REQV) of 13. The teachers were enrolled on a part-time basis at a higher education institution to upgrade their qualification to a REQV 14 level (Loots, 2008).

The educational background of the participants is multi-dimensional in terms of culture, home-language, teaching-learning environment and social strata (McMillan and Schumacher, 2006). Although the reality of the 287 participants was multi-layered, they shared the interactive social experience of further study in a professional upgrading programme and had the same exposure to new knowledge. The participants were teaching at schools from deep rural contexts to urban communities with English as the language of instruction. They represented both working-class and middle-class environments.

### **The focus group discussions**

Four groups of 8, 8, 9 and 10 participants were asked to reflect on their experience of instructional design, planning, motivation, their understanding of assessment and the possible impact of the teaching-learning environment on assessment. The groups were requested to further elaborate on purposes for assessment, the integration of teaching and assessment, what influences their assessment practices and what their views are about the effectiveness of their assessment practices.

The researcher attended the sessions as an observer; a tutor led the discussion and a scribe made notes of the discussion, a strategy Nieuwenhuis (2007) refers to as "member checking". Having more than one other person to verify (member checking) the interpretation, observation and the decoding of data lessens the risk of the researcher becoming too subjectively involved and letting biases cloud the investigation.

The time spent in the focus group discussions required the researcher to listen with a "focused ear" to the respondent's views, and to establish general trends in assessment practices.

### **Whole group discussion on open questions**

The open questions in the whole group discussion were concept-based. The 287 participants first completed the question sheet individually, then had a peer discussion followed by a whole-group discussion session to compare views about the links between teaching, learning and assessment, the impact of social and environmental issues on assessment and the role of feedback in assessment practices. Altogether 271 participants submitted their discussion sheets to be included in the data collection and further research, which accounted for 94.5% of the whole group.

### **The research project on assessment**

As a final assessment task, the participants had to conduct a classroom assessment project. They had to reflect on the process of setting assessment tasks, a formative assessment process and the value of formative feedback in a teaching, learning and assessment practices.

The reporting on the project had to include the following three sections:

Section A: Evidence of the planning, preparation and conduct of formative assessment.

Section B: A descriptive report to contextualise the classroom assessment project; providing information about diversity in terms of language and culture in the particular teaching-learning environment.

Section C: A reflective, analytical report on the findings, and an overview of their own experience regarding knowledge gained and its impact on teaching, learning and assessment.

The participants wrote feedback on the work of the three learners who represented a learner who is not yet competent, one whose work shows evidence of competency and one whose work can be recognised as highly competent. The researcher wanted to find evidence in this step as to whether the participants could provide formative feedback that was useful, appropriate, constructive and related to the set criteria. The participants were also prompted to think about what oral feedback they might want to give the individual learners or the whole class, or what they might want to say to parents or the principal about the learners' work. In order to find how the learners experienced the assessment process, the participants were requested to ask the same three learners to write a comment on the assessment task, what their experience was when they did the task and what they wanted to say about the feedback they received.

### **Considering the role of prior knowledge of learners in a diverse community**

The diversity of the participants teaching and learning communities made it necessary to also consider the role of prior knowledge in constructing understanding and dealing with assessment. The emphasis on prior knowledge means that the teacher provides learners with a cognitive structure that they can use to make sense of new learning, which is in line with the social constructivist views of culturally and context responsive teaching and learning (Nieman and Monyai, 2006; Presseisen, 1990; Vygotsky, 1929, 1962, 1978; Wertsch, 1985, 1991). Social constructivists are of the opinion that learners synthesise new experiences into what they previously came to understand. In new learning situations, learners are confronted with new perceptions, concepts and data which they interpret in relation to a set of rules or existing understanding (prior knowledge) in order to generate or construct a new understanding. Attitudes, experiences and knowledge are also embedded in prior knowledge which may all be utilized by learners to construct meaning from new content in order to give proof of understanding in an assessment task.

