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The experiences of teacher educators managing teaching and learning during times of crises at one initial teacher education provider in South Africa

Abstract

As a response to the exponential increase in COVID-19 cases, the South African government implemented the closure of schools and many universities in March 2020, with some universities operating under partial lockdown conditions. In this context of closure and lockdown, many universities have shifted to forms of virtual and online learning. Teacher education programmes were no exception, with many teacher educators having to transform their teaching under COVID restrictions to prepare future teachers. This article presents a snapshot of how teacher educators responded to the COVID-19 crisis between 2020 and 2021, and the implications of what has been deemed "emergency remote modes" of teaching for the future of higher education pedagogy. We look specifically at the effect of COVID-19 on teacher educators' sense of self and wellbeing at one institution in South Africa. These teacher educators teach on the Bachelor of Education Foundation Phase programme. We examine the way in which teacher educators in a university setting supported the learning needs of student teachers as they develop their skills and pedagogic approaches. This qualitative study included interviews with eight purposively sampled foundation phase teacher educators. Several themes emerged from the semi structured interviews. These include the implications of the pandemic on teacher educator pedagogy, the effects on teacher educator wellbeing, and the institutional context of education, including support mechanisms. Teacher educators highlighted possible solutions for the future and how institutions could best adapt its primary objective of teaching and learning during times of crises and disruptions.

Keywords: *COVID-19; crisis; learning; South Africa; teacher educators; teaching.*

1. Introduction

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in South Africa, and elsewhere, had to adapt and adjust their programme delivery at the onset of the pandemic to accommodate pandemic protocols of social distancing and the prohibition of large gatherings. HEIs needed to be innovative in the manner in

which they delivered content, how they would manage practical elements of programmes as well as how students are assessed (Hedding *et al.,* 2020).

This shift presented multiple challenges to academic staff in higher education, particularly those with little or no experience around the pedagogy or delivery of what is known as "emergency remote modes" of teaching and learning (Rapanta *et al.,* 2020). This rapid shift in the delivery of higher education courses and programmes, including those with a strong practical component such as initial teacher education, raises serious questions about the needs of lecturers, their socio-emotional needs, their relationships with students and their ability to deliver practical based learning which is key to initial teacher preparation and equity in access and achievement (UNESCO, 2020). These non-traditional methods of teaching and learning have resulted in increased anxiety for teacher educators and the students that they teach. The anxieties are more evident in contexts where these cohorts have home environments unsuitable for teaching and learning, which includes limited access to technology and the internet (Ali, 2020; Bao, 2020; Lischer, Safi & Dickson, 2021; Zhang *et al.,* 2020). In particular, academic staff struggled to manage multiple demands associated with the new methods of teaching and learning and often found it difficult to establish an acceptable work-life balance (Rapanta *et al.,* 2020).

In the context of closure and lockdowns, this paper critically examines how teacher educators responded to the COVID-19 crisis between 2020 and 2021 and the implications of "emergency remote modes" of teaching for the future of higher education pedagogy. We look specifically at the impact of COVID-19 on teacher educators' sense of self and wellbeing at one institution in South Africa preparing foundation phase student teachers. We examine the way in which teacher educators at a university supported the learning needs of student teachers and their pedagogic approaches. This is important as teacher educators are key frontline agents responsible for initial teacher education (ITE) programmes and for producing good quality teachers. Drawing on de Sousa Santo's theory of "absences" (2018), we seek to investigate what becomes manifest, rendered invisible and sublimated in initial teacher education in a crisis.

2. Literature review and framework

After the World Health Organization's declaration of a global pandemic, South Africa, as was the case in most countries, a national state of emergency was declared in March 2020 that resulted in a countrywide lockdown. This meant that all citizens, businesses as well as education institutions follow strict emergency protocol. More specifically, schools and institutions of higher education close immediately for extended periods, necessitating alternative ways of ensuring access to education (Landa, Zhou & Marongwe, 2021).

