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Teacher educators' perspectives: Preparing student teachers to teach in linguistically diverse classrooms.

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Context and rationale

- EAL (English as an Additional Language) students are officially defined as pupils who are known to, or believed to, speak a language which is not English in the home (Arnot et al. 2014). However Cunningham (2019) and Demie (2018) argue the importance of being critically aware of such labels as the term 'EAL' encompasses a broad range of learners who come from various linguistic, ethnic and educational backgrounds, resulting in varied levels of English.

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Context and rationale

Setting the scene

- It is generally considered an inevitability that in some point in their career, teachers will work in a linguistically diverse classroom with pupils with EAL due to a continual growth in global mobility (Duran 2003; Lucas, Villegas and FreedsonGonzalez, 2008).
- Every year, in the Department for Education's NQT survey a new cohort of teachers report feeling underprepared for working with children designated as speaking English as an Additional Language (EAL) as Starbuck (2018) reports that since 2004 the proportion of NQTs saying that the extent to which their ITT prepared them for teaching EAL learners was 'good' or better has never exceeded 50%.

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Context and rationale

Identifying the gap

- NQT surveys and previous studies provide a clear picture of newly qualified teacher's views (Cajkler and Hall, 2009; Fransson, 1999; Starbuck, 2018).
- Other researchers have shown a similar picture of lack of confidence from experienced teachers (Wardman 2012; Murakami 2008).
- The views of teacher educators responsible for the training of NQTs in the UK context have not been adequately considered to date.

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Context and rationale

Teacher education and linguistic diversity

- Although the government inspectorate for UK schools (Ofsted) suggested that a more tailored curriculum and staff professional development are required to improve the education of EAL pupils, a lack of funding and support for this remains (Mistry and Sood 2012) and specific reference to EAL was, in fact, removed from the national inspection framework documents in 2015.

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Research design

Research Question

- How do teacher educators view current provision in Initial Teacher Training in the UK, with a specific focus on student teacher preparedness to teach children classified as EAL?

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Research design and data

Data collection

- A mixed-methods approach was taken with data gathered using an online questionnaire and a series of follow-up interviews.
- The questionnaire data remained anonymous, whilst the interviewees were given pseudonyms which are used in the discussion shown below. University ethical approval was granted for the project.

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Table 1. Questionnaire items.

Questionnaire
(1) How long have you been a school teacher? 0–3 years4/-6 years/7-10 years/More than 10 years
(2) How long have you been a lecturer teaching on Primary/Secondary Education courses?
(3) How much experience do you have with learners who have English as an Additional Language (EAL)?
(4) Please describe your experiences with EAL learners?
(5) Are issues relating to teaching EAL incorporated into the modules you teach? If so, how?
(6) How confident do you feel about teaching student-teachers how to teach EAL learners? Not confident/Slightly confident/Confident/Very confident
(7) Do you feel that the teaching of EAL is incorporated into Primary and Secondary Education degrees and PGCEs sufficiently enough that your students would feel comfortable teaching EAL learners?
(8) Do you perceive teaching student-teachers about EAL to be challenging?
(9) How do you perceive the balance of EAL teaching to student-teachers? Mostly theoretical/Mostly practical/A combination of theoretical and practical
(10) Do you think any improvements could be made regarding how student-teachers learn about EAL learners? Yes/No If yes, please expand.

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Table 2. Interview questions.

Interview questions
(1) What region of Great Britain are you from?
(2) What EAL training did you receive in your Initial teacher training?
(3) What feedback do you receive from your cohort?
(4) The current evidence shows that students don't feel prepared, so where do you think the mismatch is?
(5) If the curriculum and current training practices are not focused on EAL, what are the current priorities? What do you think they're focussing on in schools?
(6) What do you think the biggest barriers for learning are for the children (with EAL)?

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Research design

Questionnaire participants

- 62 lecturers from higher education institutions in the UK that provide primary or secondary education courses to STs.

Table 3. Questionnaire responses per item.

Question number	Responses
1	62
2	60
3	60
4	58
5	55
6	55
7	55
8	59
9	55
10	55

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Findings and discussion

Education sector: priorities and attitudes

- 4 interviewee participants described current performativity focus of schools
- School priorities stem from their cohort of pupils and their parents so it follows that if schools have pupils who are viewed as EAL then supporting EAL pupils becomes a priority for said school – Elena (interviewee participant)