Research by Christen and Murphy (1991) on "Enriching background knowledge" has demonstrated that activating prior knowledge increases comprehension. The study revealed that when readers lack the prior knowledge to read, three major instructional interventions need to be considered in order for these learners to successfully complete the task. The interventions include the teaching of vocabulary as a pre-reading step, providing experiences and introducing a conceptual framework that will enable the learners to build appropriate background for themselves. This study shows that for a learner to make sense of learning and assessment experiences, comprehension is a major factor and prior knowledge serves as a good foundation to and is an essential element in the quest for making meaning.

For assessment practice the findings in the research mentioned above has major implications, such as to establish the level of prior knowledge and considering language and culture backgrounds of learners to align assessment tasks accordingly (Henson, 2004). The challenge all teachers face is to determine what kind of questions to ask to establish the learners' level of understanding which will also reveal why learners have misconceptions and misunderstandings about particular concepts.

### **Research findings**

#### **Assessment is an organic part of teaching and learning**

The project findings showed evidence of the value of continuous, dynamic assessment where the interactive nature of teaching and learning is extended to the process of assessment without the expectation of the production of the 'correct answers' (Borich and Tombari (2004: 1, 43, 44). Participants were of the opinion that they could monitor the quality of the learning process through involving learners in a dialogue that established not only prior information, but also learner's current levels of performance, the acquisition of new information and the transformation, elaboration and organization of such newly acquired information. A conversational approach fits perfectly into Feierstein's (1990) explanation of a mediated learning experience. The participants found assessment became an organic part of teaching and learning, where the connections between assessment and learning encourage a holistic approach to the analysis of assessment and its impact on the teaching-learning process.

#### **Formative feedback feeds positive motivation**

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The focus group discussions brought evidence of the value of efforts to lead learners to self-determination (motivation) to take up challenges which previously seemed too challenging.

The findings from the research project revealed that the way in which knowledge is verbally negotiated and the assessment tasks approached in the classroom strengthens the substantial probability that learners will succeed. The higher the probability, the more motivated these learners seem to be to pursue the challenge ahead.

The participants explained that in many cases they feel “scared” and even “inferior” about assessment and feared their learners would feel demotivated in an assessment process. The search for a semantic connection between emotion about assessment and motivation (or demotivation) led to the explanation that Myers (2004: 500) relies on in his paper, “Theories of Emotion”. Myers refers to the fact that the English word “emotion” derives from the French word *émouvoir*, which in turn is based on the Latin *emovere*, where *e-* (variant of *ex-*) means “out” and *movere* means “move”. The most interesting aspect of the explanation is that “motivation” is also derived from the word *movere*. Some positive motivations to “move” the learner towards deeper understanding and improved performance appear to include formative feedback and a supportive, conducive teaching-learning environment in which learners learn to deal with multi-dimensional contexts and feel safe enough to risk making educated guesses and venture to find new meanings.

The findings from the research project supported Bruner’s (1966) proposal that encouraging (motivating) learners to discover principles, might drive the success of teaching and learning, and will result in good performance. The participants stated that the more constructively they structured the content, involving the learners in thinking, discussing and explaining their understanding of the content and the expected outcomes of an assessment task, the more encouraged the learners were to participate in a learning experience involving assessment tasks and solving problems.

The findings from the research project brought evidence that a more motivated learner shows more persistence in the effort to complete an assessment task successfully, which of course leads to enhanced cognitive processing of subject content and concepts. Some participants reported that the learners in the class seemed “more energetic” and “willing” to get involved in the classroom activities and in the preparation for assessment tasks. There was even mention of learners who started learning and information sharing groups. The participants claimed that where they link feedback to the outcomes set, the assessment task and to recognising the full range of achievements in their interactions with the learners, the feedback became truly formative and carried a motivational effect which encouraged learners to achieve their best, which in turn, strengthened the mediation process of assessment. The participants also reported that although either a numeric or alphabetic mark may be awarded to the answer to the assessment task, the reasons for awarding a particular mark guided further improvement.

