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The receiving end: Namibian educators' perceptions of international student exchange from the Global North

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Abstract

This article explores Namibian cooperating partners' perceptions of receiving pre-service teachers on international practicums. The article focuses on what they perceive as the main benefits and challenges of receiving the pre-service teachers and the potential for developing intercultural competence and global awareness through such arrangements. The Namibian partners were mostly positive about the Norwegian pre-service teachers, although there were also challenges related to differences in cultural and educational backgrounds. The findings are discussed in light of postcolonial theory. The article concludes that a stronger focus on the school and its place in the local community may make the travelling pre-service teachers more capable of understanding the local realities, and thus open to more nuanced dialogue and learning.

Keywords: Namibia, international teaching practicum, cooperating partners, postcolonial theory

Introduction

International teaching practicum programmes for pre-service teachers are promoted as efficient ways of developing global learning and intercultural competence. Over the past few years, a growing literature has discussed the transformative potential of such programmes. Several authors highlight that students who participated in them were empowered by the experience and developed global and intercultural competence, along with a deeper understanding and appreciation of cultural differences (Smolcic and Katunich, 2017; Cushner and Mahon, 2002; Pence and Macgillivray, 2008; Cushner, 2007; Masel Walters *et al.*, 2009; Willard-Holt, 2001). However, some scholars have also raised concerns about the outcomes of international teaching practice programmes (for example, Klein and Wikan, 2019; Major and Santoro, 2016; Parr and Chan, 2015; Vande Berg *et al.*, 2012). These studies indicate that such programmes can foster neo-colonial attitudes and strengthen stereotypes, and, further, might be seen as part of a new form of imperialism.

What most studies of international practicums have in common is that they mainly research the perspective of the participants from the Global North. The empirical material often consists of interviews with the pre-service teachers and their tutors, administrators, etc. from the home institutions. With some notable exceptions (for example, Aamaas *et al.*, 2019; Major and Santoro, 2016; Martin and Griffiths, 2014; Martin and Raja, 2013), the role and views of the partners from the Global South, such as cooperating teachers, principals and administrative personnel in the host country, are

seldom the subjects of data collection and analysis. Thus, there is an extensive literature on international practicums and their outcomes from the view of the participants in the Global North, but less so from the perception of the partners that receive the students. In this article, the terms 'Global North' and 'Global South' are used in line with Alasuutari and Andreotti (2015: 87) to refer to nations that are 'scripted' as more or less economically developed. This is not to undermine that there are vast spatial differences within the northern and southern hemispheres, as well as multiple social hierarchies within cultures and countries (gender, class, race, etc.). However, for the sake of textual focus and clarity, this construction is useful.

In order to establish more insight into the views of those on the receiving end, this article explores the perceptions of collaborating partners in Namibia that have been receiving Norwegian pre-service teachers for international practicums. By focusing on those who receive the students from the Global North, the article aims to broaden the discourse on international practicums and extend the understanding of the challenges and outcomes of such praxis.

The research questions that the study seeks to answer are the following:

- What do the Namibian educational partners perceive as the main benefits and challenges of receiving pre-service teachers on international practicum programmes?
- How do the Namibian educational partners perceive the potential of such programmes to contribute to intercultural competence and global awareness?

Conceptual and theoretical considerations

There is a growing literature on international practicum programmes, yet there is no consensus on the most useful concepts for describing experiences and learning outcomes derived from engaging with foreign cultures. Sinicrope *et al.* (2007) find that up to 19 terms are used alternatively and interchangeably to discuss what we can broadly label as 'intercultural competence'. Deardorff (2006) suggests that most of the definitions of intercultural competence include more than knowledge of other cultures, since knowledge alone is not enough. Intercultural competence also involves the development of one's skills and attitudes in relating successfully to people from diverse backgrounds. A concept that is often used in tandem with intercultural competence is that of global awareness. Keese and O'Brien (2011) and Merryfield (2008) define global awareness to include knowledge, interest and engagement in global issues, local/ global connections and diverse cultures. Thus, the scope of the concept of global awareness is broadened to also include understanding of global issues in addition to what comprises intercultural competence. The term 'interculturality' encompasses learning through direct interaction with people who are culturally different, in real life settings, to provide self-awareness and cultural sensitivity (Smolcic and Katunich, 2017; James, 2008). Smolcic and Katunich (2017) advocate that interculturality includes an acknowledgement of the interconnections between schools and wider society, as well as an understanding of restraining social structures. Consequently, the term interculturality is useful in this study as it incorporates many of the factors inherent in the concepts of intercultural competence and global awareness, and emphasizes the relation between the local school and society in a broader sense, as well as social structures within the postcolonial context in which the school operates.

