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Teacher Education in the Nexus Between Digital Transformation and Internationalisation

In an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world, teachers' initial education and continuing professional development remain somewhat limited to national borders. Teacher education systems in Europe are firmly rooted in national histories and conditions (Kothoff & Denk, 2007; Symeonidis, 2021), influenced by long-standing traditions and political culture (Louis & van Velzen, 2012). However, there is a growing need for teacher education institutions and practitioners to meet the emerging challenges of increased openness and cross-national and cross-institutional collaboration as the result of international processes, including the Bologna Process and the process of Europeanisation in teacher education (Symeonidis, 2021; Zgaga, 2013).

The Covid-19 pandemic posed new challenges to the internationalisation of teacher education, which policymakers have prioritised over the past decade. Physical mobility was halted and a 'forced' transition from face-to-face to remote teaching occurred. However, this global disruption also triggered an incubation phase for novel phenomena, so that education researchers are now referring to the crisis as 'an opportunity of the century' (Schratz, 2020). Ideas such as blended mobility and virtual exchange programmes are increasingly promoted as alternative options for international learning, as demonstrated by the priorities of the Erasmus+ programme for the 2021–2027 period (European Commission, 2021). The pandemic thus accelerated the digital transformation in teacher education, a process that had already been taking place in the years prior to Covid-19.

Considering this new reality posed by the pandemic, we invited submissions for a focus issue that would investigate the evolving landscape of internationalisation in teacher education within the broader context of digital transformation. This exploration seeks to understand the alternative methods for teacher mobility that have emerged and their impact on the profession. Additionally, it examines the development of teacher education curricula in response to internationalisation and digitalisation. The professional development of teachers and teacher educators is also adapting to these changes, influenced by the increasing relevance of online and hybrid mobilities, as well as training and learning communities. Ultimately, the focus is on defining what it means to be a global and European teacher in the post-Covid-19 era.

The first article, *Supporting Pre-service Teachers' Civic Competence as a Strategy for Internationalisation in the Digital Era*, by Aspasia Dania, Marios Koukounaras Liagkis, Agoritsa Gogoulou, Evdokia Karavas, Kosmas Vlachos, Kostas Magos and Magda Vitsou, seeks to understand the challenges and

opportunities presented by an internationalised at-home professional development programme aimed at enhancing preservice teachers' competencies for democratic culture within their practicum-based university courses. This programme, which is part of a three-year Erasmus+ KA2 project, integrates digital resources and practicum-based modules to foster democratic competencies. A SWOT analysis conducted among Greek university teacher educators highlights strengths like diverse educational materials and interdisciplinary collaboration, while also noting challenges such as entrenched beliefs and time limitations. The article advocates for the implementation of similar programmes as 'participatory internationalisation at home' strategies, emphasising the necessity of context-sensitive adaptation to effectively support democratic values and civic education.

The second article, *Learning About Sustainability in a Global Context of Digital Transformation in Teacher Education: Exemplary Vignettes of Experience in Webinars*, by Ann-Kathrin Dittrich, Kgadi Mathabathe, Irma Eloff and Evi Agostini, investigates the role of webinars as digital tools to engage international education stakeholders on sustainability topics within teacher education. This study, which is part of the Teach4Reach project, conducted four international webinars to facilitate collaborative learning and share insights on sustainable development, with the aim of fostering an international vision of quality education. The article critically analyses the collaborative value of webinars and their potential to enhance education quality, while addressing challenges faced by international participants in virtual settings. By employing vignette research, the paper delves into the participants' learning experiences globally, supplemented by reflections from the project team, in order to better understand how digital learning environments can be optimised for high-quality teacher education in the future. The authors conclude that, while webinars offer valuable opportunities for international exchange and learning, their effectiveness depends significantly on the recognition of their specific properties and the active role of facilitators.

The third article, *The Multifaceted Field of Virtual Exchanges in Teacher Education: A Literature Review*, by Claudia Ingrisch-Rupp and Vasileios Symeonidis, provides a comprehensive overview of how virtual exchanges were employed in teacher education in the period from 2020 to 2023. The study uses a scoping study approach to examine research papers, focusing on the planning, implementation and evaluation of virtual exchanges. It highlights the potential of virtual exchanges to enhance digital-pedagogical, intercultural and language competencies, while also noting challenges such as the reliance on the willingness and motivation of participants, as these exchanges are often

not compulsory and require institutional support. The paper concludes that expanding virtual exchanges beyond language education and combining small-scale and large-scale studies could better inform future research and practice in teacher education.

The next article, *Digital-Inclusive Transformation and Teacher Preparedness for Foreign Language Education – A Bilateral German-Norwegian Perspective*, by Solveig Chilla, Gerke Doetjes, Karin Vogt, Lina Abed Ibrahim and Dina Tsagari, explores the intersection of digitalisation and inclusion in foreign language teacher education. The study highlights the necessity of adopting a digital-inclusive mindset among educational stakeholders and future teachers in Germany and Norway. Through a survey involving 221 participants, the research examines the attitudinal component of teacher preparedness, focusing on the confidence and willingness of teachers to integrate digital technology in inclusive classrooms. The findings underscore the importance of developing teachers' confidence in using digital tools, linking preparedness to previous experiences with digital transformation. This study advocates for a comprehensive approach in teacher education programmes in order to enhance digital-inclusive teaching and learning.