### **Feedback positively impacts on performance of under-achievers**

Many of the participants reported that improved formative assessment supported the learners who had experienced difficulties and had not performed well in the past. The participants also reported that the more formative feedback these learners received, the more improvement was evident. This confirms the assumption that frequent assessment feedback helps both performers and under-achievers (under-performers) to enhance their learning.

That the under-achievers benefitted from the feedback appeared to be significant especially as under-attainment usually leads to disruptive behaviour or the likelihood that these learners will leave school without adequate qualifications. Such underachieving learners are likely to be alienated from society as well and to become the sources, or the victims, of serious social problems. Most often, as the focus group discussions revealed, learners who encounter difficulties and poor results are led to believe that they lack ability, and this belief leads them to attribute their difficulties to a defect in themselves, about which they believe they cannot do a great deal. So they rather avoid investing effort in learning which could only lead to disappointment, and try to build up their self-esteem in other ways. Whilst the high-achievers can do well in an unsupportive classroom culture, the overall result is to increase the frequency and the extent of under-achievement. Formative assessment can be a powerful method here if it is communicated in the right way. Whilst it can help all learners, it gives particularly good results with under-performers, where it concentrates on specific problems with their work, and gives them both a clear understanding of what have not yet mastered and which achievable targets they can aim for. Learners can accept and work with such messages, provided that they are not clouded by overtones about ability, competition and comparison with others.



