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Evaluation of the Primary Teacher Education (PrimTEd) Project – Outcomes

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Executive summary – Outcomes evaluation of the Primary Teacher Education (PrimTEd) Project

Background

The purpose of PrimTEd was to produce research, standards, and teaching materials for the pre-service education of teachers in Language and Literacy and Mathematics over the period 2016-2020. PrimTEd was implemented through seven working groups (WGs), three in the field of mathematics (Number Sense, Geometry and Measurement and Mathematical Thinking), one in Language and Literacy (Consolidated Literacy WG) and three overarching WGs responsible for Assessment, Work Integrated Learning (Teaching Practice) and Knowledge Management. The JET Education Services was appointed to coordinate this work.

An initial design evaluation reported that the PrimTEd intervention was directed at establishing standards intended to guide the improvement/ redevelopment/re-creation of the curricula (content and processes) for primary school teacher preparation at universities in mathematics and literacy. It was expected that such an adjustment to the university teaching programmes would produce teachers with improved knowledge levels (subject content knowledge) and better teaching practices (pedagogical content knowledge). The research informed nature of the intervention made it relevant (appropriate) to the problem it was attempting to address. Adding to the relevance of the design was the involvement of university based practitioners and academics as the architects of the curriculum change process. The study concluded that the project design was relevant and appropriate for the objectives it wanted to achieve despite the challenge of incompatible financial administrative systems between some of the participating universities and the Department of Higher Education Training (DHET), the fundholder for the project.

A subsequent implementation evaluation study of PrimTEd found that the sustained and growing interest in PrimTEd Working Group activities by most public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in South Africa did not necessarily translate into deep engagement with the PrimTEd Working Group output and ideas, although in very many cases such engagement was demonstrated. The notion of having standards was also not an un-contested reality. A small minority of teacher educators in the Literacy and Mathematics fields questioned approaches that differed from their own theoretical and ideological perspectives. The implementation study recommended sustained engagement and experimentation at the institutional or university level to exact the benefits of having standards-informed curriculum frameworks.

The COVID-19 pandemic, the attendant lock-down procedures, the travel limitations, the closure of universities and schools and other measures that occurred since March 2020 in South Africa (and internationally) severely affected the work of the Working Groups. Very little, if any face-to-face teaching happened at universities and most institutions have been busy developing their capacity for online provisioning of teaching and learning, requiring the refocusing of resources, energy and focus.

This phase of the evaluation of PrimTEd focused on the outcomes achieved and the extent to which the programme outcomes addressed the following questions:

- What is the degree of uptake of products that emerged from the PrimTEd project?
- What factors impeded and what factors encouraged the uptake of the learning and resources?
- What lessons were learnt through this collaboration project?



- What recommendations can be made for improving the education of new teacher, arising from the PrimTEd experience?

The Outcomes Evaluation

The PrimTEd intervention aimed to produce, in a collaborative way, products to be incorporated in educational programmes at South African universities. In the longer-term such an uptake of its products ought to lead to an improved ability of teachers to teach reading and mathematics. However, the outcomes for this evaluation was more intermediary and focused on the level of uptake by academics at the universities that participated in the PrimTEd activities. During the last few months the Working Groups were busy with their close-out reports as the project had officially come to an end. The objective of this evaluation report is to address the evaluation questions related to outcomes, those planned as well as any unintended outcomes that happened as a result of the project's interventions.

Findings

This outcomes phase coincided with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. The latter resulted in the closure of institutions of learning across the country and a scramble by universities to develop their capacity for online teaching and learning. Hence, the application and utilisation of the knowledge and practice standards produced by the PrimTEd working groups were disrupted by the demands of other priorities that emerged.

Despite these disruptions, the feedback received through this evaluation process indicated that PrimTEd Working Group materials, knowledge and practice standards and other products were being used by a few people on most of the institutions that provided information related to the uptake of PrimTEd products by universities. This is an encouraging indication since there were no formal, active and coordinated strategies in place to manage and support the uptake across the different universities. However, at universities where some Working Group Coordinators are located, the PrimTEd project had progressed into projects with their own unique focus areas and with committed funding from different sources. The Assessment component received a second round of funding from DHET/EU to continue its work and to develop a web-based diagnostic report for individual students. The Advanced Certificate in Foundation Phase Literacy Teaching (AdvCert), is an NQF level 6 qualification that is offered as part-time studies by Rhodes University. The course is tailored to the needs of FP teachers, HoDs, subject advisors and literacy coaches in the Eastern Cape. Another innovation is the Sesotho and isiZulu Reading Project (SIRP) programme, based on the PrimTEd Language and Literacy Standards, for teaching reading to BEd students specialising in the FP and/or IP. And the PrimTEd work integrated learning model (PrimTEdWIL) has been revised and revamped and will be integrated into the SIRP pilot as the teaching practice component of the programme. These are some of the projects that have emerged and that were influenced by the research and /or personnel linked to PrimTEd.

The PrimTEd work has also had a significant influence in the field of mathematics education. Drawing on the disappointing results from the PrimTEd maths tests for 1st- and 4th-year BEd students, the University of Johannesburg has developed a Maths for Primary Teachers (*M4PT*) which is based on the PrimTEd Standards for Mathematics and is compulsory for 1st students at the university. This programme covers the basics of what primary school teachers should know and be able to do in order to teach FP and IP maths effectively. Following a successful pilot involving all 1st-year BEd students at UJ in 2019 (under the name *Maths Intensive*), an expanded version is being piloted in six



institutions (WSU, UFH, TUT, Wits, UJ and CPUT) from 2021 to 2025. There is also a parallel project that, funds from a second donor permitting, will ensure a similar set of outcomes at UNISA.

The factors that impeded the take up of PrimTEd at universities included the contextual differences of the participating universities and there is a recommendation that the identified enabling factors of PrimTEd be nurtured and built upon and developed as evaluative criteria for other projects involving academics at universities in South Africa.

Recommendations towards the future

PrimTEd has come to a close and its achievements have been documented in evaluation reports, in annual reports of the Working Groups, in research papers, in books, in newsletters, and shared during conferences and webinars and numerous presentations at universities and other platforms. The PrimTEd project successfully engaged a large number of academics from 24 universities in South Africa. It has acted as a catalyst for similar and related interventions. Some have already commenced and others are being planned. There is a working document entitled “From PrimTEd to ITEC”, (ITEC being Initial Teacher Education Collaboration. This document proposes that initial teacher education initiatives such as the ones discussed above (e.g. SIRP, AdvCert, M4PT and the continuation of the testing programme) be supported and used under the umbrella of ITEC as to capitalise on the momentum and lessons built by PrimTEd. ITEC is a loose agreement between leaders of independent courses in literacy and mathematics intended for use on BEd programmes for primary school teachers: AdvCert, SIRP, M4PT. All these courses are based on the PrimTEd standards.

Whatever the outcomes of deliberations around this proposal, the following recommendations are based on the findings from the evaluation processes of PrimTEd.

- The identified enabling factors/features of the PrimTEd project namely: Willingness to collaborate; Having available resources to collaborate; General agreement about the core problem to address; should be incorporated as evaluative criteria for all similar ITE projects.
- Make available university level implementation grants that will accommodate the remuneration of academics for their time and or to ensure that resources for collaboration are available.
- Each university site of implementation should develop its own theory of change as a programme theory can be a very useful way of bringing together existing evidence about a project/ strategy, and clarifying where there is agreement and disagreement about how the project is understood to work, and where there are gaps in the evidence.