In the following paper, *Greek Primary School Teachers' Narratives About Their Role Negotiation During the Covid-19 Pandemic*, by Menelaos Tzifopoulos, the author examines the experiences of Greek primary school teachers as they navigated the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. Using interpretative phenomenological analysis, the study delves into teachers' autonomy, digital literacy competences and relationships with students in a rapidly shifting educational landscape. Through the narratives of four teachers, the article highlights the lack of state support and the difficulties in managing digital classrooms, emphasising the need for better preparation for teachers in times of crisis. It explores themes of role renegotiation, professional identity reshaping and adaptation to online teaching, offering insights into psychological impacts and the necessity of support systems for teachers. The study concludes that addressing these challenges requires a more structured support framework and effective training in order to bolster teachers' resilience in future crises.

In the paper entitled *The Italian Way to the Europeanisation of Teacher Education: An Analysis of Reforms and the Ongoing Experience of Digital Transformation*, by Loredana Perla, Viviana Vinci and Laura Sara Agrati, the authors explore the process of the Europeanisation of teacher education in Italy, focusing on how digital transformation has been integrated into this process. The paper employs a documentary review study to analyse recent ministerial reforms in Italy and the DidaSco continuous professional development programme at

the University of Bari. The study highlights the challenges and opportunities presented by digitalisation in reshaping teacher education, emphasising the need for a comprehensive approach to training that incorporates technological innovations. The authors conclude that Italy is gradually developing a distinct approach to Europeanisation in teacher education, leveraging digital transformation as a significant driver for professional growth.

The last paper of the focus section, *Beyond Learning by Videoconference: Findings From a Capacity-Building Study of Kosovan Teachers in the Post-Covid-19 Era*, by Antigona Uka, Marigona Morina and Eugene G. Kowch, explores the effectiveness of online professional development programmes tailored to the specific needs of teachers in Kosova. Using Design-Based Research, the study involved 90 high school teachers and emphasised the importance of integrating complex technologies and instructional design concepts beyond simple videoconferencing tools. The research highlights the positive impact of including prior needs assessments in the development of teachers' attitudes towards online education. The paper concludes with specific recommendations for educational leaders and scholars, with the aim of enhancing teacher practice through innovative online learning strategies.

In the varia section, the first article, *Intercultural Competence, a Necessity in 21st Century Classrooms: Are Teacher Educators in Tanzania Interculturally Competent?*, by Patrick Severine Kavenuke and Grace Ezekiel Kihwele, investigates the extent to which teacher educators in Tanzania possess intercultural competence, which is crucial for teaching in today's globalised classrooms. Using a sample of 300 teacher educators from two Tanzanian university colleges, the study finds that, while educators score highly on dimensions such as attitude, external outcomes, internal outcomes and skills, they score significantly lower on the knowledge dimension. The research identifies factors like living abroad, level of education and teaching experience as significant influences on various dimensions of intercultural competence. The study concludes by highlighting the importance of enhancing intercultural knowledge among educators in order to better prepare them for diverse classroom environments.

The second varia article, *The Real and the Virtual in the Spatial Perception of Education Students*, by Bea Tomšič Amon, investigates how education students at the Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana, perceive urban spaces and how these perceptions evolved in the period from 2001 to 2019. Using a questionnaire, the study compares students' descriptions of their favourite urban places, revealing that, while the sense of touch, as opposed to vision, was least mentioned, students in 2019 expressed themselves more accurately than those in 2001, indicating a growing sensitivity to space. The article suggests

rethinking pedagogical processes to enhance spatial awareness, emphasising the need for integrating real and virtual space experiences in education in order to foster a comprehensive understanding of spatial perception.

The last varia article, *Learning to Teach in Out-of-University and Out-of-School Environments in Primary Teacher Education in Estonia, Finland and Sweden*, by Helene Uppin, Kimberly Norrman, Anne-Mai Näkk, Linn Areskoug, Inge Timoštšuk, Solveig Cornér and Erika Löfström, explores how pre-service primary teachers are prepared to utilise diverse learning environments in Estonia, Finland and Sweden. This multiple case study examines the practices of Tallinn University, University of Helsinki and Uppsala University, highlighting the importance of practical experiences, sustainability of partnerships and professional networking across institutional boundaries. The study suggests that by integrating meaningful and reflective tasks in varied environments, pre-service teachers can enhance their pedagogical skills, ultimately benefiting their future students with diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds.

The issue ends with a book review by Maria Impedovo, who selected *Creating a Teacher Collective: Professional Development Within the Group, the Community, and the Network* by Maria Impedovo, Karen Ferreira-Meyers and Noriyuki Inoue. This publication delves into the creation and maintenance of teacher communities, emphasising their role in driving educational change and enhancing student learning outcomes. The book provides a practical guide for initiating and supporting teacher collectives, highlighting the importance of educational technology in these interactions. It consists of two parts: the first guides practitioners in creating and sustaining collectives, while the second offers examples of applying concepts and technologies. The review underscores the essential elements of passion, action, collaboration and reflection in fostering sustainable teacher collectives, advocating for a strategic development that incorporates these factors in navigating the complexities of educational landscapes.

VASILEIOS SYMEONIDIS AND MARIA IMPEDOVO

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