Education in emergencies, as in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, generally relies on basic technological access (Landa *et al.*, 2021) that posed significant challenges for higher education institutions (HEIs) in the context of initial teacher education (ITE) and inhibited teacher educators from physically observing pre-service teachers' lessons on school placement (Grádaigh *et al.,* 2021).

In response, teacher educators had to prepare and deliver their classes from home (Hodges *et al.,* 2020), with the support of various learning management systems (LMSs), course management systems (CMSs) and virtual learning environments, depending on the requirements of their institutions (Landa *et al.*, 2021). This also meant that teacher educators

had to act as constructors and actors and had to design the tasks, environments and resources that help students learn (Rapanta *et al*., 2020). Furthermore, they had to consider the modality, pacing, student-instructor ratio, pedagogy, online instructor role, online student role, online communication synchrony, role of online assessments, source of feedback of their programmes and the delivery of their courses all within a social justice framework (Hodges *et al*., 2020).

Teaching and learning is an exchange of knowledge, thus research on teachers has been driven by the assumption that knowledge is at the heart of their professional competence (Kleickmann *et al.,* 2012; Hoy, Davis & Pape, 2016; Shulman, 1986). Sayed *et al.* (2018: 9) suggest that, while the idea of knowledge sets help to understand the conceptual framing of ITE programmes, in the end, it is how this translates into programme designs that determine their usefulness. Nonetheless, online teaching and learning implies a certain pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), an ability to navigate online technologies (Rapanta *et al*., 2020) and hybrid modalities for teaching and learning (UNESCO, 2020). Institutions and staff faced practical and technical challenges in implementing online learning and struggled with technical support (Hodges *et al*., 2020), so institutions and staff frequently retained a focus on old procedures (Dhawan, 2020). Hodges *et al.* (2020) suggest that, although moving instruction online can enable flexibility for teaching and learning anywhere and at any time, the speed with which this move occurred under COVID-19, coupled with technical problems, such as installation and login problems, proved daunting (Dhawan, 2020). Under COVID-19, this included challenges relating to: a lack of electricity, infrastructure, connectivity, devices and technology; a lack of learning materials and curriculum; and a lack of professional development and teacher training (eLearning Africa, 2020).

Mpungose (2020) contends that, as access to online teaching and learning platforms and resources for students from poor, rural communities in South Africa is challenging, gross inequalities abound in educational outcomes for learners from different socio-economic backgrounds in relation to online teaching. Similarly, Cutri, Mena and Whiting (2020) suggest that equitable access to online learning and managing the demands of scholarship, university-based and academic community service duties are in need of attention. In addition, according to Dhawan (2020), clear stipulation by government in educational policies about e-learning programmes, standards for quality, quality control, development of e-resources and e-content delivery are largely absent.

Uninterrupted periods of digital use can have positive and negative effects on the well-being, productivity and social interactions of others (Strydom *et al.,* 2020). Rapanta *et al.* (2020) highlight that several universities' faculties and staff have struggled with workload, teaching and work-life balance due to the above challenges. A recent survey on the *"Verge of Burnout: Covid-19's impact on faulty well-being and career plans"* conducted by The Chronicle of Higher Education (2020) found that faculty members reported elevated levels of frustration, anxiety and stress; difficulty managing increased workload; and a deterioration of work-life balance during the pandemic. This was particularly evident amongst female faculty members. Some faculty members even considered retiring or changing careers, with certain faculty members more likely to retire than others (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2020). In particular, Van Niekerk and Van Gent (2020) found that 27.6% of the staff members in their study reported psychological distress during lockdown.

Bartusevičienė, Pazaver and Kitada (2021) argue that, despite these disruptions, universities have had to preserve their mission to educate young people. The results of their study suggest that, to ensure academic continuity and build resilience, a university should develop anticipation, coping and adaptation capabilities and act on lessons learned. Their findings reveal that the capability of a university coping with unexpected challenges shows the potential of a university to be resilient. Similarly, Nandy, Lodh and Tang (2020) recommend that higher institutions employ an all-inclusive resilience model at the beginning of the recovery period to withstand the shock of the pandemic and demonstrate how an HEI can apply an "antifragile" model for the betterment of experiences of individuals associated with it. This is particularly crucial in a context such as South Africa where crises and disruptions are consistent in their occurrence and often interlock.

