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Examining the efficacy of professionalising university teaching through formal teaching qualifications at a historically disadvantaged university in South Africa[1]

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ABSTRACT

Lecturers in higher education normally come into teaching with little, if any, formal professional training in teaching. The changing higher education landscape, for example, the increased student diversity, has begun to put pressure on academics to get solid grounding in pedagogical training. Many universities across the globe have now put systems in place to professionalise their teaching. This article reports on an initiative by a South African university to foreground the importance of professionalising teaching and learning among current and future university lecturers as a strategy to improve student success. The article discusses impressions of university lecturers enrolled on a formal higher education teaching qualification; the Post Graduate Diploma in Higher Education (PGDHE) on the usefulness of the qualification. Grounded in the interpretivist paradigm and premised on the qualitative research approach, this case study focuses on only one university. The research was conducted as part of a large National Research Foundation (NRF) research project on the enabling and constraining conditions in the uptake of professional development opportunities in teaching by lecturers, involving eight South African universities. A purposive sample of sixteen academics who had applied for and received funding support to enrol for a post graduate diploma in higher education was used for data collection. The lecturers responded to an open-ended questionnaire on their experiences of the first year of the two-year post graduate diploma and how their teaching practices had been affected by the attendance of that year's sessions. Content analysis was used to identify emerging themes from the data. Findings from the study revealed that new ways of understanding teaching and learning and relating to students had emerged as a result of attending the first-year sessions and that the participants were developing an identity as university teachers. Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that professional training in pedagogy is essential for university teaching; disciplinary expertise alone does not necessarily make one a good teacher. Based on the conclusions of the study, it is recommended that academics should undergo training to get solid grounding in pedagogical content knowledge before assuming duties as lecturers at university.

Keywords: agency, culture, pedagogical competence, professional development, structure

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, lecturers have been employed in universities primarily based on their disciplinary expertise rather than pedagogical competence. Teachers in higher education come into teaching with little, if any, formal professional training in teaching other than in the content of their discipline (Al-Hattami et al., 2013; Malfroy & Willis, 2018; Fraser, et al., 2019; Daumiller et al., 2020). The above anomaly is because acclaimed disciplinary expertise and accomplishment as a researcher in one's discipline is seen as sufficient to become a university teacher. The question is whether disciplinary expertise alone is sufficient strength to teach at university. Al-Hattami et al. (2013: 39) argue that expertise based only on subject matter is not enough to claim competency in teaching, because besides subject matter, 'teaching professional competency requires additional "non-academic" knowledge (i.e. social, administrative and technical)'.

The changing higher education landscape, for example, the increased student diversity has begun to put pressure on academics to get solid grounding in pedagogical training (Renta-Davids et al., 2016; Jääskelä, Häkkinen & Rasku-Puttonen, 2017; Reimann & Allin, 2018). Such aspects also extend to issues relating to standards and quality and growing international competition (Yàñez et al., 2019; Reimann & Allin, 2018). The need to raise the profile of teaching in universities, the need to achieve external quality standards imposed by governments (Jawitz & Perez, 2016; Trautwein, 2018) and the need to improve university teachers' teaching skills and pedagogical thinking (Malfroy & Willis, 2018) have further foregrounded the need for pedagogical content knowledge.

In South Africa, no legislation exists that compels university lecturers to possess qualifications in pedagogics or teaching in higher education before appointment. Lecturers are generally appointed on the basis of their disciplinary expertise. Any initiatives to professionalise university teaching are at the discretion of individual universities. This article examines the extent to which existing structures in the university either enabled or constrained the uptake of professional development opportunities by lecturers and lecturer beliefs regarding the significance of training for teaching at university. The study is predicated on the following research question: To what extent was the initiative to professionalise teaching through a formal qualification at the University of Venda seen as having transformed the participating lecturers' pedagogical competencies?

The following objectives guided the study: (i) To examine the extent to which existing structures in the university either enabled or constrained the uptake of professional development opportunities by lecturers; (ii) To solicit lecturers' views regarding formal training for teaching at university and to determine the extent to which formal university lecturer preparation programmes translated to changes in actual teaching practices in the lecture room.

The Case Study

The impetus for this article stems from an initiative by a South African university to foreground the importance of professionalising teaching and learning as a strategy to improve student success. This followed the availability of funding from the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) (2013) in South Africa for teaching development in universities. The Department introduced a ring-fenced 'Teaching Development Grant' now renamed University Capacity Development Grant (DHET, 2019) to be utilised by universities to implement a Teacher Development Programme to support the nurturing of pedagogical competence in undergraduate and postgraduate teaching.