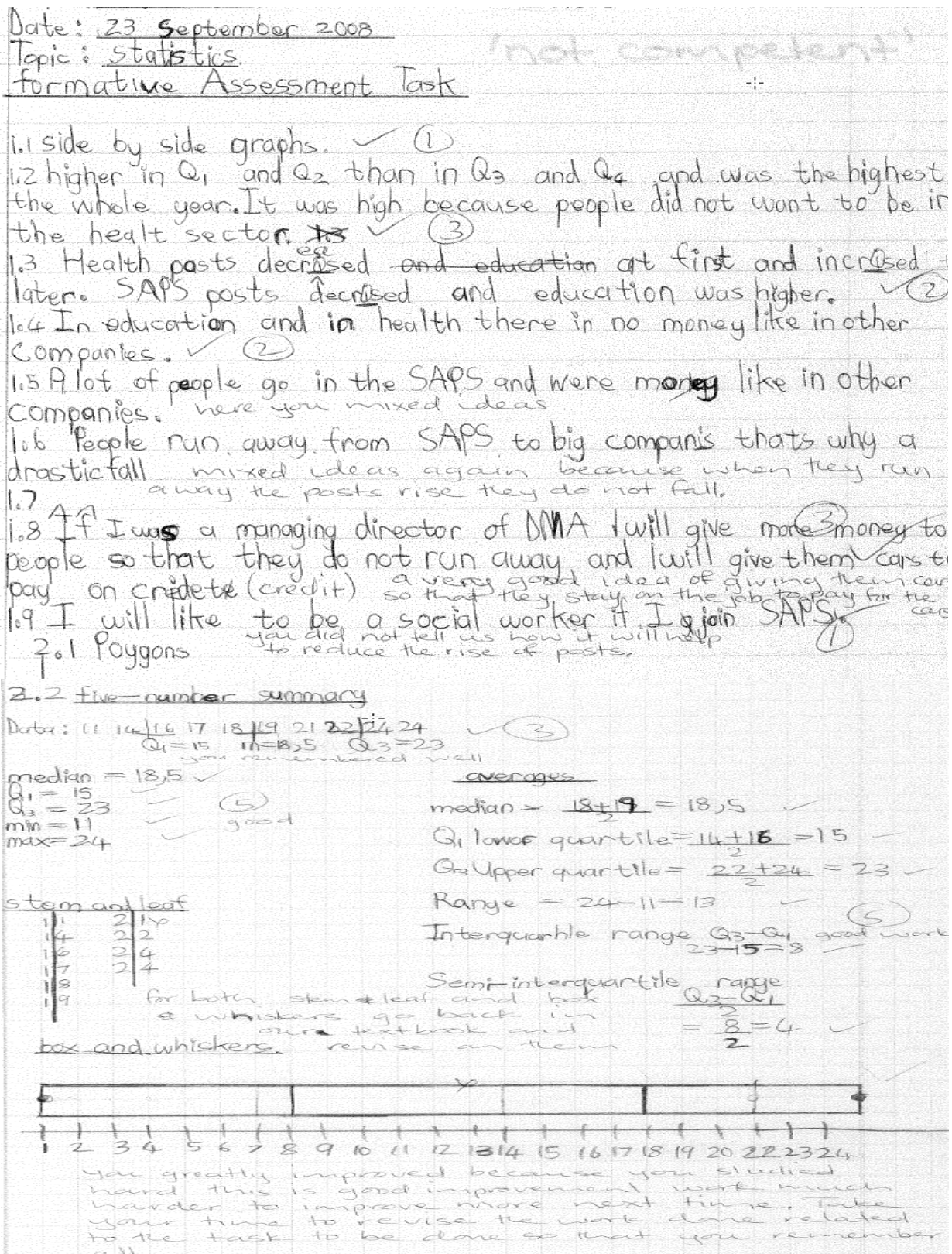


Figure 1: Teacher's feedback on assessment task

The feedback to the learner above in Figure 1 related to the particular qualities of his or her work, with advice on what he or she can do to improve. The feedback is linked to specific activities as required in the assessment criteria.

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### **Peer- and self-assessment enhances the ability to value own work**

It was clearly evident from both the focus group discussions and the reporting on the project that for formative assessment to be productive, learners should be guided to allow peer-assessment and do self-assessment so that they can understand the main purposes of their learning and thereby grasp what they need to do to achieve. To develop the ability to engage in self-reflection and for learners to be able to identify the next step in their learning, deepen the ability to seek out and gain new skills, new knowledge and new understandings are needed. Teachers can equip learners with the desire and the capacity to take charge of their learning through developing the skill of self-assessment. Commencing with the assessment process by including an explanation and giving reasons for instance why certain tasks are important and talk about links and goals will encourage learners to get involved in self-assessment. In this sense self-reflection is encouraged by mediation and will result in willingness to engage with the assessment task. A good comprehension of set criteria, the knowledge of how to apply a particular set of outcomes in answering questions and being able to value one's own work, develop learners' capacity for self-assessment so that they can become reflective and self-managing.

Some of the participants teaching younger learners mentioned in the reporting on the research project that they made use of the "traffic-lighting"-method where learners assigned red, amber or green to a piece of work, according to the degree in which the learners did or did not understand the task or work, or to indicate where they found it to be valuable. The participants also reported that through the practice of peer assessment, learners were more likely to challenge each other's judgements of their work. This sparked further discussion and debate, which in turn enhanced the possibility of formative feedback and the improvement of planning for the next level of learning.

### **Formative feedback enhances the learners' ability to reflect**

The fact that learners had to reflect on and provide feedback on their experience in and of the assessment reminds one of Vygotskian views (1982, 1987) regarding the ability to express ideas and views, mediation and the importance of language. The emphasis was on the learner as an active "maker of meanings" in learning and through assessment and for the teacher to enter into a dialogue with the learner, in an attempt to understand the meaning that the learners attached to the material they were learning and being assessed on.