The work of de Sousa Santos (2018) anchors this present study. His sociology of emergences and absences enables researchers to examine what becomes manifest and what is rendered marginal or invisible during this pandemic. In particular, attention is directed to understanding what is actively produced as well as what is non-existent, revealing how ideologically driven alternatives are formulated (*cf.* Klein and the shock doctrine). De Sousa Santos' work uses what he refers to as the five logics or modes of production of non-existence. In particular, we are interested in his first logic, the monoculture of knowledge, where all that is not recognised or legitimated is perceived as non-existent, stemming from ignorance or a lack of culture, his fourth logic, the monoculture of the universal and the global that refers to embedded structures of power and privilege, and his fifth logic, the monoculture of criteria of capitalist productivity and efficiency. This logic, drawing on privileges growing through market forces, applies to nature and human labour. Non-existence in this logic is produced in the form of non-productiveness such as discardable populations, professional disqualifications and a lack of skills (de Sousa Santos, 2018: 239).

3. Methodology

This study provides a snapshot of how teacher educators have responded to the COVID-19 crisis and how their approaches to this crisis will shape their future work. The research was driven by the following research questions: 1) What is the impact of COVID-19 on teacher educators' sense of self, wellbeing and teaching? 2) What support was provided by and to teacher educators at the university during times of crisis? 3) What are the future implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on the foundation phase programme?

The sample consisted of eight foundation phase teacher educators, seven females and one male (ages ranging between 29–63, mean age of 46.37), purposively selected on the basis of the researchers' judgement and respondents representativeness (Babbie, 2016), from one initial teacher education provider in South Africa. The lecturing experience of the eight teacher educators ranged from one year to 28 years and lecturing in foundation phase ranged from one year to 25. In addition, several of the teacher educators lecture across foundation and intermediate phases.

We conducted virtual in-depth semi-structured interviews posing questions that address how teacher educators have responded to the COVID-19 crisis and how the crisis impacts their future work. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the teacher educators' sense of self, wellbeing and teaching were also addressed. Questions were based on the teacher educator's experiences of teaching, student learning and institutional support during the pandemic.

As a qualitative endeavour, data analysis included immersion followed by searching for, reviewing and defining themes (*cf.* Braun & Clarke, 2006). Several themes emerged of which five are illuminated in this paper. These are teacher educator pedagogy; the sociality of teaching and learning; equity and pedagogy; effects of the pandemic on teacher educators' wellbeing; and institution and context.

4. Results

Findings revealed several interrelated themes regarding teacher educator preparedness to deal with conflict and crisis. Themes relate to how the context and institutional rules and regulations shaped their pedagogic response to the pandemic, their sense of wellbeing during the pandemic, and the pedagogic enactment they were able to realise in the context of the pandemic.

4.1 Theme 1: Teacher educator pedagogy

The first emergent theme relates to the pedagogy of teaching. This challenge affected teacher educators and the delivery of the pedagogy of teaching. Three sub-themes characterised the visible and the non-existent in pedagogy forms of teacher educators: strategies to deliver the teaching practicum component of the ITE programme; the sociality of teaching and learning and equity and pedagogy.

4.1.1 Strategies to deliver the teaching practicum component of the ITE programme

Teacher educators faced several challenges with strategies for delivering the teaching practicum component of the ITE programme and preparing teachers for the profession. Practicum requires a physical location and a placement in time and space to assess the preparedness of prospective teachers and their abilities to render visible their learning from the programme, but lockdown made this difficult, if not impossible. What emerged is a sense of loss and a sense of the absence of the practical. As one teacher educator noted,

> training teachers is something that is very practical. You can give them all the theory you want, but unless you teach, you're not a teacher – you cannot teach without practical knowledge (Lecturer 1, Foundation Phase, University of Technology, UOT).