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List of Abbreviations

| | |
|----------|--|
| AMESA | Association for Mathematics Education if South Africa |
| ANA | Annual National Assessments |
| B Ed | Bachelor of Education |
| CAPS | Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement |
| COVID | Coronavirus |
| CPUT | Cape Peninsula University of Technology |
| DBE | Department of Basic Education |
| DHET | Department of Higher Education and Training's |
| DVC | Deputy Vice Chancellor |
| EDF | Education Deans Forum |
| EFAL | English First Additional Language |
| FP | Foundation Phase |
| HOD | Head of Department |
| HL | Home language |
| IP | Intermediate Phase |
| ITE | Initial Teacher Education |
| ITEC | Initial Teacher Education Collaboration |
| ITERP | Initial Teacher Education Research Project |
| JET | Joint Educational Services |
| KM | Knowledge Management |
| LOLT | Language of learning and teaching |
| MDG | Millennium Development Goal |
| MRTECH | Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications |
| NGO | Non Government Organisation |
| NMU | Nelson Mandela University |
| NQTS | Newly qualified teachers |
| NWG | National Working Group |
| NWU | North West University |
| PGCE | Postgraduate Certificate in Education |
| PrimTEd | Primary Teacher Education |
| RU | Rhodes University |
| SAARMSTE | S A Association Research Mathematics, Science and Technology Education |



| | |
|---------|--|
| SAERA | South African Education Research Association |
| SARCHI | South African Research Chairs Initiative |
| SACMEQ | Southern and Eastern Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality |
| SACE | South African Council of Educators |
| SAMF | South African Mathematics Foundation |
| SPU | Sol Plaatjie University |
| SSI | Semi-Structured Interview |
| TLDCIP | Teaching and Learning Development Capacity Improvement Programme |
| TIMSS | Trends in Mathematics and Science Study |
| TOC | Theory of change |
| UCT | University of Cape Town |
| UJ | University of Johannesburg |
| UNISA | University of South Africa |
| UNIZULU | University of Zululand |
| UP | University of Pretoria |
| UWC | University of the Western Cape |
| WG | Working Group |
| WGC | Working Group Coordinator |
| WGM | Working Group Member |
| WIL | Work Integrated Learning |
| WITS | Wits University |
| WSU | Walter Sisulu University |



1 Brief background to the PrimTEd Project

1.1 Background and findings for the design study (first phase)

The PrimTEd project was designed on the premise that teachers, and the actions they take in the classroom, have fundamental impacts on student learning; and that teachers are the most important resource at the school level for improving the quality of teaching and learning.¹ However, teacher competencies and preparation are reasons for concern as countries, including South Africa, struggle with recruiting, training and retaining good teachers. The low standards in performance at school level have also ‘infiltrated’ universities. A learner only needs to get above 50% in four of seven subjects in order to pass well enough to gain university entrance. Teacher education programmes have lower entrance requirements in comparison with most other disciplines and students are accepted without any reference to their motivation to become teachers.² These and other factors, such as a dearth in research outlining primary school teachers’ reading literacy and teaching practices especially in the Intermediate Phase³, informed the Initial Teacher Education Research Project (ITERP) to investigate the quality of the English and mathematics curricula offered to B Ed students. This study opined that in-service interventions over the last two decades have had limited impact and that the greatest opportunity for improving the quality of schooling lies in strengthening initial teacher education at Universities. The Primary Teacher Education (PrimTEd) Project was initiated as a result.

The aim of the PrimTEd project was to provide standards intended to guide the restructuring of the theory and practice components of the language and mathematics curricula for prospective primary school teachers. The programme theory identified poor teaching by teachers at primary schools level as the reason for learners’ poor performance. It took its lead from the revised policy on the minimum requirements for teacher education qualifications⁴. The policy requires the higher education system to produce teachers of high quality, in line with the needs of the country. This informs the basis for the development of core curricula for Initial Teacher Education (ITE), as well as Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programmes for teachers.

The PrimTEd project was a component of the Department of Higher Education and Training’s (DHET) Teaching and Learning Development Capacity Improvement Programme (TLDCIP), and as such is under the overall authority of the DHET’s Director-General. It was managed by the Chief-Directorate for Teaching and Learning Development, located in the University Education branch of the DHET. The project was supported financially by the European Union and the Zenex Foundation.

¹ Nordstrum, L.E., 2015. Effective teaching and education policy in sub-Saharan Africa: A conceptual study of effective teaching and review of educational policies in 11 Sub-Saharan African countries. USAID.

² Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE). 2015. Teachers in South Africa. Supply and Demand 2013 – 2025. Johannesburg, South Africa.

³ Taylor, N. 2014. Thinking, Language and Learning in Initial Teacher Education. Presentation to the Seminar: Academic Depth and Rigour in ITE. 30-31 October 2014, University of the Witwatersrand.

⁴ Department of Higher Education and Training. 2015. National Qualifications Framework Act, 2008 Revised Policy on Minimum requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications. South Africa



Seven Working Groups were created; one for literacy and three for mathematics and three cross-cutting groups; Assessment; Knowledge Management and Work Integrated Learning, each with a Coordinator based at a university.

A first phase evaluation study of the design of the PrimTEd project (PrimTEd, 2019) was completed in September 2019, where the Design refers to the overall framework, the plans, the policies, structures and mechanisms put in place to manage the programme and to execute the plans. The table below lists the completed and current evaluation studies for the PrimTEd project.

Table 1: Completed and planned evaluation stages

| Report | Main purpose | Target Date | Completed |
|---|--|----------------|-------------------|
| INCEPTION AND FIRST FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT | Design of PrimTEd | 31 August 2019 | 23 September 2019 |
| SECOND FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT | Implementation of WG plans | 30 June 2020 | September 2020 |
| FINAL SUMMATIVE REPORT (current report) | Take up of PrimTEd products by DHET and universities | 15 July 2021 | November 2021 |

The initial study found that the PrimTEd project was based on a common agreement that primary schooling in South Africa was in a crisis and the extent of the crisis had been highlighted by the poor results in core subjects such as mathematics and literacy. The poor performance of the learners in the national assessments such as Annual National Assessments (ANA), in regional assessments such as Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ) and international assessments such as Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) stimulated and informed further research studies such as the Initial Teacher Education Research Project.

The PrimTEd intervention was directed at establishing standards intended to guide the improvement/ redevelopment/re-creation of the curricula (content and processes) for primary school teacher preparation at universities with special emphasis on mathematics and literacy. It was expected that such an adjustment to the university teaching programmes would produce teachers with improved knowledge levels (subject content knowledge) and better teaching practices (pedagogical content knowledge). The research informed nature of the intervention made it relevant (appropriate) to the problem it was attempting to address. Adding to the relevance of the design was the involvement of university based practitioners and academics as the architects of the curriculum change process. This enhanced ownership of the outputs, understanding of the content, and streamlined wider application and implementation at the universities. The Working Groups also developed 'organically' with three literacy focused working groups morphing into one Consolidated Literacy Working Group. It further found that there was good synergy between the Higher Education policy intents, national priorities and the programme framework documents. The purpose of the



PrimTEd project was articulated as the development of consensus about approaches to the teaching and learning for mathematics and literacy in primary schools.

The study concluded that the project design was found to be relevant and appropriate for the objective it wanted to achieve despite the challenge of incompatible financial administrative systems between some universities and DHET, the project fundholder.