However, there is a further dimension of application, namely that the learner developed self- and peer-assessment capability, which is inevitably part of a formative assessment practice. The main problem with learners who lack the ability to assess themselves or to attach value to completed activities, appears to be not the problem of reliability and trustworthiness, but rather a lack of understanding of the worth (value) of work in relation to set criteria. Learners can only assess themselves when they have a sufficiently clear picture of the targets that their learning is meant to attain. Surprisingly, many learners seem not to have clarity on expectations and appear to have become accustomed to receiving classroom teaching as an arbitrary sequence of exercises without an overarching rationale. When learners do acquire such ability to reflect and attach value, they become more committed and more effective as learners. Their own assessments become an object of discussion with their teachers and with one another, and this further promotes the idea that reflection is essential to good learning and understanding what is expected in an assessment task.



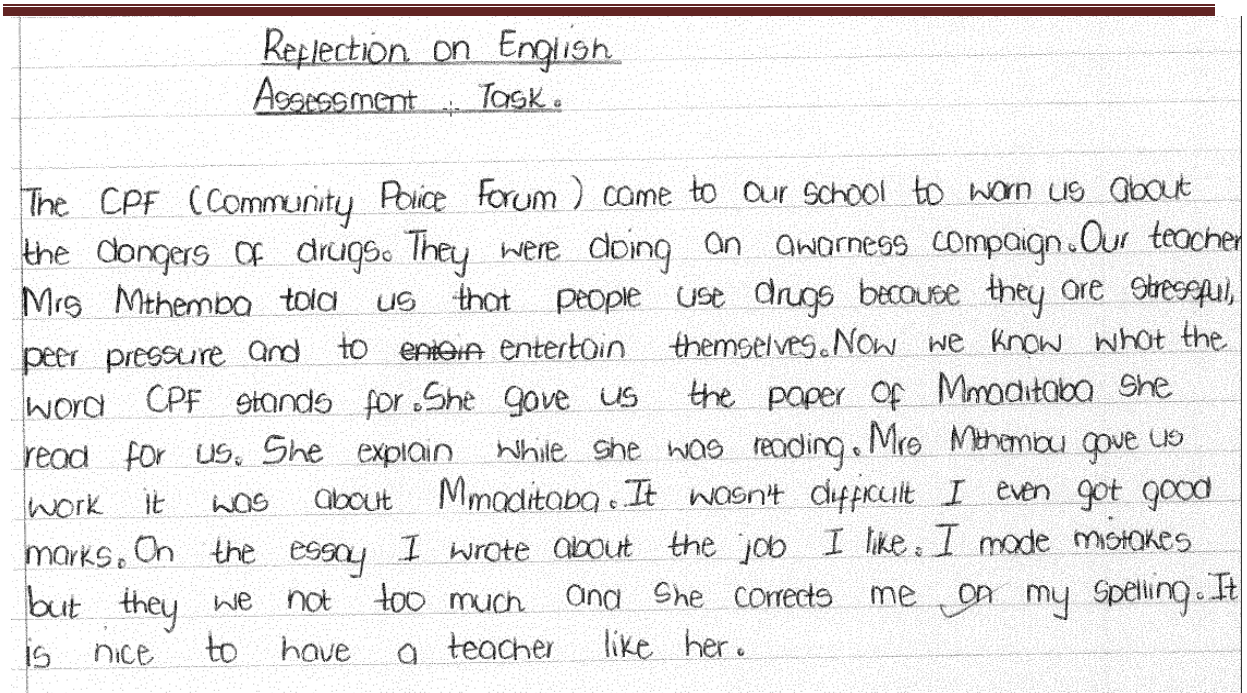


Figure 2: Learner feedback on English task

Learners had the opportunity to reflect on the task, the teaching done, the reaction of the teacher in the class, their experience of the assessment process and the assessment task. The learner's feedback in Figure 2 above also referred to the value of application found in the assessment task – an aspect which many learners stated was important for them. The learner expressed in the last sentence also the emotion towards the teacher – an aspect which also appeared as reflection from the participants in the focus group discussion.