When sending pre-service teachers to Namibia for their practicums, it is important to acknowledge the complex power relations that operate within such endeavours, and how these affect intercultural encounters. These include issues of race and colour,

as well as vast economic disparities between the actors, in this case between the pre-service teachers from Norway and the cooperating Namibian partners. This is further complicated by commonly acknowledged pre-service teacher education problems related to practicums, such as the asynchronous relationship between universities and schools, and unclear definitions of the roles of the pre-service teacher, the cooperating teacher and the university supervisor (Major and Santoro, 2016).

In order to grasp the multiple layers of power relations that exist between the actors involved in an international practicum, a postcolonial lens is applied in this study. A postcolonial approach implies that the colonial legacy and its impact on formerly colonized countries and people are considered, but within the context of contemporary globalization, as suggested by Crossley and Tikly (2004). A major tenet in postcolonial theory is to explain issues of privilege, domination and struggle, which are the effects of colonization, and how representations of the world reflect certain beliefs and produce ongoing effects (Hickling-Hudson *et al.*, 2004). A central thinker within postcolonial theory is Edward Said (1978), who developed the idea of orientalism by focusing on how dichotomies, such as static–dynamic and savage–civilized, were developed and maintained, and the effect such dichotomies have on how we see the 'other' and how we see ourselves. Hence, the 'other' is constructed through language and intellectual formation. Therefore, postcolonial studies can be particularly useful in the analysis of global ethnocentric hegemonies that reproduce and maintain global inequalities (de Oliveira Andreotti and de Souza, 2012). In addition to analyses of domination and power, postcolonial work also uncovers the inherent ideas of European superiority over non-European peoples and cultures, and the negative effects such ideas have on the self-identity of the colonized (Agbenyega and Klibthong, 2011). This is an important point in relation to studies of receiving partners in educational programmes, especially in order to understand the dynamic between the local participants and the incoming travellers.

The concepts of third space and hybridity, as presented by Bhabha (1994), are useful to describe the construction of culture and identity that is played out in such encounters. In his view, hybridity describes a mixture of the colonized experience and the colonial influence. According to Bhabha (1994: 1–2), 'these in-between spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiates new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself'. The process of hybridity gives rise to something new and different, and the third space can be seen as an ambiguous area of negotiation of meaning, that develops when two or more individuals or cultures interact (Bhabba, 1994; Gannon, 2010). Drawing on Hulme *et al.* (2009), this article employs the concepts of third space and hybridity to explore professional cultural exchange in the practicum setting. Discourses linked to race and other hierarchies impact on the contact, but are not determinants of the outcome. Thus, the ideas of hybridity and the third space add layers of interpretation and open up multifaceted patterns of cultural exchange that go beyond the colonizer–colonized dichotomy (Idrus, 2015). In this way they offer a theoretical foundation for exploring the encounters between pre-service teachers from the Global North and Namibian teachers, principals and educational authorities.

Colonial history and the development of the Namibian educational system

This section provides a short introduction to Namibia's history with special emphasis on factors relevant for education.

Some 20–25,000 years ago the vast area of land between the Namib and Kalahari deserts were shared by the San and the closely related Nama (Khoekhoe) people. Bantu-speaking people entered Namibia between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries onwards and started competing for the land formerly shared by the San and the Nama. In the 1850s, European missionaries, traders and settlers arrived, and most of what now comprises Namibia was annexed as a German colony in 1884 under the name of South West Africa (Wallace and Kinahan, 2011; Saugestad, 2004). In line with many African colonies, there was much resistance to colonial rule in Namibia, and the Nama and the Herero peoples, in particular, strongly opposed the colonial project. The Germans responded with brutal force and in the Herero–German and Nama–German wars (1904–8) the Nama and Herero people were subjected to operations that were later deemed genocidal (Kössler, 2010; Eriksen, 2007).

The brutal killing and ill-treatment of the indigenous people by the Germans laid the ground for a classification of the black population as inferior to the whites. Thus, when South Africa gained control of the country after the First World War (Sturges, 2004), the foundations for a racist white rule were already established. From 1948, South Africa introduced its apartheid policy, which included the establishment of so-called Bantustans (racially segregated spaces for African populations). As in the South African Republic, general discrimination and inequity in all spheres of life was a part of the system (Zeller, 2010; Dahlström *et al.*, 1999). From the 1960s, the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) led an armed struggle against South African rule, resulting in independence for Namibia in 1990.