This case study is located at the University of Venda, a historically disadvantaged university in the South African higher education system. Under the apartheid legacy in South Africa, the university system was divided into what has come to be commonly known as formerly Historically Advantaged Universities

(HAUs) on the one hand and the formerly Historically Disadvantaged Universities (HDUs) on the other (Nyoni, 2020). Historically disadvantaged universities, which are mainly located in poor, rural areas, serve in the main poor students who are poorly prepared for higher education studies (DHET 2014) while the historically advantaged universities benefited from the apartheid system through provision of adequate resources. As Leibowitz et al. (2017) show, this inequality is a logical outcome in a country with one of the highest degrees of wealth disparity in the world, and where there was previously a history of legislated inequality on the basis of both race and class. The nexus between academic professional development and historical disadvantage warrants attention, since sites used for delivering academic professional development undoubtedly influence its uptake (Ndebele, Muhuro & Nkonki, 2016). In addition, geographic and social isolation are linked to professional isolation and lack of professional support from mentors, colleagues and counterparts (Leibowitz, Vorster & Ndebele, 2016; Ndebele, Muhuro & Nkonki, 2016).

As part of its teacher development programme, the University of Venda (UNIVEN) identified the attainment of formal higher education teaching qualifications by its lecturers as a long-term strategy in addition to periodic short courses and workshops conducted within the university to capacitate lecturers with skills in teaching and learning. As the university did not have such a programme in its programme qualification mix (PQM), an external service provider was hired to provide the training.

The diploma runs over two years on a part-time framework and comprises six week-long sessions, each spread over the two years. The purpose of the Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education (PG Dip: HE), according to CHERTL (2016), is to facilitate the professional development of lecturers as reflexive practitioners in higher education by developing their knowledge of Higher Education (HE) as a field of study. The diploma is designed to assist lecturers to enhance their ability to facilitate, manage and assess students' learning, and provide professional accreditation for HE practitioners. The Diploma is registered as a 120 credit honours level (level 8) course on the Higher Education Qualifications Framework (CHERTL, 2016). This paper reports on research regarding the reflections of the participants after attending the first year of the course.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research was premised on Archer's (1995, 1996, 2000) social realist analytical framework. Her framework is used to analyse the interplay between structure and culture and the development of agency in an initiative to professionalise teaching at UNIVEN. Archer (2000) distinguishes between the people (agents) and the parts (structure and culture). Agents coming onto the scene inherit a set of doctrines, theories, beliefs and values which dictate what could have an impact on them and this shape what these agents can do (Omingo, 2019). The structural domain in Archer's social realist theory comprises things which exist in the institution, such as policies, committees and academic development centres. These structures, either constrain or enable the actions of the agents and in turn, agents reproduce and transform structures. Interpreted in the context of this study, the agents would be the newly appointed lecturers joining the university who need staff development training in pedagogy. Under the domain of structure, are the committees that approve funding for teaching development programmes and the staff development directorate that designs and implements programmes to professionalise teaching in the university.

Culture, in the context of Archer's theory, comprises how and what we think about things. This includes values, beliefs, attitudes, ideas, ideologies, theories and concepts which are manifest through discourses that are used by particular people at particular times (Quinn, 2012). The beliefs held by lecturers, for example, on what constitutes good teaching or on whether training in pedagogy is necessary to teach at university have an important influence on whether or not lecturers take up opportunities to professionalise their teaching.

Agency, according to Archer (1996, 2000), refers to the personal and psychological makeup of individuals, their social roles and relates to the capacity that people have to act in specific ways. Agents can engage in concerted action to re-shape or retain the structural or cultural features they inherit in specific institutional settings. Archer (1996, 2000) believes that social structures exert causal influence on social interactions, while the actions of individuals and groups affect social structures by modifying them. Agents, in this study, refers to the new lecturers coming into a university who can either attend the lecturer preparation programmes or shun any calls to enrol for professional development in teaching courses.

