

The PrimTed Project to Develop Pre-Service Teachers' English Proficiency Levels

Language and literacy teachers need to have knowledge of the theoretical, historical, and research-based foundations of reading and writing, language structures and conventions, speaking, listening, viewing, and presenting. This includes the processes and phase appropriate instruction used in teaching these, and the role of the language and literacy teacher within and across subjects. Higher Education Institutions in South Africa do not have commonly held standards to benchmark primary school teacher training at university level or validated assessment instruments to test these standards. PrimTed is a European Union (EU) funded project, in partnership with the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) that seeks to support the strengthening of pre-service Primary Teacher Education programmes by creating standards for measuring and benchmarking primary student teachers' English and mathematics levels and abilities. The project aims to track their development by testing their English and mathematics proficiency in 1st year (entrance) and 4th year (exit). This paper focuses on the English track of the PrimTed project. The PrimTed team designed standards to articulate the knowledge and practice that should guide what is taught to student teachers of foundation and intermediate phase English First Additional Language. An important facet of this project is the development of tests that are used to evaluate the knowledge and skills that student teachers have in teaching English (as a first additional language) so that this is used for strengthening assessment frameworks and standards for teacher education. The focus of this paper is on the development of test items for an English Test bank from which annual PrimTed English tests will be drawn. The PrimTed English team had a Language Item writing development workshop in order to develop testing items to reflect the PrimTed teacher standards developed by a working group in 2018, and to make the online testing process more robust as we develop more testing items. As a starting point we analysed an existing test called the 'Tea Test' by mapping the assessment items against the PrimTed standards. After deliberation, it was decided to create an assessment instrument to determine which students might have difficulty in reading and writing English, as these students could then be supported through different online reading programmes offered at the institution and through specific tutor programmes. The assessment was not intended as an evaluation of students' abilities, but as a way of identifying potential support needed. This paper describes the development and origin of the tests that have been used to assess the English proficiency of pre-service teachers in the Intermediate Phase in South Africa as well as the envisaged outcomes. The process that was followed included a group of academics from various Higher Education Institutions who were invited to a workshop and received training in writing multiple choice questions for the PrimTed assessment item bank. Although generic academic literacy tests were originally used, these were now being adapted to an education context. This is an ongoing process, but one which needs to be documented and reported on, as this paper intends.