The recommendations from the design evaluation included a proposal that possible external financial administrative support be sought to combat the unwieldy university financial administrative systems, or alternately that the university financial administrative systems be streamlined to accommodate the work of the Working Groups. Other recommendations were that each Working Group develop a theory of change involving the uptake by universities to include university level contextual factors. The study noted that there needed to be clear policies and strategies that would support the curriculum change efforts of the PrimTEd project. The entry requirements for teacher education programmes was one such policy.

1.2 Background findings of the implementation of PrimTEd (second phase)

The implementation study reported that the overall programme management and coordination and day-to-day intellectual and technical guidance to the subject-based working groups (WGs) and cross-cutting working groups (CCWGs) was provided by JET (JET Education Services) that also acted as secretariat to the National Working Committee. The management and support functions performed by JET were funded separately by the Zenex Foundation. This was found to be a 'successful' design and implementation strategy that avoided the complication of this necessary support service competing for the same pool of resources and freed up additional funding for the work of the Working Groups.

The PrimTEd project, through the activities of the Working Groups managed to sustain the interest of a large number of teacher educators from both public and private institutions as well as other parties interested in teacher development. The Working Groups also managed to involve a diverse range of people – novices/ experts from different universities. While the project succeeded in involving more and more participants from different institutions, there were reports of limited active engagement across all universities in South Africa. However, in terms of project implementation, it was revealed that Working Group participation was facilitated through different means and participation was as a result of multiple strategies. The strategies included national seminars, regional workshops, conference presentations and presentations for Education Faculty/ Department staff at some universities. There was general agreement that South African universities were well represented on the Working Groups.

The Working Group members indicated that they became part of the PrimTEd process through diverse means, self-selection, being delegated as well as being nominated by WG Coordinators. While the Working Group Coordinators provided the necessary support and guidance, not all education (relevant) academics at the universities were aware of the activities of the PrimTEd Working Groups. Much of this has to do with poor communication within Faculties of Education on each of the campuses. The implementation of PrimTEd proceeded as planned during the first three years of the project; adjusting mainly for the incompatible administrative university systems encountered; overcoming workload pressures of individuals who had to find time to attend to PrimTEd matters; and developing consensus around the development of standards within some Working Groups



The COVID-19 pandemic, the attendant lock-down procedures, the travel limitations, the closure of universities and schools and other measures that occurred since March 2020 in South Africa (and internationally) severely affected the work of the Working Groups. Very little, if any face-to-face teaching happened at universities during the extended lock-down period and most institutions were developing their capacity for online provisioning of teaching and learning, requiring the refocusing of resources, energy and focus. The WG Coordinators found that the most rewarding aspects of the PrimTEd project, for themselves and others, were the opportunities for the collegial efforts and the inter-institutional collaboration.

Some recommendations were provided to strengthen implementation. The establishment of university-based curriculum working groups to engage with the draft standards was recommended and for DHET to make implementation grants available. As with the design evaluation, it was recommended that each university site of implementation should develop its own theory of change as a programme theory that clarified understanding, assumptions and the gaps in evidence.

2 Objectives and method of the (third phase) outcomes evaluation

The purpose of PrimTEd was to produce research, standards, and teaching materials for the pre-service education of teachers in Language and Literacy and Mathematics over the period 2016-2020. PrimTEd was implemented through seven working groups (WGs), three in the field of mathematics (Number Sense, Geometry and Measurement and Mathematical Thinking), one in Language and Literacy (Consolidated Literacy WG) and three overarching WGs responsible for Assessment, Work Integrated Learning (Teaching Practice) and Knowledge Management. The JET Education Services was appointed to coordinate this work.

This phase of the evaluation of PrimTEd focused on the outcomes achieved and the extent to which the programme outcomes addressed the following questions:

Outcomes (Results)

- What is the degree of uptake of products that emerged from the PrimTEd project?
- What factors impeded and what factors encouraged the uptake of the learning and resources?
- What lessons were learnt through this collaboration project?
- What recommendations can be made for improving the education of new teacher, arising from the PrimTEd experience?

Outcomes

The outcomes describe the intended changes in development conditions that result from the interventions (implementation strategies and activities) employed, in this case, through the PrimTEd project. While the ultimate target group for the PrimTEd project will be learners in primary school to address poor learner performance in mathematics and literacy in South African primary schools, the specific problem identified through the PrimTEd intervention was poor teaching knowledge and practices of primary school teachers. The PrimTEd intervention aimed to produce, in a collaborative way, products to be incorporated in educational programmes at South African universities. In the



longer-term such an uptake of its products ought to lead to an improved ability of teachers' reading and mathematics. The following theory of change was constructed to illustrate the intermediary outcomes planned for the programme.

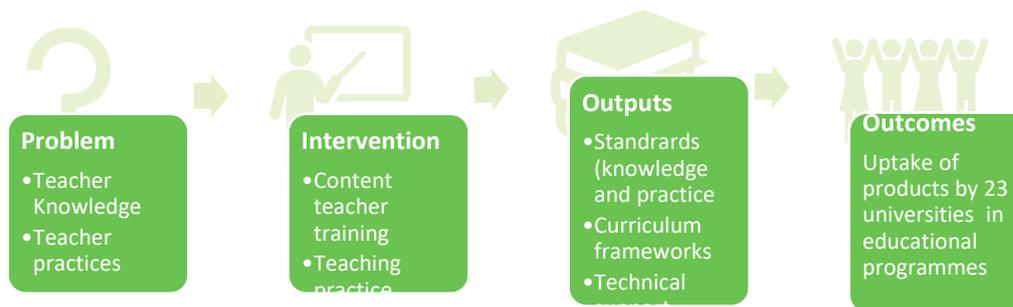


Figure 1: Theory of Change for PrimTEd project

As reported in the implementation evaluation of the PrimTEd project, it is noted that the COVID-19 pandemic, the attendant lock-down procedures, the travel limitations, the closure of universities and schools and other measures that occurred since March 2020 in South Africa (and internationally) severely affected the work of the Working Groups. Very little, if any face-to-face teaching happened at universities and most institutions have been busy developing their capacity for online provisioning of teaching and learning, requiring the refocusing of resources, energy and focus.

During the last few months the Working Groups were busy with their close-out reports as the project has officially come to an end. The objective of this evaluation report is to address the evaluation questions related to outcomes, those planned as well as any unintended outcomes that happened as a result of the project's interventions.