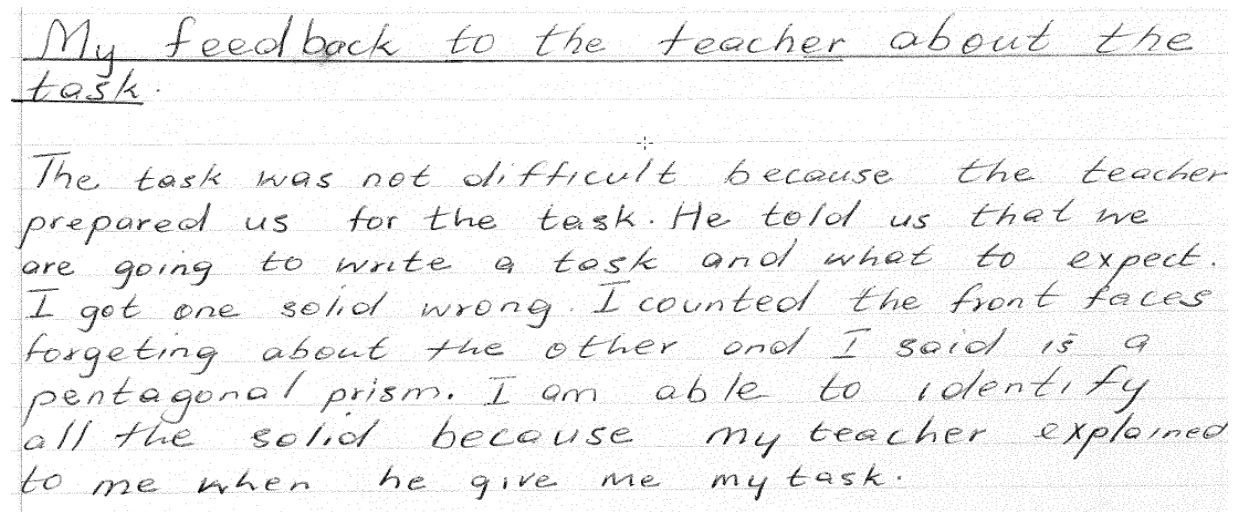


Figure 3: Learner feedback on Mathematics task

Learners have to be able to question their understanding and compare their version of the truth with that of the teacher and fellow learners in order to arrive at a new level of understanding (Henson, 2004: 15). Scardamalia and Bereiter (2003: 5) argue persuasively that the task-learner-teacher interaction is a process of knowledge-building and encompasses foundational learning and socio-cognitive dynamics. In particular, the interaction involves making collective inquiry into a specific topic, and may therefore lead to deeper understanding. It is clear that realising and identifying new goals are essential parts of the learning process.

Learner's Feedback

Sambelisiwe

I really enjoy this activity working with money. Everything was clear and I can be able to answer what is needed through my understanding.

Happiness

The questions were clear and easy and easy to answer. I can solve more activity now for money problem. I have learn how to save money or make money. One day I can have my own Shop.

Sandile Nkasi

The exercise was nice because it taught me to work with number. The questions were challenging and the questions made us be able to solve problem. I really enjoyed the exercise. I learnt how to use money wisely especially number 9. The skills I learnt were maths and money skills. I believe that in the future I can be a business man because of what I learnt.

### Feedback from learners on money activity

What is evident from the examples above is that the learners want to learn – therefore the feedback on their efforts shows in some instances a desired goal that they want to achieve; there is evidence about their present position, and some understanding that more is required of them than their current level of understanding. Significantly, some learners realized that there is still a gap between their current understanding and what is actually required from them as mentioned in the learner's feedback in Figure 3 regarding the experiences in the Mathematics task.