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Findings and discussion

Balancing the practical and the theoretical in ITT

- 4 questionnaire participants explicitly discuss the problematic narrative surrounding EAL in the education sector. One questionnaire participant stated that the training their STs receive is: *lodged into the 'EAL' narrative which approaches multilingualism as an educational problem to be overcome by instrumentally ignoring multilingualism and replacing emerging bilingualism with enforced monolingualism.*
- 1 questionnaire participant stated one of the main challenges for teacher educators when teaching STs about EAL is challenging their cohort to reconsider the preconceived notions in the education sector as it continues to construct EAL 'as if it was a 'need' rather than a 'bonus'.
- The majority of questionnaire participants (n = 40) considered that improvements could and should be made to ITT with regards to the coverage of EAL issues in the curriculum.
- time constraints on ITT courses (it is impossible to cover everything in depth and report that, as a result, students inevitably do not receive enough input about EAL
- many (n = 18) separate extracts from the questionnaire data across multiple items, and all interviewees highlighted the need for, and value of, more practical classroom experience with EAL pupils.
- The importance of placement experience is mentioned 23 times throughout the course of the collected questionnaire data, outlining the need for more placement experience involving EAL for STs, as STs 'preparedness' is dependent on sufficient experience and training (Butcher, Sinka, and Troman 2007; Foley, Sangster, and Anderson. 2013).

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Findings and discussion

- minority of STs are provided with opportunities to work with EAL pupils as only nine questionnaire participants explicitly stated that their students were given an opportunity to work with, and teach, EAL pupils in the classroom
- 17 explicitly stated that they felt their students have sufficiently incorporated EAL into their ITT so students would feel comfortable teaching EAL, whilst another 17 explicitly disagreed
- These findings contradict existing studies (Hanson 1999; Starbuck 2018) where teachers overwhelmingly expressed feeling inadequately trained and prepared to teach EAL pupils, resulting in them lacking confidence in their ability to meet the needs of their EAL learners
- 20 participants suggested that ITT with regards to EAL could be improved by ensuring STs across the country gain adequate practical experience of teaching EAL learners, regardless of the location they are studying in

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Findings and discussion

The nature of 'preparedness' in Student Teachers

- the data initially suggests that more is needed to establish what 'preparedness' actually is in relation to STs leaving their ITT feeling ready to teach.
- 1 participant suggested in the interview that some of the negative issues around ST preparedness are based in STs' own misapprehensions about what being prepared actually means.
- 6 questionnaire participants and all interviewee participants posited that it may be seen as unreasonable to expect STs to report feeling prepared to work with EAL at the point when they leave ITT courses.

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Findings and discussion

- Interview participants were told about the apparent disparity between our questionnaire findings and previous research (i.e. that teacher educators seem to be more confident about equipping STs to work with EAL children than NQTs have regularly been reporting) and asked where they thought the potential mismatch was.
- Carole suggested the disparity could be because of a lack of time and a variety of experiences had by STs on placements.
- Sophie and Rosie suggested that ultimately it is relevant experience that will make the students confident, no matter how prepared institutions may attempt to make them.
- Rosie went on to argue that the reason for the disparity could be that although teaching EAL learners in mainstream classrooms should simply be good inclusive practice, STs believe it is more complex than that

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Conclusion

- This study revealed a disparity between how TEs perceive the training for STs on linguistic diversity and EAL during ITT courses and how STs and in-service teachers viewed their ITT on EAL (Murakami 2008; Foley, Sangster, and Anderson. 2013; Starbuck 2018; Ginnis et al. 2018).
- TEs reported feeling that they felt they had sufficiently prepared their teachers, contrary to findings from researchers (Hanson-1990; Ginnis et al. 2018) who have reported that teachers have expressed that they felt inadequately trained in the teaching of EAL.
- this study has suggested that there is a disparity between how STs, NQTs and TEs define 'preparedness', 'comfortable' and 'confident'.
- All interviewee participants and 24 questionnaire data extracts argue that the opportunity for practical placement experiences with EAL pupils correlates with STs leaving ITT feeling more prepared and confident
- This study suggests that there is a clear disparity between what STs feel they need and what TEs believe STs require to be prepared to help EAL learners to succeed in accessing the curriculum in mainstream schools.

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Implications and recommendations

- Some participants argued that ITT on EAL could be improved by teaching STs about Language Acquisition, so they can understand the importance of maintaining the L1 and potentially using it as a resource in the classroom
- many participants believe that placement opportunities need to improve to enable STs to have experience with EAL learners
- it is undeniable that teachers would benefit from practical advice given by experienced practitioners on how to develop resources for EAL students as well as practical teaching strategies (NALDIC 1999; Franson et al. 2002; Conteh 2015).
- ITT courses need to equip STs to deal with the challenge of getting all students through such regimented tests, whilst also differentiating materials to best support learners, whilst simultaneously creating an inclusive environment where students' home languages are welcomed in the classroom

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