Namibia's educational evolution resembles its colonial history and must be assessed in this light. The first primary schools were established by the missionaries from the late nineteenth century, as a way of creating Christian communities. The German authorities introduced organized education from 1909, but only for the white settler population. The South African administration established so-called Bantu education in Namibia in 1958. In this system, education was aimed at preparing the black African population to hold subordinate positions in the growing economy, and inculcating submission to the rules and superiority of the whites (Harber, 1993). Significant features of this system were separate educational administrations based on ethnic divisions and an authoritarian system of instruction centred on repetition and rote learning (Rowell, 1995).

At the time of independence, the Namibian educational system was characterized by vast inequalities rendered to its various ethnic groups (Frydman, 2011). The new government wanted to provide educational access for the majority of the African population, which had been left out under apartheid rule. At the time of independence, only 38 per cent of the African population was literate, and measures such as compulsory schooling for children aged from 6 to 16 years, free primary education and new school curricula were introduced (Matemba and Lilemba, 2015). A new education policy was developed, building on the four pillars of access, equity, quality and democracy. It drew on the experiences of many exiled Namibian leaders with different educational practices. Its emphasis on learner-centred teaching methods was considered an antidote to the teacher-centred practices used under the previous regime (O'Sullivan, 2004; Dahlström *et al.*, 1999).

In addition to the legacy of apartheid, Namibia faced the challenge of a linguistically very diverse population. The government recognizes 13 national languages, including 10 indigenous African and 3 European languages. The SWAPO government decided to make English the Republic of Namibia's official language, despite the fact that only 0.8 per cent of the population spoke it as a first language.

While English was perceived as the language of resistance and liberation, Afrikaans was regarded as the language of oppression (Frydman, 2011). In 1993, the language policy for schools was implemented, with mother tongue-based education during the first three years of schooling, then, after a transition grade four, all subjects have to be taught in English (Brock-Utne and Holmarsdottir, 2001).

Namibia's education policy was strongly influenced by Western thought and not as autonomous as might have been expected. External agencies have left a strong mark on curriculum innovation and scholarship in Namibia, and one of the prime instruments in this process is international donor aid (Jansen, 2003). The decision to make English the medium of instruction in the Namibian schools has been further heavily criticized (Kirchner, 2018; Nekhwevha, 1999). In addition to this, the use of Cambridge Assessment for the validation of examinations gives the Namibian education policy a largely Western character.

Case, context and methodology

The case that this study investigates is a three-month international programme for Norwegian pre-service teachers in Namibia, which has been running since the early 2000s. The teacher education programme of which it forms a part is a four-year course for primary and secondary school teachers; the students can apply for the international programme in their third year. After a selection process based on passed exams, a motivational letter and individual interviews, the selected students travel to Namibia in the second term of their third year, where they spend three months. This includes an introductory course to Namibian society and culture in the capital Windhoek before the eight-week practicums in the towns where they have their placements in local schools. The students work as pre-service teachers in primary and secondary schools in medium-sized towns throughout Namibia. For the sake of the anonymity of the participants, the names of the towns and schools in the study are not displayed. During the first two weeks, they mainly observe the local teachers from the back of the classroom, and then gradually take on more of the teaching themselves. Each student has a supervisor from their home institution and an assigned teacher at the local school. The students are placed at the schools by the district education authorities, in most cases in groups of two.

A qualitative case study approach was employed. The data reported in this article are drawn from open-ended, semi-structured interviews with Namibian teachers, principals and educational officers. The interviews were conducted over a period of two years (2018–19). The sample for the interviews is made up of 14 individuals (7 male and 7 female), and includes 9 teachers, 3 principals and 2 educational officers who have all been involved in receiving international students in Namibia. In addition to the individual interviews, two focus group discussions with teachers, principals and educational officers from Namibia were held. Thematically, these focus group discussions centred on: the benefits and challenges of receiving foreign students for practicums; intercultural interaction and understanding; school systems and teaching practices; and cultural change and adaptation. Classroom observation and informal conversations with the Namibian partners during school visits have given further valuable input to the study, and provided the basis for triangulating and validating the findings from the individual interviews and the focus group discussions.