This analytical theoretical framework was used in the research reported in this article to analyse the impressions of lecturers on the role of teaching development courses in professionalising teaching at university. As Archer's social realist theory shows, structure and culture can influence the extent to which lecturers take up teaching development opportunities. In order to extrapolate from Archer's domain of culture, the article discusses the impressions of the lecturers on the extent to which their beliefs about teaching and learning shifted following attendance of the course. Similarly, in order to examine fully the domain of agency, the article considers the extent to which the lecturers felt their actual teaching practices changed as a result of attending the course, specifically the extent to which these agents were able to apply the theories that they learnt in the actual lecture rooms.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Professionalising teaching at university

As already shown in the introduction, traditionally, lecturers have been employed in universities primarily based on their disciplinary expertise rather than pedagogical competence. The need to improve university teachers' teaching skills, the focus on quality enhancement and the need for accountability for public funds allocated to universities (Maclellan, 2015; Jawitz & Perez, 2016; Malfroy & Willis, 2018) have foregrounded the need for pedagogical content knowledge. Many universities across the globe have now put systems in place to professionalise their teaching (Reimann & Allin, 2018).

Initial training of university teachers is now established in universities in the United Kingdom (UK), (Asghar & Pilkington, 2018) Spain, (Fernández & Márquez, 2017) and Switzerland (Charlier & Lambert (2020). Reimann and Allin (2018) note that in the UK, it is not uncommon that the completion of postgraduate certificates in either learning and teaching in higher education (HE) or academic practice is compulsory and linked to probation. In Finland, several universities also arrange pedagogical training for their lecturers (Jääskelä, Häkkinen & Rasku-Puttonen, 2017).

Elsewhere in Europe, some countries for example, Finland (Jääskelä, Häkkinen & Rasku-Puttonen, 2017) teaching development for higher education lecturers has become entrenched, while in Norway (Fremstad et al., 2020), university leaders have established academic development centres to drive lecturer professional development. In Saudi Arabia, according to Al-Hattami et al. (2013), the government has recognised the need to make it obligatory for lecturers to improve their teaching skills and in order to meet this imperative, universities have put in place structures to provide training in different teaching and learning skills to improve the quality of their faculty members. The uptake of professional development in teaching seems to have picked up in Australia. A study by Fraser et al. (2019) found that not only does the Australian higher education sector expect teaching staff to be familiar with their university's specific learning and teaching policies, priorities and strategic directions, it also expects staff to develop an understanding of active learning pedagogies, assessment strategies, evaluation instruments, feedback, academic literacies, first-year transition pedagogies.

In South Africa, Education White Paper 3 (1997) emphasises the need for establishment of academic development structures and programmes at all higher education institutions to promote the development

of teaching skills, curricula, courseware and student support services. In the same vein, *Higher Education Monitor Number 7*, a publication produced on behalf of the Council on Higher Education by Scott, Yeld and Henry (2007: 61) argues that

> There is an important need for a sound level of educational expertise in a number of mainstream academics…sufficient for effectively leading and managing the design and delivery of mainstream courses and programmes and guiding the selection and work of programme and large-course teams.

The above authors argue that some level of professionalisation of teaching is increasingly being required of academic staff in developed countries, whose educational challenges are not as demanding as South Africa's and recommend that all academic teaching staff in South Africa should in time gain a basic level of educational knowledge, sufficient for effectively implementing appropriate educational approaches.

The effect of formal university lecturer preparation programmes on teaching practices

Views of academics on the efficacy of lecturer formal preparation programmes in teaching and learning are reported in literature. An investigation of the impact of university teachers' pedagogical training on approaches to teaching in Finland by Jääskelä, Häkkinen and Rasku-Puttonen (2017) found that university lecturers faced pressures to renew their teaching practices and were challenged by both recent learning research and higher education policy to take an active and agentic role in the development of conducive learning and teaching environments. A study by Trautwein (2018) at a university in Germany that explored the development of academics' identity as teachers before and during teaching development programmes found that enrolment in the teaching development programme marked the beginning of a new phase for the participants. While participants had entered the programme with a conception of the lecturer as the one who possessed all the knowledge to be transmitted to students, after the training, 'They described how they were confronted with the ideas and methods of a learning-centred teaching culture and the changes this brought to their teaching identity' (2018: 1005).

Grounding in the theories that inform teaching and how students learn is enhanced when lecturers engage in professional development related to teaching and learning. After conducting a study on development of academics' identity as teachers before and during teaching development programmes in Germany, Trautwein (2018) reports that participants stated gaining confidence in teaching and shifts from intuitive approaches to teaching to theory-based approaches, which helped them to substantiate and justify their teaching practice.