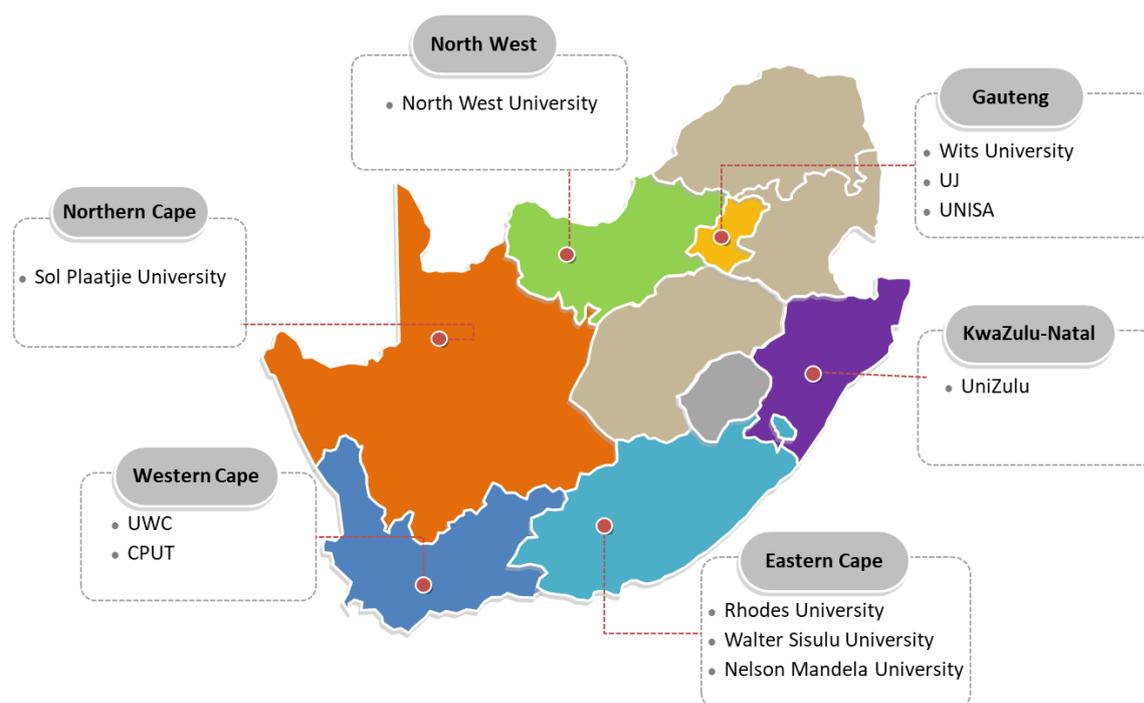
2.1 Method and sample

The analysis of the outcomes relied on the reports (updates) interviews conducted during previous phases of the evaluation, recent interviews conducted, and survey responses received about implementation and outcomes at the universities. A short quick-response survey targeted university based PrimTEd Working Group members that responded to a previous survey about the implementation of PrimTEd at their institutions.

**Table 2: Data sources and instruments**

| Data source | Instrument(s)/ process |
|--------------------------------|--|
| University based respondents | Quick-response survey of university based WG members |
| JET Coordinator | Interview/report |
| University based WG members | Interviews |
| Working Group Coordinators | Interviews/ reports |
| Department of Higher Education | Interviews |

The following universities, targeted in the design and implementation evaluations, again featured in the list of universities where the survey respondents were located. This time, staff members at Sol Plaatjie University in the Northern Cape did not respond, despite several appeals but staff members from University of Stellenbosch (US) and University of Fort Hare (UFH) did respond. PrimTEd participants from private institutions and non-government organisations (NGOs) and not for profit organisation (NPOs) were not surveyed.

**Figure 2 Universities of survey and interview respondents**

2.1 Limitations

The COVID-19 pandemic forced universities to re-prioritise and it was very difficult to reach individuals for sustained engagement around the PrimTEd project. The contact details of many potential respondents had changed or did not work and some indicated that they were on leave or had moved on to other institutions. The feedback about outcomes at institutions was received only from people who had been listed as having attended one or more PrimTEd related events.



3 Presentation of findings of outcomes evaluation

3.1 Uptake of PrimTEd at universities?

3.1.1 Results of quick response survey

The challenges encountered during the data gathering process for the outcomes evaluation had a lot to do with the demands of online teaching and learning that were enforced on institutions of higher education by the Covid-19 pandemic. After being completely closed for nearly six months, universities, staff and students had to adapt to online teaching and learning at a rapid pace involving staff and other stakeholders who had limited technological resources and capacities for online teaching. This is an ongoing challenge for many, as some students expect and want face-to-face engagement while others are more comfortable with the online teaching and learning mode. Following the relative successful survey administered during the implementation evaluation with a 38% response rate totaling 60 respondents from 23 universities, there was some expectation of similar success. This time around, despite many appeals just over 10% (16) responded to a short survey enquiring about the implementation and outcomes of PrimTEd at their institutions and the feedback came from only 13 universities. The following charts provide visual representations of the feedback received about the institutional affiliations of the respondents, their PrimTEd Working Group affiliation and their views of the outcomes (implementation) of PrimTEd at their institutions.