This sense of learning to teach as inherently and fundamentally requiring practise was a recurrent theme, with several teacher educators insisting that certain subjects they teach are "more practical" and that students "should be in a classroom getting experience". One teacher educator expressed that the pandemic affected their subject "massively" arguing,

> I couldn't do what I wanted to do. I've got a practical subject. I need to be with my students. I need to correct them if they do something incorrectly (Lecturer 2, Foundation Phase and Intermediate Phase, UOT).

The loss of the practical becomes, in the words of an educator, a "disembodiment" and the non-existence of the physicality of presence of the teacher educator and the student teachers as the teaching practicum relationship prohibits them "from being there in person. Especially from the practical, with the practical components". The acknowledgement of the lack of the practical placement saw a flurry of different approaches for online teaching and learning: from student teachers required to model the practicum in a virtual space, to developing pedagogic responses to scenarios set by the lecturer. Typical alternatives included the following:

> For practicum, what I was doing was things like how you would prepare a lesson plan, and how would you structure it. [Student teachers had to] work around analysing where the students had to interview a learner and they had to look at the learner's answers (Lecturer 3, Foundation Phase, UOT).

The range of responses to the delivery of the teaching practicum by teacher educators reveals not only diversity (Mutton, 2020) but also the absence of a shared, common discourse of alternatives to delivering the key component of initial teacher education during times of crisis. Further to this, there is an overwhelming sense that the practicum requires physical, spatial and temporal embodiment, as this defines the nature of the activity of teaching and that social interaction plays an important role in learning (Okita, 2012). It is thus "absence" that the pandemic most reveals and for which the institutions found themselves unprepared and underprepared.

4.1.2 The sociality of teaching and learning

The lack of face-to-face interaction and practicum time and space carried over for most teacher educators into their teaching, noting a non-existent and non-credible alternative to what previously existed (de Sousa Santos, 2018). Researchers, such as Okita (2012) as well as Rizvi *et al.* (2020) contend that the pandemic displaced and rendered marginal the relational element and the "sociality of pedagogy". Learning and knowledge engagement, as discursive engagement in time and space, was difficult for most teacher educators to realise as the following excerpts reveal:

> I couldn't get that level of interaction [with online classes] … I am still locked into the idea that we are social beings, we need to interact, we need collaboration, we need to be talking (Lecturer 3, Foundation Phase, UOT).

> You cannot throw away the face-to-face training because that is where you motivate the ones that are falling behind (Lecturer 4, Foundation Phase, UOT).

> I'm still part of the old school where I believe face-to-face interaction is really, really important – especially in the foundation phase and especially with the little ones – because, when we are teaching, they need to see our mouth, they need to see our interactions and sounds (Lecturer 5, Foundation Phase, UOT).

The self-deprecating description of "knowledge of the past", of being "old school", and not "throwing way face-to-face" reveals what de Sousa Santos calls the *monoculture of linear time* with the sociality of learning rendered as "backward" (pre-modern, under-developed) and online learning as "forward" (de Sousa Santos, 2018: 238–239). The pandemic and the mainly "emergency mode" of teaching is rendered universal and general, making what is key to learning specific and marginal. This dialectic of rendering a particular pedagogy as "past" and "local", and the present, which is driven by exigent circumstances as "global" and "universal", share ways in which, post-pandemic, the specific becomes the new norm. In so norming, the particularity is stripped of its specificity and granted a universal in the same way that the idea of "Northern knowledge" as modern and "Southern knowledge" as backwards suffuses approaches to decolonisation.

In the pandemic, the relationality of pedagogy was mediated by the flourishing of approaches called blended, mixed, hybrid and multi-modal. The following quote from a teacher educator articulates the bridging of teaching and learning approaches:

> I think the blend of having things like, these things, like being able to go over the notes and having the lecturer explain -I would make slides and the voice-over, and then I would say to the one half of the class this week you don't come, and the other half – you come. And then sit with them and probe them and talk to them and say, okay, now what is going on here? (Lecturer 3, Foundation Phase, UOT).