Participation in formal lecturer preparation programmes promotes critical reflection by lecturers on their teaching practices through the scholarship of teaching and learning. When academics research their teaching, they develop a reflexive critique of their teaching where they explore the underlying values and motivations that drive them to teach the way they do. In a study that examined teachers' ways of experiencing their identity, Korhonen & Törmä (2016) found that professional growth was kept up by constant reflection and reassessment through which the individuals built their roles, fixed goals for changing situations in their careers and constructed alternative practices. It is indeed the lecturers' reflections on their epistemic beliefs which enable them to modify their practices when it is seen as necessary or desirable (Maclellan, 2015). In the same vein, writing from New Zealand, Deaker, Stein & Spiller, (2016) conclude that academic development can be an initiator of reflection on one's behaviours, beliefs and practices.

The issue of generic professional development programmes in higher education has been picked up as a weakness by lecturers who attend such programmes. Daniels (2017) conducted a study in Scotland that looked at standardisation of professional learning in higher education through a Post Graduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (PGC TLHE). Although many of the participants of the PGC

THLE programme studied appreciated their learning experience, reporting it as beneficial, 'a frequent complaint regarding the activities and the summative work has been around lack of relevance to individual practice' (Daniels, 2017: 175). Based on her study on the professional development of new lecturers at the University of Cape Town in South Africa, Behari-Leak (2017) also concludes that the generic nature of the professional development programme constrains the ability of new lecturers to bring disciplinary perspectives to bear on their academic practices.

METHOD

Grounded in the interpretivist research paradigm and premised on the qualitative research approach, the aim of this study was to examine the impressions of university lecturers on the extent to which an initiative to professionalise teaching through a formal qualification at one South African university transformed lecturer pedagogical competencies. This case study, which focuses on only one university, was conducted as part of a large National Research Foundation (NRF) research project on the enabling and constraining conditions in the uptake of professional development opportunities in teaching by lecturers, involving eight South African universities. Upon receiving funding from DHET, a communiqué was sent to all academic staff in the University inviting them to express interest in pursuing a postgraduate qualification in higher education studies. A total of 16 academics submitted applications to enrol for the post graduate diploma. The population of the study comprised all academics at the University who did not hold a qualification in learning and teaching in higher education. The sample comprised all the sixteen academics who responded to the call for expression of interest and enrolled for the postgraduate diploma.

The participants consisted of four junior lecturers, nine lecturers and three senior lecturers. An open-ended self-administered questionnaire was issued to participants and collected prior to departure for the first session of the course with a set of questions to find out why they had enrolled for the diploma and what they expected to gain from it. A second open ended self-administered questionnaire was issued mid-way through their studies, that is, at the end of the first year of the two-year course to find out their impressions of the first year, what they perceived to have been the benefits and challenges and how their teaching practices had been affected by the attendance of the first-year sessions. Content analysis, which is a process of categorising qualitative textual data into clusters of similar entities or conceptual categories to identify consistent patterns and relationships between variables or themes (Omingo 2019) was used to identify emerging themes from the data. Excerpts from the actual data are presented verbatim in some cases in the results section for illustrative purposes.

Ethical issues

Primary ethical clearance was issued to all the eight universities by the ethical clearance committee of the university coordinating the NRF research project. In addition to ethical clearance from the institution coordinating the NRF project, ethical clearance was also granted by the University of Venda under reference number CHETL/11/01/E0811. A consent form was developed in which the purpose and objectives of the study were explained to the respondents and which they were asked to sign as proof of consent before taking part in the study. All participants in the study were informed that their participation was purely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time if they so wished without consequence. In addition, the researcher guaranteed the anonymity of the participants. Participants were assured that all the information provided would be held in strict confidence and would be reported as aggregated group data. For anonymity, lecturers were coded as JL1 to JL4 for Junior Lecturers, L1 to L9 for Lecturers, and SL1 to SL3 for Senior Lecturers.

RESULTS

The results are presented and discussed according to several emerging themes in this section. Under reasons for enrolling for the course, two issues emerged, namely the importance of grounding in teaching

methodology in addition to grounding in the discipline and the influence of previous participation in short courses and workshops on teaching and learning. Exposure to theoretical principles and discourses underlying teaching and learning also emerged as a key theme. Under the impact of the course on practice, identity development, the promotion of critical reflection on teaching and learning and the development of teaching philosophies were key themes that emerged. Another emerging theme related to the issue of generic teaching development programmes as opposed to discipline-specific tailored teaching development programmes. A major issue that arose from all the participants was the need for training in pedagogy for all lecturers regardless of their length of service.