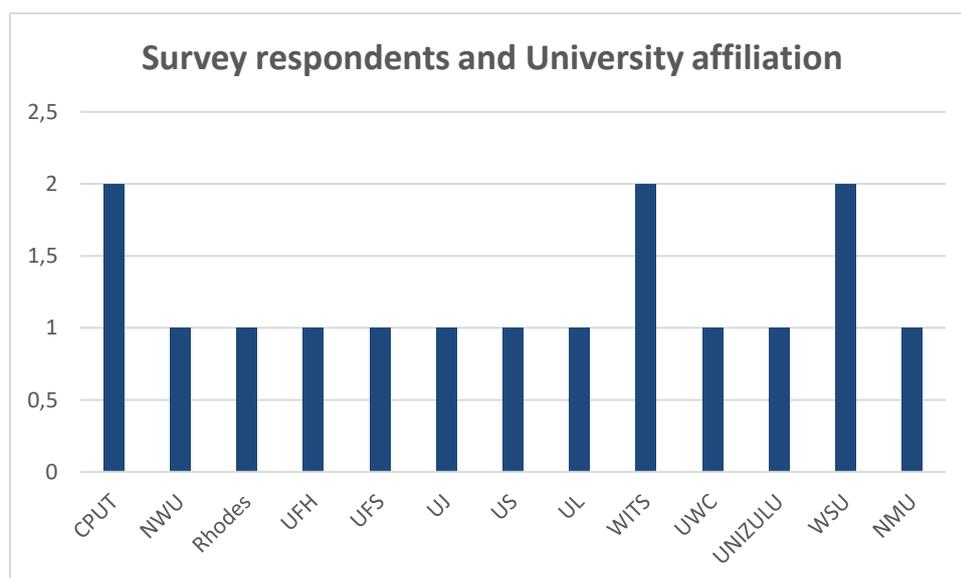


Figure 3: University affiliation of survey respondents n=16

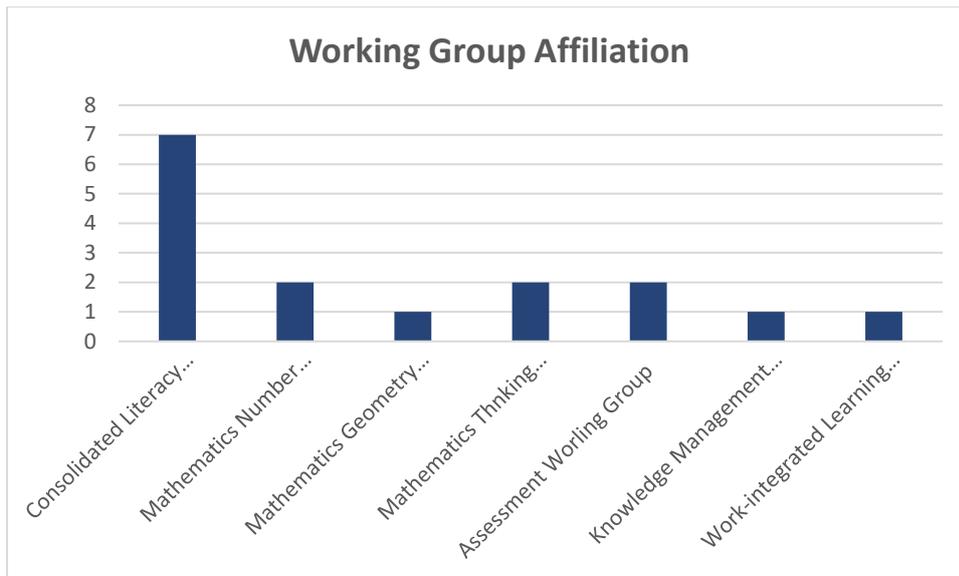


Figure 4: Working Group affiliation of respondents

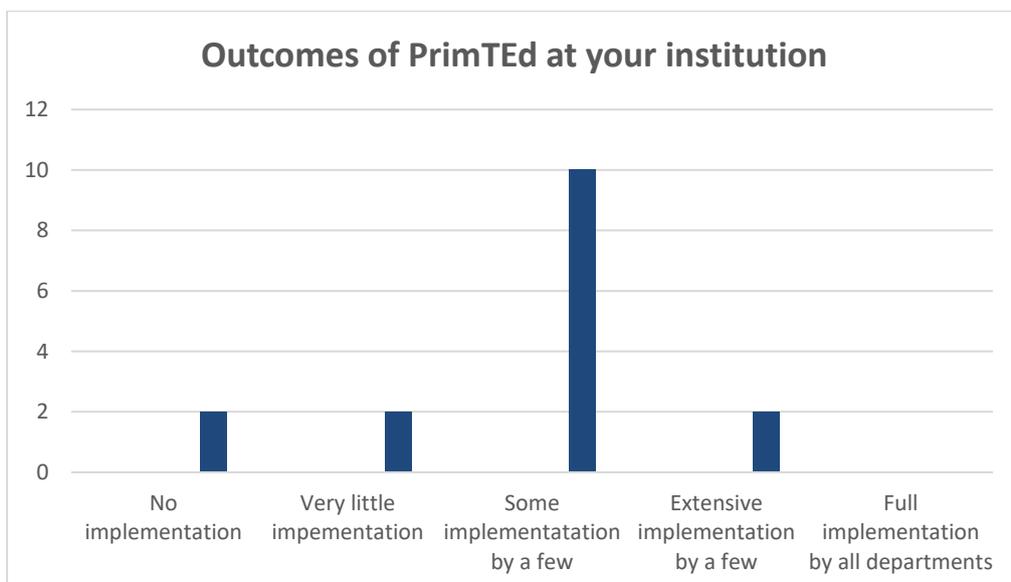


Figure 5: Respondents' views of PrimTEd at institutions

While there was clear indication that full implementation by all departments at institutions was not happening, the overwhelming majority of these respondents indicated that some implementation by a few in their departments was indeed happening. The respondents were asked to motivate their responses and the following reasons for the views above were provided;

We use the PrimTEd data in the English department.

Full implementation was not possible as campuses were closed for Covid-19 and renovations.

Not much dissemination from other groups than my designated group. No communication straight to my colleagues from other PrimTed groups. I had communication from the Assessment group.



I have implemented the geometry materials in my BEd 2 Course in 2020 and 2021.

The other colleagues they are still trying to familiarize themselves with MRTEQ programs but Covid 19 disrupted a coordinated effort to implement what we have learnt at the workshops.

Where implementation is ongoing, even by a few, the respondents specified the use of PrimTEd at their institution and that it was happening in literacy (English Department), in mathematics (Geometry) as well as Assessment. The COVID-19 pandemic and the disruptions that followed created the challenges to implementation of PrimTEd activities at the institutions.

3.1.2 Additional views about uptake of PrimTEd at universities

Follow up interviews with some working group members, interview feedback from all the working group coordinators (except Assessment) and DHET staff generated more insights about the uptake by universities, of the standards generated, the materials and PrimTEd related research produced in the working groups. These views are shared in relation to each working group, noting that three working groups worked across content areas with PrimTEd.

What has been the uptake of the outputs and outcomes of the Consolidated Literacy Working Group at universities across South Africa? Coordinator response

I think it is mixed and uneven. Although we tried to involve as many colleagues as we could across the various universities, a lot depended on *who* came (to the event) and *to what extent* they cascaded the information back to their colleagues. From anecdotal evidence e.g. from what colleagues say in various zoom meetings, some individuals within education faculties across universities have commented on how useful the standards are in helping them reflect on their BEd courses and restructure them.

Supporting this response by the Coordinator of the Consolidated Literacy Working Group, two others commented that the standards generated by the working group were well received by universities but that they did not know how well DHET supported the application of the standards. Another respondent stated that this particular working group produced amazing deliverables such as the annotated bibliography of reading research in the African languages and in English First Additional Language (EFAL), curriculum frameworks, numerous research papers and prompted healthy discussions about approaches to reading, particularly in the African Languages. The teaching of reading was elevated and the standard and the curriculum frameworks provided guidelines to the amount of credits and time that should be allocated to language and literacy teaching within the Initial Teacher Education programmes. The research also informed the African Language policy documents that informed other units such as the Centres for African Language Teaching at North West University (Setswana), University of Limpopo (Tshivenda) and University of the Western Cape (IsiXhosa). The latter is a partnership with three universities in the Eastern Cape where IsiXhosa is widely spoken and taught as a home language, namely: Walter Sisulu University, University of Fort Hare and Rhodes University. Outside of these languages, *the Sesotho and isiZulu Reading Project (SIRP)* is developing a self-sufficient programme for teaching reading to BEd students. All these initiatives have links to the PrimTEd programme and have attracted support from donors such as USAID, VVOB (Belgium), the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) and the EDTP SETA.



There was also a dissenting view that emerged from a follow-up interview with one of the Consolidated Literacy Working Group participants who claimed that the project was flawed and that there was no discussion around the pedagogical questions that resulted in a tight and repetitive focus on implementing specific programmes with narrow ideological bases. The respondent motivated or elaborated this position as follows – particularly in response to the (recorded) large number of universities that participated in the processes of the working group:

This assumes that the objectives of the PrimTEd project were collaboratively interrogated, explored and agreed upon. They were not. A group of people over a few meetings presented the same literacy content to us with little engagement with our experiences and our knowledges. Until this is done then top down processes of curriculum and pedagogical change is very unlikely to occur.

That there was wide participation in this working group was not contested. In fact the largest individual and institutional participation was in the Consolidated Literacy Working Group. It was pointed out that early reading instruction informed by prevailing general and highly theoretical educational perspectives on reading remained uncontested at some universities. The challenge was to engage academics since very few university lecturers in education departments seemed to be aware of current research evidence about early reading. The general agreement was that literacy academics at institutions should interrogate and engage with the standards, curriculum frameworks and research produced by the working group participants in order to make sense of the guidance provided and to improve the literacy teaching and learning as envisaged by the project.

What has been the uptake of the outputs and outcomes of the Number Sense Working Group at universities across South Africa? Coordinator Response

The evidence is very anecdotal. Many institutions have used the key performance standards (KPS) to inform the design of their courses. In cases like our university, we have aligned our Foundation and Intermediate Phase programmes on the structure of the KPS. Other universities have looked at the Standards and have decided to adapt sections to their context. I think that greater use of the Standards across the universities would require a different intervention. The intervention will have to look at unpacking the Standards and how the Standards should be implemented in particular Universities to meet both the institutional realities and the requirements within the Standards.