On the one hand, data reveal teacher educators feeling a sense of loss and seeing face-to-face learning as important given the sociality of pedagogy. In contrast are those positing a bridge between virtual pedagogies and face-to-face learning. Whatever the approach, the ideas of communication, discursive engagement (Dios & Charlo, 2021) and social interaction are valued by teacher educators in relation to student learning (Hurst, Wallace & Nixon, 2013).

4.1.3 Equity and pedagogy

The shift to pedagogy or delivery of online learning revealed inequities in physical and epistemic access and achievement (UNESCO, 2020). Teacher educators reported difficulty being fully inclusive in their pedagogy due to inequities in access to technologies and resources:

> We also have, socio-economically, a massive variation. So, there were some students that had things at home that were able to log in, up they go and off we go. And there were equally if not more, those who literally ... were trying to do the assignment and trying to take pictures and send it to you (Lecturer 3, Foundation Phase, UOT).

> In terms of equity, I think that is very difficult, and I think this thing has just exacerbated it, definitely, between universities that have and universities that have not, and the schools haves and have nots (Lecturer 6, Foundation Phase, UOT).

> I tried the best that I could and once again, the unfairness came through because those students at home who had Wi-Fi, who were living like that, it was okay, and then the other half, so I tried to take that into consideration … with assessments, I would give them extra time, and also struggling because … there wasn't a library, they couldn't access the library to find information and those at home who had Wi-Fi could go onto the internet and the others struggled … for research and for different purposes (Lecturer 6, Foundation Phase, UOT).

Inequities are largely a result of resources that reflected bifurcated education systems in general, and inequities in higher education, in particular (see Motala, Vally & Maharajh, 2016). This inability of student teachers to navigate teaching and learning in an online setting, as noted by teacher educators, speaks to the monoculture of the criteria of capitalist productivity and efficiency (de Sousa Santos, 2018) in which those whose structural positioning in society render them marginal are then blamed for not keeping up. To mitigate these inequities, teacher educators sought to provide the necessary support and resources as acts of individual volition, as noted in the following excerpt:

> I gave every student data, I bought phones for them, just to eliminate the excuses. And they would be too ashamed to come to class because ... and I said: I'm watching you. I gave you data now so what is the complaint now? purposes (Lecturer 1, Foundation Phase, UOT).

Despite concerns of student teacher welfare and mitigating inequities in access, there is, as de Sousa Santos (2018) suggests, a blaming of the individual and not the system or the structures. The failure of the monoculture of capitalist efficiency, in this instance, becomes a failure of the individual.

According to teacher educators, mitigating inequities of physical access to resources that promote learning also entailed finding low-tech, asynchronous forms of virtual learning such as WhatsApp as noted in the following excerpt:

> So, when I started with the WhatsApp, I did that because I thought that would be the cheapest and they had the data. So, we started with that, then they said to me no, please, other lecturers are moving to the Blackboard Collaborate, can you go to that? So, I went to the Blackboard Collaborate, I put the PowerPoints – so, if you opened up Blackboard, everything that I was doing was there ... On top of that, because some couldn't get into Blackboard, I then loaded that also onto WhatsApp (Lecturer 3, Foundation Phase, UOT).

It is apparent from teacher educator responses that online teaching and learning platforms and the lack of resources bring inequalities into educational outcomes for students from different socio-economic backgrounds (Mpungose, 2020). According to the monoculture of criteria of capitalist productivity and efficiency (de Sousa Santos, 2018), this is the "have" and "have nots" or varying "privileges" between students that either promote or prevent students from accessing learning during a time of crisis and disruption. COVID-19 has exacerbated that which already existed but was "non-existent".

The temporality of the pedagogic response during the pandemic was accompanied by a futuristic view of pedagogy of the "new normal", the "different normal" as reflected by teacher educators. The data suggests that all teacher educators felt that, whilst the practical and the practicum is unlikely to be virtual or simulated in future, much of what would count as learning would be "e-learning" and "blending with more technology in the classroom, using it as a teaching aid".