The first question sought to find out what had motivated the lecturers to enrol for the diploma. The question specifically requested lecturers to think back to their personal reasons for enrolling for the diploma, and what they had hoped to gain from it. Two themes emerged from the responses, first the importance of teaching methodology as a complement to disciplinary knowledge and second, the influence of previous encounters with short courses and workshops on teaching and learning pedagogy.

Importance of teaching methodology as a complement to disciplinary knowledge

Participants had joined the postgraduate diploma because although they were disciplinary specialists, they were not experts in teaching. They needed to develop agency in pedagogy so that they could better handle the teaching and learning process such as, for example, managing large classes. The following sample of responses serves to illustrate the admission by lecturers:

> The reason I applied for the PG Dip: HE is because my academic qualification does not include training on teaching and learning methodology. I believe that teaching requires specific skills and I hope that this programme will unleash those skills which will enhance my teaching (JL3).

> I have realised that holding a masters, PhD or post-doctoral qualification in a particular field does not make one a good teacher. One needs a teaching qualification to be a better teacher (SL2).

The responses imply that participants acknowledged that they could not be good teachers based solely on their disciplinary expertise thus acknowledging the need for grounding in teaching and learning as a field of study. The need for specific skills in mediating learning and teaching in the lecture room is indicated in the responses and enrolling for the diploma is seen as one of the ways such pedagogical content knowledge would be acquired.

Previous encounters with short courses and workshops

Still on the question to find out what had motivated the lecturers to enrol for the diploma, some of the participants had decided to enrol for the course because of their exposure to UNIVEN's internal workshops on teaching and learning which conscientized the lecturers about the significance of knowing how to teach at university. The two responses below demonstrate the influence exerted by the internal workshops on lecturers who eventually enrolled for the formal qualification:

> After attending a short course on curriculum development, I realised that there is a lot that I do not know when it comes to teaching and learning in higher education (L1).

> I did an assessor and curriculum development course. The way the short courses were presented I was convinced that I should enrol for a professional teaching qualification (L4).

Structures and systems that are put in place in the university to create awareness among lecturers on the importance of grounding in teaching pedagogy can spur lecturers on to acquire formal qualifications in

teaching at university. This calls for advocacy campaigns among university lecturers, through for example, internal university workshops and recognition systems for those who have already undergone professional development in teaching.

Exposure to theoretical principles of pedagogy and concepts related to teaching

Another question presented to participants sought to examine ways in which participants' experiences of the first year of the diploma had been similar to and/or different from their initial expectations. Participants were probed to provide explicit examples to illustrate their experiences. Participants generally felt satisfied with the course content and related issues raised during the course:

> The first block provided me with lots of background information on teaching approaches, perspectives and challenges that we as lecturers encounter in, HE and also provided me with possible suggestions on how one can handle such challenges (L2).

> I expected to get a deeper understanding of the theoretical principles of teaching and learning in higher education. The course itself is designed to do exactly that (L3).

Responses indicate that participants benefitted from being exposed to the general higher education context and challenges facing the higher education sector in South Africa. This enabled the participants to realise that some of the issues they had been grappling with were not only peculiar to them. A deeper understanding and grounding in higher education teaching and learning pedagogy increased the confidence of the lecturers in their role as university teachers.

Identity development and teaching philosophy development

On a question seeking participant views on the value and benefit of the diploma, participants were asked to provide explicit examples on what they deemed to have been the most important insights, ideas, or lessons learned. The course, according to responses from the lecturers, enabled the development of an identity as an academic and a university teacher, including how to deal with teaching and learning challenges as shown in these sample responses:

> The first block, amongst many things, assisted me in identifying my role as a teacher. (JL1)

> It gave me the push to explore issues about higher education teaching and learning on my own. It made me realise the existence of that gap between knowing your discipline and knowing how to impart knowledge in your discipline. (L6)

Exposure to the course, as inferred from the responses, enabled shifts in the lecturers' beliefs on teaching and learning. Participants acknowledged that exposure to the teaching philosophy concept enabled them to think more deeply about why they taught the way they did. For example:

> One major thing that has changed so significantly is my teaching philosophy. (SL1)

> Having gone through teaching perspectives and theories of learning I discovered my hidden teaching philosophy. (SL3)

The shifts in teaching philosophies consequent upon the course, urged lecturers in this study to review the way they taught and those who had previously relied only on teacher-centred lecture methods started experimenting with student-centred approaches.