According to respondents, colleagues in the primary education teaching and learning space were very aware of the PrimTEd project activities as representatives from 11 universities participated in the Number Sense working group. The efforts of the Number Sense working group were also boosted by collaboration with the Assessment working group where more universities have come on board to assess their students' mathematical abilities. They discovered that their students still have huge mathematical content knowledge gaps. One respondent reflected on this issue as follows,

The problem is not institutionally but the fact that the DHET only allowed us to teach Mathematics and Language for 6 months of the year from B.Ed1 to B.Ed 4. The lack of time afforded lecturers despite any other interventions it would be impossible to decrease the



gap. Online learning has also resulted in technical challenges like students' non attendance etc.

The challenges related to the Covid-19 pandemic have delayed the attainment of the project goals. In other words, some of the objectives were paused and only recently re-started. Universities, who have all been forced to move their courses online, were encouraged to use the standards as guiding tool for this exercise.

What has been the uptake of the outputs and outcomes of the Mathematical Thinking Working Group at universities across South Africa? Coordinator response

The mathematics working groups, which are more oriented (in their work) to teaching, do not have such direct levers for influencing the system. In discussions earlier in the year, the use of assessment that is well aligned to the work of these groups was identified as a possible lever for further influence. Work in the Mathematical Thinking group to make such aligned assessment feasible and to pilot this is ongoing. Funding for this would, of course be an important factor.

A sentiment was shared that effective uptake will require extensive and substantive engagement throughout the sector and that while the uptake for mathematical thinking was minimal to date, more has been achieved through working with for example the Assessment working group. They (Assessment working group) according to the respondent, have an appropriate lever that can influence the system rather than just the practice of one or two people at the university. The results of the assessments will/should influence the way mathematics is taught and the amount of time that is allocated to the teaching of mathematics.

What has been the uptake of the outputs and outcomes of the Geometry and Measurement Working Group at universities across South Africa? Coordinator response

Working group members used the designed activities in the case of Geometry and Measurement for their own teaching of pre-service mathematics teachers and designing quality assessment tasks. The Assessment Working group have been using our items in our teaching units to assist with setting of test items for the national benchmark mathematics tests for pre-service mathematics teachers in FP & IP phases.

The designed activities developed in this working group included a set of toolkits for Geometry and Measurement for use in Foundation and Intermediary Phases. The toolkits have been aligned to agreed upon Knowledge and Practice Standards for Geometry and Measurement. According to the coordinator, these toolkits will be sent to experts to review and provide feedback, which will be used to produce an enhanced second version of the toolkits. Currently, according to one respondent, there is limited coherence among university Initial Teachers Education programmes in terms of mathematics teaching, its design and the amount of time allotted to mathematics. The knowledge and Practice Standards aim to create coherence across the curricula with regards to weighting,



credits, notional hours and calendar groupings. This should be facilitated jointly by mathematics teacher educators and colleagues working in the teacher development directorate unit at DBE. They suggest that what is lacking is the adequate coverage of core mathematical content knowledge, procedures and processes with adequate depth that can promote deep thinking.

What has been the uptake of the outputs and outcomes of the Knowledge Management Working Group at universities across South Africa? Coordinators response

Whilst there was good participation in PrimTEd workshops much still needs to be done. The Knowledge Management Working Group has made materials developed by all the others available via a website and shared information about PrimTEd development via a newsletter.

There was a strong appeal for dissemination workshops or dissemination webinars for all universities, but per university so that the thinking behind the PrimTEd work can be discussed in a non-comparative situation. Followed up by research partnerships within institutions and then across institutions. This appeal suggests the continuing need for knowledge sharing at university level.

What has been the uptake of the outputs and outcomes of the Work Integrated Learning (WIL) Working Group at universities across South Africa? Coordinators response

This is difficult to answer as a number of universities do their planning without informing the WIL group of uptake. The work of the group has been widely disseminated on various platforms and universities have requested individual “consultations/presentations” on core aspects related to WIL. Materials have also been sent to those universities requesting to have access, and they also access the materials on the JET clearinghouse.

Respondents who were part of this working group as well as several outside the working group expressed a view that this working group (WIL) produced materials, research and products that were very useful and beneficial to education departments from most universities. There was high awareness of the work of the working group and they have been invited by many institutions to present their work. The work of the WIL group has been instrumental in the adaptations made to WIL at the NWU university. Aspects that emanated from the project have led to new collaborations with other universities to explore and implement new ground-breaking initiatives.

The lessons, research, materials generated by this working group enabled universities to come up with novel approaches to teaching practice and deal creatively with the challenges brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic. The latter limited access to schools. The research shows, according to a respondent, the need to have an apprenticeship model to teacher development. Teaching practice should be conceived of differently based on theoretically sound principles that would include simulation and mentoring as ways of developing teacher competencies. There is now experimentation with virtual classrooms and the Department of Basic Education expressed



admiration for the creativity displayed as well as the high standards maintained during this exploratory process.

What has been the uptake of the outputs and outcomes of the Assessment Working Group at universities across South Africa? From reports

12 Universities, four for English and eight for Mathematics signed up to participate in the assessment of education students' literacy capabilities. The Assessment Working group also secured a further DHET grant to work for two-years on a proper item bank for Mathematics and English. The working group is also developing a proposal for the further online testing and reporting functionality and for extending and trialing of mathematics learning materials.

More universities are starting to work together on aspects related to mathematics and literacy especially with assessment results being shared and discussed. A respondent believes that more research needs to be done and should involve more people who are in leadership positions.

For example, where I can speak with relative confidence, at the two universities where the leadership of the faculties of education have been involved, in collaboration with project leaders, there have been major changes and collaboration across the universities. People with decision-making power need to be involved to see the value of the work being done. Very often the participants involved in the projects do not have this power.

The assessment component of PrimTEd has received a second round of funding from DHET/EU to continue its work and to develop a web-based diagnostic report for individual students. These will be made available to all HEIs, public and private, to diagnose gaps in student knowledge and to track progress on bridging these gaps over the course of the BEd.

3.2 What factors impeded and what factors encouraged the uptake of the PrimTEd learning and resources?

The broadly agreed stumbling block to the uptake of PrimTEd learning and resources at universities was/is the Covid-19 pandemic. All universities were forced to refocus priorities and energies towards the rapid development of online capabilities of both staff and students. Universities have responded very differently and unequally and the blended learning process remains a challenge for all the universities. The factors highlighted and discussed below are all non-Covid-19 related that were raised by respondents when asked about **challenges** encountered as well as the **enabling features** of PrimTEd at universities.

Challenge: Different starting points

Institutions as well as individuals engaged the PrimTEd project with different expectations, expertise, experiences and exposure to the theories and practices that emerged during national gathering and subsequent working group meetings. The differing interests, skills and concerns affected and in some cases delayed implementation when a few interested parties carried on with the tasks. One respondent indicated that there was an intention to share skills and resources but sometimes we got



it wrong and this got people upset. The following statement is shared as an example shared upon request:

How could they allow a white male academic, and I have nothing personal against him, to speak on behalf of literacy in African Languages? This was so insensitive and I struggled to convince my colleagues to engage after that but this should not be happening in South Africa today.

This incident was acknowledged and another respondent indicated that other speakers had been approached but were not available and that the speaker did not speak on behalf of literacy in African Languages, but he was asked to raise key aspects for discussion. Having people at different levels in their career also means that some people may need more time to engage with certain concepts in order to attain uptake and sustain progress. Different universities responded differently to the uptake of PrimTEd learning and resources depending on the involvement or non-involvement of experienced academics.