Teacher educators who were most open to the possibility of new ways of teaching and learning also confirm much loss of learning, making up, and filling in gaps. The following excerpt succinctly captures this idea:

> I think when and if we do get back, it's going to be a time that we have to catch up everything. There is going to be such gaps that are going to have to be filled. So, there is going to be a lot of work and a lot of, I don't know, if the students are going to be able to cope because it's not just my subject, it's a whole lot of subjects so I think they are going to be overwhelmed (Lecturer 5, Foundation Phase, UOT).

The idea of learning loss infuses much of the discussion surrounding the pandemic (Burgess & Sievertsen, 2020; Niazi, 2021). Yet the real loss is, as this educator notes,

> we really need to just prepare them and give them our skills that they can use when it comes to online teaching and learning and also how to stress with their own or how to deal with their own stress when another pandemic hits us (Lecturer 7, Foundation Phase, UOT).

De Sousa Santos' (2018) monoculture of linear time points to the old struggle with the new in which the notion of curriculum loss is not extended to issues of the affective and the psychosocial. Eloff (2021) notes that the crisis pedagogically requires adaptation and modifications but to the affective, as the educators point out.

4.2 Theme 2: Effects of the pandemic on teacher educators' wellbeing

The disruptive nature of the pandemic resulted in many academic staff reporting high levels of frustration, anxiety and stress (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2020; Van Niekerk & Van Gent, 2020). The PWC (2020) reports that, although we have all been impacted socially, culturally, psychologically, emotionally and financially, teachers, in particular, have faced uncertainty in navigating the demands for learner support, their own wellbeing, and their multiple roles as family members and carers in a context of tremendous adjustment to new modalities of pedagogic delivery in diverse and unequal contexts impacting resource availability and diverse technologies for themselves and their students.

In this study, teacher educators reflected on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on their individual wellbeing and their work. One constant refrain from the data was the feeling of stress and feeling overwhelmed as teacher educators, captured succinctly by the following excerpt:

> At the beginning I felt I was stressed, at first because I didn't know how to work online, but I was in survival mode, if I can put it that way (Lecturer 8, Foundation Phase, UOT).

The stress and survival mode of many teacher educators resulted from the rapid, unplanned and uncoordinated transition to "emergency remote']" teaching, as the following excerpt notes:

> I've had to learn to adjust … But I find it very stressful because I feel that I'm not teaching the quality that I have in the past, and I've been doing it for so many years and I know there are so many things lacking … I've had to see my doctor, my stress levels, my anxiety, I've been on medication, I'm not sleeping because I'm worried about this and what and how do I deal with all that kind of stuff. So, ja, it has definitely affected my wellbeing … It's been traumatic, I find not being on campus, not interacting with my colleagues, with the students, the support – I find it's really hard (Lecturer 5, Foundation Phase, UOT).

The lack of sociality coupled with only remittent and disjointed interaction with colleagues is responsible for some stress of teacher educators, as we note below, from institutional procedures and policies:

> I've always had stress but, this year, stress was much more because we had parents banging, sending you e-mails ... We had very short d-dates, for instance, ensuring that the 1st year batches of selections have been approved or whatever ... I did find that the stress was getting to me ... I started having stomach pains and whatever, and that's why I decided, I asked them to release me of my contract and not go on with it anymore (Lecturer 4, Foundation Phase, UOT).

The stress, whilst experienced individually, reflects the intensification of labour because of institutional practices, as the following teacher educator notes:

> There was a time when they said: "but we need to go online" ... I think they gave us two weeks to have everything, the whole years' work on a memory stick. So, I was like, this is getting too much. I can't deal with this … That was impossible. When it comes to impossible things like that, that is when the stress kicked in (Lecturer 2, Foundation Phase and Intermediate Phase, UOT).