In addition, the lecturers appreciated the knowledge gained so much that they decided to implement whatever they learned as the course progressed rather than wait till completion of the diploma:

> I will adopt the student-centred approach to foster deep approaches to learning for lifelong learning. I intend to use a wider range of teaching methods. (JL3)

> I never considered the way students learn, in other words to me my teaching practice was more teacher-centred not learner-centred. (L2)

> The course has so influenced my teaching that I already encourage student engagement in the form of class discussions in courses I teach. (L5)

> The knowledge and experience I got will help me when I approach my lecturing this academic year. I will not have to wait for the qualification for me to start implementing what I am learning. (L8)

The first year of the course resulted in shifting lecturer beliefs on how students learn. While some had relied previously on lecturer-centred teaching methods, a shift towards student-centred approaches and the promotion of student engagement during the learning and teaching process emerged.

Discipline specific versus generic teaching development courses

An open-ended question was included in the questionnaire to find out the specific challenges that the lecturers encountered during their engagement with the generic diploma and how they would have wanted this done differently. The issue of participating in a generic course on teaching and learning with lecturers from other disciplines emerged from the data as shown in these two excerpts:

> I had expected special attention to be given to individual disciplines in terms of teaching theories. For example, how do we apply behaviourist theories to teaching computer programming? (L3)

> However, I thought in this programme there will be lecturers for specific fields such as Zoology who will teach us how to teach Zoology/ Biology. (L7)

Some academics felt the course was rather too generic without specifically relating to their own disciplines as they would have preferred a contextualised course tailored to their own disciplines. This meant that the lecturers struggled to relate what was taught in the courses to their actual practice. The results imply that; disciplinary allegiance may be so strong sometimes that it blinkers lecturers only to what happens in their own disciplines.

The promotion of critical reflection

An open-ended question was included to gauge how the course had impacted on the lecturers' current practice. The lecturers were further probed to provide examples of changes they intended to implement motivated by the attendance on the course. The promotion of critical refection on own practice emerged as the recurring theme from the responses:

> I was also able to reflect on my teaching perspectives which can encourage the use of different learning approaches. (L4)

> I realised we need to reflect on our teaching practice, research practice. (L2)

> The diploma forces one to reflect on your teaching practices and encourage you to improve every day. (L9)

Lecturers, after attending the first half of the course, as shown in the responses, began to reflect on different approaches to learning, revisited their beliefs on teaching and learning (teaching philosophies) and reflected on the higher education context in general and the implications for learning and teaching. Such reflection, it appears, had not been in place before enrolling for the diploma and can therefore be attributed to participating in the qualification.

DISCUSSION

Importance of teaching methodology as a complement to disciplinary knowledge

One of the emerging themes in the results was the need for grounding in pedagogy in addition to grounding in the discipline. Participants noted that they joined the postgraduate diploma because although they were disciplinary specialists, they needed to develop agency in pedagogy so that they could better handle the teaching and learning processes such as for example, managing large classes. The responses imply that participants acknowledged that they could not be good teachers based solely on their disciplinary expertise.

In terms of Archer's theory, the impressions conveyed by the lecturers reflect a change in the domain of culture. While the lecturers had been teaching without any formal exposure to teaching methodologies, they realised that there was more to the teaching and learning process than only disciplinary expertise. This lack of pedagogical content knowledge is compounded by the fact that academics often receive little, if any, formal exposure to pre-service teacher education before assuming their roles as university lecturers (Daniels, 2017; Daumiller et al., 2020). Participation in the diploma resulted in a shift in lecturers' beliefs about teaching and learning. Thus, Archer (1996)'s argument that agents can engage in concerted action to re-shape cultural features they inherit is true of the lecturers who enrolled for this course. After the course they acknowledged that disciplinary expertise alone was not adequate for good teaching.

These impressions expressed by the participants concur with the argument in the literature that knowledge based on subject matter alone is not enough to claim competency in teaching. A study by Al-Hattami et al. (2013) investigating the needs and importance of having professional training programs to enrich faculty members' teaching competencies in Saudi Arabia confirms that besides subject matter, teaching professional competency requires additional non-academic knowledge such as facilitation, administrative and classroom management skills. Similarly, a study by Trautwein (2018: 997) at the University of Hamburg, Germany that explored the development of academics' identity as teachers before and during teaching development programmes found that

> early career academics view of teaching tends to centre on teaching and content, however, once they establish a teaching identity and undergo teaching training their teaching conceptions are likely to change towards student-centeredness.

This essentially means that early career academics tend to see themselves primarily as experts who have to transmit the knowledge they have to the students, but after training this conception changes and they see themselves as co-learners with their students who they see as possessing the potential to contribute to the teaching and learning process. What is apparent from the findings of this study is that training in pedagogy helps the lecturers to change their beliefs on how students learn and therefore how teaching should happen in the lecture room.