The data were analysed through inductive categorizing and coding of the material. By looking for concepts and themes that emerged from the material, the data were colour-coded and segmented. Drawing on Cope (2016), the first round

involved classification into descriptive and analytical codes. Descriptive codes were used for themes or patterns that were noticeable and stated directly by the research subjects. Examples of such codes were, for instance, discipline, corporal punishment, authoritarian vs soft, language of instruction, maturity and racism. Analytical codes were developed from the descriptive codes and revealed overarching themes and patterns in the material. Examples of such codes were classroom management, exchange of ideas and change and personal growth. The interviews were reread several times and some of the initially descriptive codes were merged into analytical codes which became main categories. In line with, for instance, Cinelli and Jones (2017) and Willard-Holt (2001), the data are reported under the identified main categories.

The author of this article has been involved in student exchange programmes as a supervisor for many years and has conducted research based on interviews with Norwegian pre-service teachers in Namibia previously, the findings of which are reported in Klein and Wikan (2019). The quality of the data in this study might be affected by power relations between the researcher and the local Namibian partners. In this case, the research was conducted by a male, white professor from a cooperating university in the Global North. This might, for instance, have led the interviewees to avoid controversial or critical remarks, due to a perceived inferior position or for fear of compromising the arrangement. Such biases were avoided by triangulating the different sources of information and validating through an incremental process of building the knowledge base. Triangulating took the form of introducing information from interviews into group discussions, or vice versa, or validation through observations and informal conversations. In this way the trustworthiness of the data was gradually strengthened. It must also be noted that the researcher has been conducting research for many years in the region and is familiar with local social organization, culture and customs. Further, travelling to the area on many occasions over many years and visiting the schools and local communities have contributed to building rapport and trust among the participants.

Research findings

This section presents the most relevant findings from the case study in relation to the research questions. These are: What do the Namibian educational partners perceive as the main benefits and challenges of receiving pre-service teachers on international practicum programmes? How do the Namibian educational partners perceive the potential of such programmes to contribute to intercultural competence and global awareness? The major trends in the material are emphasized, and are accentuated with quotations from the participants.

The exchange of ideas

Overall, the Namibian partners were positive about receiving Norwegian students for pre-service training. A majority responded that it contributed positively to the school and to the learners and that they wanted to continue with the collaboration. This was also confirmed by the district education office, which pointed out that the schools are very eager to be allocated international pre-service teachers, and that they express disappointment if they do not receive students. The benefits of having international students were explained in relation to both the teachers and the learners.

In relation to the teacher collegium, many mentioned that having pre-service teachers was good for exchange of ideas, methodologies and teaching strategies. Many of the teachers highlighted that they appreciated learning about how the school

system works in Norway in relation to promotion strategies, classroom management and tests, and feedback for the learners. Several also mentioned how they exchanged ideas concerning the use of various teaching aids, models and aspects of outdoor teaching with the Norwegian students. Some also pointed out that learning about global issues was an important factor, as this quote from an educational officer exemplifies: 'One of the main benefits is the cultural interaction. Most of our teachers have not travelled, so they learn a lot about Europe from the Norwegian students.'

A secondary school teacher mentioned that they exchanged ideas about educational systems, for instance, regarding matters related to the language of instruction:

> The benefit is that we are able to exchange ideas about different educational systems … I think that teaching everything in the Norwegian national language is good. It is a problem for pupils in Namibia that they don't master English, and then they don't understand what is being taught.

Many of the respondents pointed out that the learners also benefited from having international pre-service teachers. Several mentioned that the learners have the opportunity to find out about another part of the world, both through lessons that the pre-service teachers prepare and through interacting with them. This contributes to global awareness for the learners. It was also pointed out that it was good for the learners to be exposed to other variants of English (accents), and that they had to avoid using local languages while the students were present.

Another interesting finding is related to Namibia as a post-apartheid society and racial issues. After almost 30 years of independence from South African apartheid rule, the issue of racism is still very prevalent in Namibian society, as highlighted by one of the teachers: 'Some white people we deal with, we can feel/smell the racism. I have experienced that. But with the students we really feel acceptance.'