Setting unmanageable targets without adequate support makes the working environment stressful, but even more so during times of crisis. An intensification of labour also resulted from new technologies that teacher educators were expected to adopt with only a modicum of support and guidance:

> Student teachers WhatsApped you like all hours of the day … which was also not good for you and for, like, as an academic for your wellbeing. Because you literally have so many jobs, and people that you need to answer to and that, I think that, with COVID, that was extremely hard (Lecturer 8, Foundation Phase, UOT).

The intensification of labour transcended time and space as working in a virtual environment and working from home blurred boundaries between institutional and home life, with institutional imperatives shaping the realities of home:

> Well, I find I've never worked as hard in my life, because, when you are at home, I've made my lounge into my office and so I never leave, I'm always at the office (Lecturer 5, Foundation Phase, UOT).

This sense of always working, and always needing to work, is what various writers have denoted as an "intensification of academic labour" (Hedding *et al.*, 2020; Rapanta *et al.,* 2020), a process exacerbated by crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. A small albeit unintended benefit from the intensification of labour was that work commutes were reduced as teacher educators did not have "to drive all the way to campus every time" which was then converted to more home working time.

The future post-COVID-19 unsurprisingly identified institutional policies, procedures and administrative burdens as key to managing crises, enhanced work productivity and wellbeing, as noted in the following excerpts:

> If the administrative burden from the institution were lifted from teachers [and] if we trusted teachers more and we gave them autonomy (Lecturer 6, Foundation Phase, UOT).

> I really hope that we leave teachers alone who are doing their jobs well and not burden them with admin ... I think we've underestimated how big of a role could management and leadership and clear decisions – how big of a role that plays in a teacher's wellbeing (Lecturer 6, Foundation Phase, UOT).

Here, the fourth logic, monoculture of the universal and the global, sheds light onto the non-existence (i.e., institutional leadership and teacher educator autonomy) and the realities (i.e., multiple roles and responsibilities of teacher educators) that are produced under the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic. Teacher educators' work has intensified and, although they have adapted, their wellbeing has been adversely impacted by institutional policies, practices and leadership. Leadership emerges as a key aspect of the experiences of teacher educators during the pandemic: autonomy-thwarting leadership (Collie, 2021) emerges as a stressor associated with emotional exhaustion. The key absence (de Sousa Santos, 2018) in the pandemic was leadership that supported teacher educators and teachers to give them necessary autonomy, treating them as reflexive professionals able to adapt to and manage teaching and learning.

4.3 Theme 3: Institution and context

In South Africa, a large proportion of students are dependent on financial assistance to make ends meet, where data costs are high and where mobile connection is not always readily

available (Hedding *et al.*, 2020). External inequities in the South African context link to the quality of institutional leadership and policies during the pandemic. In respect of the latter, teacher educators noted that COVID-19 exacerbated frailties and weaknesses in the way the university managed its teaching and learning programme for student teachers, as captured in the excerpts below:

> That [problem] is not due to COVID. This is due to that there is no HOD, no support (Lecturer 4, Foundation Phase, UOT).

> We haven't got a dean. I don't know whether there is one being appointed. We've got an acting Dean, but there is not an HOD for foundation phase at one of our campuses (Lecturer 4, Foundation Phase, UOT).

> It's a very deurmekaar kampus [i.e., confused campus] – you don't know where what is, where who is, then we have no HODs, we have no Dean, people just resign left right and centre (Lecturer 1, Foundation Phase, UOT).

Ineffective and poor communication characterised the relationship between the institution and teacher educators:

> Communication could have been better. Not only to us as lecturers but maybe to the students, could have been a bit clearer, especially the finance staff and the exam staff – you really battle to get any answers from them, because everybody is suddenly working from home and then you don't get anything back from them, no matter how many e-mails you send… nobody (Lecturer 4, Foundation Phase, UOT).