Exposure to theoretical principles of pedagogy and concepts related to teaching

With regards to whether or not their initial expectations of the course were met by the first-year block sessions, participants generally felt satisfied with the course content as shown in the results section. Participants had been exposed to theoretical principles of pedagogy, clarification of concepts related

to teaching and learning and challenges facing the higher education sector generally. Grounding in teaching and learning pedagogy increased the confidence of the lecturers. Exposure to experiences and discourses around teaching and learning, as shown in the findings, can cause lecturers to start relooking at their current teaching practice in view of what they have been exposed to in order to improve it. In this regard, a study by Chabaya (2015) on academic development practices at higher education institutions in Zimbabwe found that exposure to theoretical frameworks such as the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) engaged lecturers in reflective practice on their teaching and this improved the quality of their teaching. Similarly, a study by Reimann (2018) that investigated the impact of two academic development courses that focused on assessment in the UK found that both courses engendered important conceptual changes for the lecturers, in particular the stimulation of critical reflection and new ways of thinking about assessment and student learning. In the same vein, a study that explored the development of academics' identity as teachers before and during teaching development programmes in Germany by Trautwein (2018), found that theory that stemmed, for example, from books about learning-theories or feedback participants received from academic developers informed reflection and tended to catalyse development. Cameron and Woods (2016), however, caution academic developers that a lack of common understanding of what quality teaching means and what counts as evidence may result in resistance to attempts to support and develop teaching expertise among lecturers.

Identity development

Identity development as a university teacher emerged as a key finding from the results. Such identity development gives the lecturers the agency not to be blinkered by their disciplines but to understand higher education more broadly. In this study, the training amongst many things, assisted the lecturers to clarify their roles as teachers. They began to realise the existence of a gap between disciplinary knowledge and mediating student epistemological access to the knowledge, rules and conventions of one's discipline. The significance of training in the development of identity is also reported in the literature. In a study to explore the development of academics' identity as teachers before and during teaching development programmes in Germany, Trautwein (2018: 1002) reports that in the beginning of their teaching career, lecturers

> often had a highly idealistic picture of the teacher, for example, as somebody who is omniscient and can ensure that every student is successful. After teaching for a while, participants described how they modified their conceptions regarding the teacher role, for example, that the teacher does not and cannot know everything.

It can therefore be concluded that teaching development programmes, if properly planned, can indeed help shape identity development. Trautwein (2018) however cautions that pedagogical change, as aimed for in teacher training, may challenge academics' professional identity and can create role and identity ambiguity if the targeted way of teaching in teaching development programmes does not align with teachers' personally held values.

The teaching identity construction of academics is seen in the literature as a holistic, career-long process, in which constant reflection and reassessment of teaching practices and roles, identification of development challenges and goals and the construction of alternative practices induce development (Korhonen & Törmä, 2016). In a study that explored the development of academics' identity as teachers before and during teaching development programmes in Germany, participants also reported how their conceptions regarding the role of the teacher had changed. While they tended to enter the programme with a conception of the teacher as 'a herald of the truth', they described how, 'they were confronted with the ideas and methods of a learning-centred teaching culture and the changes this brought to their teaching identity' (Trautwein, 2018: 1005). The motivation and zeal to start implementing what was being learned from the course including adopting student-focused approaches even before completion of

the qualification in my study shows the motivation that can arise from exposing academics to professional development opportunities that challenge them to change their practice.

Discipline specific versus generic teaching development courses

The postgraduate diploma in which the participants in this study were enrolled was a generic qualification enrolling lecturers from across all disciplines. The issue of participating in a generic course on teaching and learning with lecturers from other disciplines was experienced as a challenge by some lecturers. As the findings show, disciplinary allegiance may be so strong sometimes those lecturers do not see value in what happens in other disciplines. Such allegiance may be linked to issues of relatedness. As van der Rijst, Baggen & Sjoer (2019) show, the need for relatedness will be satisfied if people experience a sense of value and belonging in a community around the topic of interest. Such a community in this study would be the disciplinary community of practice of the lecturer. In this view, the confidence of agency will be cemented if learning takes place in a disciplinary context, where the pedagogy acquired is seen in relation to the discipline taught. As Daniels (2017), avers, following a study in Scotland, when generic standards are applied to meet the demands of professional development, a mismatch becomes evident between the practitioner as agent of her/his own professional development and a standardisation of what is deemed good practice. Behari-Leak (2017) also argues that the generic nature of the professional development programme in her case study at the University of Cape Town in South Africa constrained the ability of new lecturers to bring disciplinary perspectives to bear on their academic practices.