Challenge: remuneration for time spent on PrimTEd work

One of the coordinators pointed out that it was a constant juggle to fit in the Prim TEd work with all the other academic commitments the coordinator had to deal with. It was also difficult get to colleagues from other institutions on board to help with the work; there was initially lots of enthusiasm early on but this waned when the actual work came up.

Another challenge was that DHET decided that colleagues only receive funds for particular purchases. For example, conference attendance, teaching buyouts, computers and other equipment. The result was that it was difficult always to get people motivated to complete tasks.

A DHET respondent agreed that this was indeed a challenge and that it was a struggle to retain and sustain the involvement of top academics who all experienced heavy workloads. This is something that it reconsider to make sure that the people are appropriately compensated for time spent on strengthening the teacher education systems in the country.

Challenge: Incompatible financial systems

As was reported in the design and implementation evaluations of PrimTEd, the financial administrative complications delayed payments, exacted time of academics and officials from DHET who struggled to create manageable financial systems that satisfied the demands of the project, the requirements outlined in the Public Finance Management Act (PMFA), external donors in the form of the European Union and the institutional financial limitations and requirements.

The project was administered through the University Finance Department which was rather inept and rigid, and this created a lot of stress with the CLWG team member at the university who, already under normal work pressures, had to deal with this additional administrative burden

One suggestion to alleviate this challenge was to cut out the mediating role of JET as direct financial reporting will help with identifying the gaps much sooner and set up appropriate systems. Working groups first reported to and via JET and this resulted in more delays.



Enabling feature: Willingness to collaborate

Several respondents indicated that despite all the challenges, the ones highlighted above and Covid-19 related challenges, it was the willingness of individuals academics, experts and novices to collaborate around common tasks and themes that enabled the very substantial outcomes and results of the PrimTEd project. Some stated that there was a willingness to share and learn and the participants were also referred as a committed core group of participants, spanning a variety of universities and different orientations to mathematics and literacy education. The last part of the following statement aptly captures this enabling feature.

There were a few enabling factors. The first was that the DHET staff supported us. Their guidance and ability to advise under challenging situations provided a safe space for emerging coordinators of National projects. The support provided by the local universities also played a pivotal role in managing processes within the broader project. The relationships developed between colleagues was the glue that ensured the completion of tasks and activities

Added to this enabling feature was that the participation in the working group activities came from a very broad spectrum academics from 24 public universities in South Africa. The experts worked developmentally with novice academics. The expert researchers ensured that they opened up research spaces. The opening up of spaces allowed novice researchers to express themselves. Lecturers from both historically advantaged and disadvantaged universities came to the space sharing what was working for them in their context, according to a respondent.

Enabling feature: Having available resources to collaborate

A coordinator listed the availability of resources to collaborative plan and deliberate about tasks related to PrimTEd as an enabling feature. Going away to a quiet venue for 2-3 days at a time for a project writing workshop was extremely helpful. It enabled them to discuss issues, to do project writing without work interruptions, and it helped build camaraderie across institutions. The available resources allowed larger groups of academics to gather for the annual dialogues and think tank sessions by the different working groups.

It created the possibility for 'organisational and leadership drivers' to emerge. These drivers were key to the implementation of PrimTEd and the perspectives of the relative success of these drivers were reported on in the implementation evaluation report. Basically indicating agreement that the working groups created an enabling environment for ongoing improvement and that they developed leadership practices that ensured that practitioners had the necessary technical knowledge and practical skills to effectively carry out a specified tasks.

Enabling feature: General agreement about the core problem to address

The fact that there was general consensus from participating universities and other stakeholders such as the Department of Basic Education (DBE), the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), the South African Council for Educators (SACE) for the need to restructure the theory and practice components of the language and mathematics curricula for prospective primary school teachers was enabling. The programme theory, as mentioned before, identified poor teaching by teachers at primary schools level as the reason for learners' poor performance. However, according to one respondent from the literacy working group, the 'problem' extends beyond the school:

There are also very few reading specialists in education departments who are well versed in current reading research and evidence, so the prevailing general and highly theoretical



educational perspectives on reading remain uncontested. Very few university lecturers in education departments seem to be aware of current research evidence about early reading in South Africa, or indeed the rest of Africa or other developing countries (much of it from large scale studies), and if they are, they seem unable to 'read' the basic stats.

This growing consensus triggered the interest of most higher education institutions, both private and public and increased levels of participation albeit unevenly across the different public universities. The goals of PrimTEd were also shared directly to staff at some institutions, through the Dean's Forum, during Provincial Education Sector sessions, documents, publications and research made available on the JET PrimTEd Clearinghouse website, regular online newsletters and very many research papers presented at national and international literacy and mathematics and teacher education conferences.

3.3 What lessons were learnt through this collaboration project?

Respondents were specifically asked to share lessons learnt through their involvement in the PrimTEd project and the lessons were many and varied, depending on their level of involvement or engagement. The list of lessons has been clustered into themes based on common concept(s) raised.

Lesson 1: Develop shared understanding:

There is a need to expend (spend) a lot of time and effort in developing a shared understanding of what we are doing and of what it is possible to do. This is especially important at the start of a project or programme. Linked to this is the need for dialogue and the creation of forums where colleagues from different institutions can meet regularly to exchange views, share information, debate contentious issues and build camaraderie. This lesson is amplified, according to one respondent, since the production of formalised standards for the entire field was not explicitly stated at the start of the process and this work took up considerably more time and effort than had been written into the plans. This impacted adversely on their work to trial, refine and bed down the conceptual frameworks in the more normal workstreams of participating universities. Also, there will be little substantive uptake of imposed sets of standards which are not easily understood.

In my opinion, these will achieve very little substantive change unless the entire sector can be engaged in a productive debate to understand, critique and improve these standards.

Only in this way could we begin to achieve a shared understanding that we could work on across the system to improve our teaching.

After bringing people together, constructive dialogue is needed to generate debate and allow space for sharing and insights to develop.

Lesson 2: Allow for co-creation of knowledge and practices.

This 'lesson' is similar to the earlier one but emphasizes the 'what' of the collaboration. The respondents felt that the dialogues should enhance the coverage of core content knowledge, procedures and processes with adequate depth to promote deep thinking. This is in line with expectations of a profession where knowledge and practice standards are developed and generated in the field. The co-creation process will enhance (the sense of) ownership of the standards and develop more coherence across institutions. The PrimTEd project has highlighted the need for universities to work together to address issues of concern in teacher education. It has also show-



cased examples of collaboration among other stakeholders in teachers education such as SACE, DBE and DHET as well as Provincial and District level education officials.

Lesson 3: There is strength in diversity

One respondent put it strongly, that it was essential that novice researchers be matched with mentors either in the institution or in another institution to assist them along the journey of the project. Experienced academics brought their skills and expertise, and emerging academics inserted diverse contexts and experience all of which added to the richness of the deliberations.

Lesson 4: Project design must accommodate project needs

Linked to the collaborative nature of all the lessons listed above, the project design should accommodate the project needs by enabling experienced academics to participate, either through direct remuneration, or adequate compensation for time spent on the project. The project design should also ensure the development of financial and administrative systems that speak to the requirements of the project as well as the fiduciary obligations to internal and external stakeholders.