Whilst some teacher educators did identify positive measures – such as receiving data and modems from the institution, and some counselling – the common refrain was that,

> I think the university needs to provide more support for, also technical support for the students … who are struggling. So, if they can't get online or they don't have data, there is one number they can call. They phone, nobody replies to them, their data doesn't arrive, so I think the university really needs to get there, the support for the students and for staff … I'm using all my own stuff – I have paid for all my own stuff over here, so it's quite difficult to produce when you don't have the scanning, the printing, all those, I don't have a dongle so I can only work here if Wi-Fi … I think the university needs to provide more support emotionally, physically, administratively … it's just been very rough (Lecturer 5, Foundation Phase, UOT).

The monoculture of knowledge informs that all that is not recognised or legitimised is regarded as non-existent. As is evident from the responses, this stems from a lack of institutional leadership and support for students and teachers based on the context and infrastructure of the institution. A lack of consistent leadership, guidance, communication and support adversely affects teaching and learning at the university.

5. Discussion of findings

The work of de Sousa Santos (2018) reveals that, in moments of crises, what in initial teacher education becomes manifest, can be rendered invisible and sublimated (de Sousa Santos, 2018). With the rapid closures of higher education institutions and the need for ITE courses specific to foundation phase to move online, all that was not recognised or legitimated was perceived as non-existent. The research for this study reveals several keys aspects about this process in relation to how teacher educators navigate teaching and learning during a crisis and disruption such as COVID-19.

First, many teacher educators reported that they struggled to navigate online learning and, in particular, the teaching practicum component of the initial teacher preparation programme. This suggests that teacher educators find that the online emergency remote mode of teaching provides a disembodied practical experience for student teachers. This is particularly the case when it come to the teaching of a practicum component of ITE which requires immersive pedagogic encounters in real schooling contexts. Dhawan (2020) suggests that online teaching and learning does not necessarily hone the ability to practise their craft in the context of a real-life situation.

Second, teacher educators argue that, in displacing the traditional face-to-face classroom lectures, online teaching removes the sociality of pedagogy which they perceive as crucial to their work (Dhawan, 2020). In this study, teacher educators defined this relational absence as limiting meaningful and robust epistemic engagement with their student teachers. According to Okita (2012), the important social aspect of providing meaningful epistemic engagement in learning was not possible in this context.

Third, meaningful epistemic engagement relies on material, physical access to resources and tools to engage in online learning. In this study, teacher educators pointed to the multiple ways in which inequities manifest in online teaching, including weak online teaching infrastructures (Ali, 2020); a lack of hardware and unstable networks (Bao, 2020; Lischer *et al.*, 2021; Zhang *et al.,* 2020); limited data access; a lack of finance to purchase data and tools and distance constraints (Rapanta *et al.,* 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic not only reveals existing inequities but, in the context of this institution under study, further intensifies inequities in access to learning due to the structural context and socio-economic background that marginalises working class student teachers enrolled in this university (Mpungose, 2020).

Fourth, the research revealed a lack of attention to the psychosocial wellbeing of teacher educators. The participants in this study spoke alarmingly of their mental and physical wellbeing which they felt was ignored by the institution. Fifth, as de Sousa Santos (2018) notes, there are multiple ways in which the institution delegitimated and misrecognised the nature and scale of the problem. This was evident, as an example, with the intensification of labour. This intensification was difficult to manage given the lack of support from the institution for the transition to emergency remote online teaching, an entirely new experience for many. In this respect, they called for greater support but also clearer leadership. It was also evident in the increased administrative burden placed on teacher educators coupled with a lack of support for students and teacher educators, particularly in relation to access to the necessary tools for online teaching.

6. Conclusion

The institutional responses to the delivery of professional education and training to prospective student teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic illuminates the ways in which a particular narrow monoculture of knowledge and response is reproduced within HEIs. A more resilient teacher education system would envision affirming and empowering forms of leadership in a conducive environment to be prepared for future crises. Furthermore, such responses would legitimate the experience of the lecturers involved in the delivery of teacher education and call attention to their material and well-being needs as well as those they teach. In so doing, a more authentic response to crises and disruptions can be rendered possible in higher education.

Disclosure statement

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