Literature on academic development warns how academic developers sometimes fail to understand the differences between how concepts are applied in different disciplinary settings leading to jumping to conclusions about developmental work in different contexts, which can be less fruitful (Laksov & McGrath, 2020; Reeping, 2020). It is therefore the author's considered view that while introductory generic induction sessions maybe held with lecturers, it is essential to bring in contextual examples from a variety of disciplines or invite disciplinary experts to present some sessions to accommodate all who attend. In addition, discipline specific tailor-made made short courses on teaching and learning are recommended and where these may not be available within an institution, staff could be sent to attend such courses externally.

The promotion of critical reflection

In the domain of culture, one noticeable learning change, as seen from the results, was the development of the craft competence to reflect on their teaching and student learning. Such reflection according to social realist theory (Archer, 2000) is situated in the domain of culture and may result in changes in lecturers' teaching practices. Lecturers, after attending the first half of the course, were able to reflect on activities they did, reflect on different approaches to learning and revisited their beliefs on teaching and learning. The ability to look back at one's teaching with a view to examining what is going well and what may need to be done differently is indeed a lauded move as it means lecturers no longer take things for granted but engage deeply with issues relating to student learning.

With regard to promotion of reflection and how it can contribute to enhancing the quality of teaching, Van der Rijst, Baggen and Sjoer (2019) hold that learning by reflecting is characteristic of teachers who evaluate and consciously reflect on their own learning experiences so that they can improve themselves. Reporting from a university of technology in South Africa, Sebolao (2019) advises that academic development initiatives need to be strengthened by working together with scholarship of teaching and learning programmes to create groups of communities of practice in order to encourage more reflection on teaching practices.

CONCLUSION

This research has shown that the professionalisation of teaching in higher education can benefit both the higher education system in general and the lecturers themselves in particular. Lecturers begin to realise that disciplinary expertise alone is inadequate to teach effectively in higher education. Attendance of teaching development programmes has been shown in this study to result in changes in conceptions of teaching and how students learn. Such courses expose lecturers (who come into field armed only with disciplinary expertise) to theories and principles of teaching and learning. In addition, lecturers attending such courses begin to develop identities as university teachers and begin to interrogate their values, assumptions and beliefs (teaching philosophies) about teaching and learning. If the quality of teaching and learning is to be enhanced in higher education, a national level legislative framework that compels academics to hold qualifications in teaching at university would be a worthwhile risk to take.

Archer's social realist theory has been used in this article to understand the professional development of academics enrolled for the postgraduate diploma in higher education. The impressions expressed in the data confirm the significance of understanding the interplay of Archer's concepts of structure, culture and agency in enabling or constraining the professional development of lecturers. It has been demonstrated that structures put in place in a university, such as a dedicated department dealing with professional development can indeed enable the process to professionalise teaching at university.

In the domain of culture, the article examined the extent to which lecturers' beliefs about teaching and learning shifted following attendance of the course and found that indeed beliefs changed with some lecturers re-visiting their original teaching philosophies while others only conceptualised their teaching philosophies as result of the course. The theory, therefore offers a useful tool for analysing changes in beliefs and practices as a result of professional development. In the domain of agency, the data agrees with the socialist realist theory where we see the agents (lecturers) calling for a requirement to make training in teaching compulsory for university teachers. As social realism shows, agents (the lecturers) can either reproduce the existing structures or transform them. In this article, agents recommend the transformation of existing structures, for example, the current structure in higher education in South Africa where training in teaching is not compulsory for university lecturers. The researcher therefore finds Archer's social realist analytical framework useful and valid for the South Africa context.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the presented findings, the following recommendations are put forward regarding ways of increasing the uptake of professional development opportunities in teaching by lecturers. First, professional development courses offered should be varied and tailor-made to ensure relevance to different faculties and departments in universities as this accommodates disciplinary contexts. Second, teaching and learning centres should devise ways of constantly engaging staff to motivate them to make it a priority to undertake professional development courses in teaching and learning. Third, the researcher agrees with the participants on the issue of a compulsory teaching qualification for academics. Fourth, the study further recommends that notwithstanding possession of qualifications in teaching and learning in higher education, professional development for university teaching should be an ongoing lifelong learning exercise.

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