### Formative feedback enhances the teachers' ability to reflect on and review assessment

Outcome 5 (see Table 1 below) of the assessment criteria for the research project required evidence of reflection on the teaching, learning and assessment process. The levels indicated in this particular outcome were used to determine whether the participants understood the notion of "reflection" and especially whether the ability to reflect had had an impact on the teaching, learning and assessment process, and especially on the ability to give formative feedback. The depth of reflection is related to the levels of performance. Basic reflection is linked to 50-58% application, analytic reflection is linked to 60-80% application and insightful, innovative reflection is linked to 85-100% application. The research showed that there is a link between a lack of reflection on the teaching, learning and assessment process and the inability to compile a good assessment task or give formative feedback. This means that the level of reflection has a direct link to the kind of feedback given to the learner and whether the feedback can be considered as "feeding forward" in new teaching, learning and assessment practices. An inability to reflect also impacts on assessment practices and the identification of strengths or weaknesses in the teaching-learning-assessment process (Booyse, 2010).

**Table 1: Outcome 5 - Reflective report: Able to review, reflect on and evaluate the assessment process (Total marks: 30)**

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
1 - 14 marks	15 -17 marks	18 - 24 marks	25 – 30 marks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Repeats description but no reflection and analysis.</li> <li>- Confused understanding of course concepts such as fairness, characteristics of good assessment tasks, formative assessment</li> <li>- Not able to review strengths and weaknesses of task or assessment process</li> <li>- Cannot suggest improvements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Basic reflection on and analysis of task and assessment process</li> <li>- Correct understanding of course concepts, especially formative assessment</li> <li>- Able to outline some strengths and weaknesses of the task and process in relation to its context</li> <li>- The task and process are described with reference to the course concepts</li> <li>- Ideas in the different sections of the report relate to each other in some way</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Depth of reflection in review and analysis of task and process</li> <li>- Comprehensive understanding of course concepts</li> <li>- Review is done with appropriate reference to course concepts, particularly from Black</li> <li>- Integrates concepts with the analysis, reflecting an understanding of the relationship between theory and practice</li> <li>- Analytical and evaluative comments are backed up with evidence</li> </ul>	<p>In addition to level 3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Presents valuable insights into assessment tasks and processes</li> <li>- Has used course readings to generate good assessment practice</li> <li>- Has excellent insight in formative assessment conducted constructively</li> </ul>

The participants who performed well in the research project (see Table 1, Levels 3 and 4) mentioned that they became able to analyse the teaching, learning and assessment process and use feedback to guide planning for new assessment processes. Some participants also confirmed that the interrelatedness of teaching and assessment results in better learner performance and a deeper level of understanding. In all instances, the level and nature of the constructive feedback was pivotal in the teaching-learning-assessment relation.

### Concluding remarks

Assessment that encourages learning fosters motivation by emphasising progress and achievement rather than failure. The research findings indicate clearly that by giving constructive feedback, teachers can use assessment to create a stimulating environment that encourages learners to learn, while guiding the learner's progress to his/her own understanding of new concepts and content. This is possible when learners are given credit for what they can do, rather than being penalised for what they have not mastered yet.

In order to use formative feedback effectively, the assessment associated with it should not be seen as more frequent testing or as an informal assessment which limits the purpose of improving learning. Formative feedback should be seen as a process in which information regarding learning is central and used to modify the teacher's as well as the learner's understanding of how and on what level learning took place. Therefore, feedback needs to be specific, immediate and personally addressed to the learner as an individual. Teachers should pinpoint the learner's strengths, be clear and constructive about any weaknesses and about how these might be addressed in order to provide opportunities for learners to improve upon their work.

It may well take several feedback cycles to register an impact. The feedback should therefore be continuous and automatic to ensure a quicker impact on the teaching-learning situation. Feedback may take on different forms of which moving about the room and using a conversational approach, may well be needed to strengthen the understanding of written feedback.

The developmental nature of formative feedback seems to be corrective by design, in that teacher and learner can note what is completed successfully and correctly, but also be able to note what is still

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lacking in order to be able to complete the task successfully. Any improvement, however small, could direct and encourage all learners, no matter what level or stage of the learning cycle they are at.

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