3.4 What recommendations can be made for improving the education of new teacher, arising from the PrimTEd experience?

The following recommendations were shared by respondents

- There may be more willingness to get involved if lecturers from universities can be released from their commitments and be paid to get involved and work full time on projects like this over a period of time (e.g. a year stint).
- There must also be experienced researchers in the team (from both quantitative and qualitative traditions) to guide and mentor more inexperienced lecturers in the team to nurture a more methodologically literate approach to literacy and maths challenges within the education landscape.
- More effort should be put into developing thinking mathematical activities that stimulates critical and creative thinking, and ultimately enhances problem solving capabilities of pre-service teachers.
- What I think would strengthen the work is to build on the relationships which have been built over the last four years. I also think that it is crucial that all the institutions in South Africa go through a process in which the Standards are discussed and made clear. Then we should have a team which goes into institutions which will assist them in the implementation of the KPS without overriding the staff and institution character and individuality. The KPS should be a living document and should be revisited and evaluated in order to strengthen it within our context.
- Work to develop in-depth assessment that is aligned with the work of the mathematical working groups and then to begin to implement these in universities in order to generate deeper research into the mathematical engagement of our students (and how this may be changing in response to changes in practice).



- The reform of ITE is imperative if the country is to achieve the significantly higher performance warranted by the very considerable expenditure on the school sector. PrimTEd has set up a situation, both in terms of the academic standards required and the level of inter-institutional collaboration needed to drive such a movement. It is important that the programmes **Maths 4 Primary Teachers (M4PT)/ Advanced Certificate in Foundation Phase Literacy Teaching (AdvCert)/ Sesotho and isiZulu Reading Project (SIRP)/ Assessment instruments for literacy and maths at ITE level/ The PrimTEd work integrated learning model (PrimTEdWIL)/ Teacher Internship Collaboration South Africa (TICZA)** and others, be utilised under the umbrella of ITEC so as to capitalise on the momentum and lessons built by PrimTEd.

4 Discussion and conclusions

This phase of the evaluation of PrimTEd focused on the outcomes achieved and the extent to which the programme outcomes addressed the following questions:

Outcomes (Results)

- What is the degree of uptake of products that emerged from the PrimTEd project?
- What factors impeded and what factors encouraged the uptake of the learning and resources?
- What lessons were learnt through this collaboration project?
- What recommendations can be made for improving the education of new teacher, arising from the PrimTEd experience?

As reported previously, the PrimTEd project, through the activities of the Working Groups managed to sustain the interest of a large number of teacher educators from both public and private institutions as well as other parties interested in teacher development. PrimTEd also created heightened awareness of knowledge and practice standards (KPS) for literacy and mathematics teaching in primary schools. The Working Groups engaged in research, produced an abundance of research papers, books, and teacher education resources and materials for use in teacher education.

This outcomes assessment phase coincided with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, resulting in the closure of institutions of learning across the country and a scramble by universities to develop their capacity for online teaching and learning. Hence, the application and utilisation of the knowledge and practice standards produced by the PrimTEd working groups were disrupted by the demands of other priorities that emerged.

Despite these disruptions, the feedback received through this evaluation process indicates that PrimTEd Working Group materials, knowledge and practice standards and other products are being used by few people on most of the institutions that provided information related to the uptake of PrimTEd products by universities. This is an encouraging indication since there were no formal, active and coordinated strategies in place to manage and support the uptake across the different universities. However, at universities where some Working Group Coordinators are located (e.g. University of Johannesburg, NorthWest University, WITS University and Rhodes University among others), the PrimTEd project had progressed into projects with their own unique focus areas with committed funding from different sources. The Assessment component received a second round of funding from DHET/EU to continue its work and to develop a web-based diagnostic report for



individual students. There is an Advanced Certificate in Foundation Phase Literacy Teaching (AdvCert) an NQF level 6 qualification, that is offered as part-time studies by Rhodes University. The course is tailored to the needs of FP teachers, HoDs, subject advisors and literacy coaches in the Eastern Cape. Another innovation is the Sesotho and isiZulu Reading Project (SIRP) programme for teaching reading to BEd students specialising in the FP and/or IP. And the PrimTEd work integrated learning model (PrimTEdWIL) has been revised and revamped and will be integrated into the SIRP pilot, as the teaching practice component of the programme.

The Mathematics and Literacy Coordinators have also worked closely with the Assessment Working Group to provide assessment items for mathematics and literacy tests being constructed. The challenges (not Covid-19 related) to the uptake of PrimTEd materials and standards at the universities highlight the contextual factors and obstacles that should be considered in further permutations of PrimTEd or similar initiatives. How academics are remunerated for their time spent on projects like PrimTEd is a challenge that must be seriously considered and must be supported by financial administrative systems that facilitate rather than impede. The identified enabling factors of PrimTEd should be nurtured and built upon and can be developed as evaluative criteria for other projects involving academics at universities in South Africa. The ultimate success of PrimTEd, improved teaching and learning of mathematics and reading in primary schools in South Africa, depends on how development projects like PrimTEd take on board the essence of the 'lessons learned' shared above. Developing a shared understanding for example should translate into strategies (critical phase) that will allow for wider consensus building. A critical phase that acknowledges the complex task of engaging in a complex social system of teacher preservice education provision. All of the lessons learned refer to and highlight the need to elevate the substantial contribution of appropriate constructed learning events. Spaces and places where experts and novices exchange, contribute, and where possible, consensus is found. In the end, the academics will be responsible for engaging with waves of potential teachers who will fill the classrooms across the country. The following sentiments capture the willingness to collaborate.

Although being involved in PrimTEd added to my existing workload and stress levels, it was an honour and privilege to have been involved in the project. I learned so much from my experience in PrimTEd and enjoyed getting to know education colleagues from around the country 😊⁵

5 Recommendations towards the future

PrimTEd has come to a close and its achievements have been documented in evaluation reports, in annual reports of the Working Groups, in research papers, in books, in newsletters, and shared during conferences and webinars and numerous presentations at universities and other platforms. The PrimTEd project successfully engaged a large number of academics from 23 universities in South Africa. It has acted as a catalyst for similar and related interventions. Some have already commenced

⁵ The "smiley face" was included in the text provided



and others are being planned. There is a working document entitled “From PrimTEd to ITEC”, (ITEC being Initial Teacher Education Collaboration. This document proposes that initial teacher education initiatives such as the ones discussed above (e.g. SIRP, AdvCert, and others) be supported and used under the umbrella of ITEC as to capitalise on the momentum and lessons built by PrimTEd. ITEC is a loose agreement between leaders of independent courses in literacy and mathematics intended for use on BEd programmes for primary school teachers: AdvCert, SIRP, M4PT. All these course are based on the PrimTEd standards.

Whatever the outcomes of deliberations around this proposal, the following recommendations are based on the findings from the evaluation processes of PrimTEd.

- The identified enabling factors/features of the PrimTEd project namely: Willingness to collaborate; Having available resources to collaborate; General agreement about the core problem to address) should be incorporated as evaluative criteria for all similar ITE projects.
- Make available university level implementation grants that will accommodate the remuneration of academics for their time and or to ensure that resources for collaboration are available.
- Each university site of implementation should develop its own theory of change as a programme theory can be a very useful way of bringing together existing evidence about a project/ strategy, and clarifying where there is agreement and disagreement about how the project is understood to work, and where there are gaps in the evidence.

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