Several of the interviewees noted that the learners especially appreciate having white people teaching and mingling with them. One of the respondents pointed out that, for some of the learners, these are the first times that they have spoken to and had first-hand contact with a white person. Along the same lines, another stated that:

> There are big issues with racism in Namibia. The students help to break down the barriers of the races. Some of the kids have never related to a white person before. The learners experience that whites are also loving persons that care for them. (Educational officer)

Through the interviews it became evident that the perceived 'colour-blind' engagement of the Norwegian students with the Namibian learners made the Namibian learners more at ease with relating to white people than they had been previously. Several participants reported this as one of the main benefits of hosting the Norwegian students. In addition to indicating an ethnorelative behaviour, this can also be attributed to pedagogical paradigms and learner-centred strategies, as we will see further down.

Classroom management and discipline

The Namibian partners appreciated the easy tone the pre-service teachers had towards the learners. However, this also pointed to one of the major challenges with receiving the overseas visitors. Several of the Namibian partners highlighted that the Norwegian pre-service teachers had problems with keeping discipline and order in the classroom:

> In my opinion, the biggest problem is the problem of discipline, and how to maintain discipline in the classroom. The Norwegian students have problems adapting to that issue. They never get to a serious point with the learners; they think that they can be at the same level as the learners. (Primary school teacher)

The Namibians described this as a lack of authority on the part of the Norwegian students and, as seen from the extract above, the fact that they wanted to be on the same level as the learners. Some mentioned that the Norwegian students did not use loud voices ('their tone is too soft,' one female teacher explained), with the result that the learners did not listen. Others related it to differences in values:

> They [the Norwegian pre-service teachers] are more concerned about the slow learners than teaching the whole class. They kneel down and sit with the slow learners. (From the group discussion)

Several of the teachers acknowledged that the Norwegian students tried to make more use of learner-centred methodologies than the Namibian teachers. They related the lack of learner-centred teaching among the Namibians to practical barriers and frame factors, such as scarce resources and teacher–learner ratios, as pointed out by an educational officer: 'To make learner-centred education, you need much time for each child and we don't have that here.' This was echoed in many of the interviews:

> The Namibian system is not so learner-centred as the Norwegian. Even the teachers themselves are also teacher-centred, because that is what they have experienced during their own schooling. The learner-centred theory is introduced at college as a theory, but is seldom shown in practice. (Primary school teacher)

In Namibia, one teacher might have between 40 and 50 pupils in a class and managing such high numbers can be challenging. According to many of the respondents, this calls for more teacher-centred and authoritarian classroom management. This was discussed among the participants in the group discussion:

> Sometimes you need to intervene to get the children to be quiet. The class might get out of hand with the Norwegian students because they don't raise their voices or try to discipline the children. Then you need to come in and raise your voice to get the children to behave. You might even need to get out the stick to show them, but we don't hit them, just show them that it can be used.

Several interviewees highlighted the context and background of the learners and how this affected the pedagogical strategies employed in the classroom:

> It is important to maintain a level of respect. They should not try to be at the same level as the learners. This relates especially to the big ones, 14–15 years and above. If they lose respect for you, it can even become violent. Some of the Damara, for instance, can be very violent. (Primary school teacher)

Even though many of the participants interpreted the lack of authority and different approach to learning as a major challenge, they also cited examples of where the Norwegian students had successfully used more dialogue-based strategies. A local primary school teacher gave them credit for that:

One day there were some learners fighting, and the students solved the problem very nicely. They sat down with the children and asked what had happened and asked for the reasons, and then solved the problem. It was very nicely done.

The issue of how to maintain discipline was also commented on by one of the principals: 'The Norwegian students have other ideas about how to discipline a child. It is a skill we need to learn.' Thus, although the lack of authority and discipline were mostly regarded as a challenge and somewhat problematic, learning about alternative ways of handling conflicts and discipline was considered a benefit.

Change and personal growth

In the interviews with the Namibian partners, it was relevant to hear if they noticed any change in the pre-service teachers' behaviour and attitudes during the practicum, and if they believed that the time they spent in the classrooms was sufficient to have an effect on intercultural competence. Most of the respondents noticed that the Norwegian students were a bit reserved in the beginning, but that they opened up after a while and became more comfortable and confident. Several mentioned that while eight weeks was sufficient time for this change to take place, it should not be any less, as commented on by one primary school teacher: 'They should stay for at least two months, because it is only at the end of the stay they start to familiarize with the children and get to know them.' Another primary school teacher highlighted that it takes time for the students to open up: 'It takes some time to get to know them, to get to see their true colours.'

Some of the respondents also highlighted how the students matured during the stay:

They adapt to us and become a part of our culture. After a while, they can communicate and have fun with everyone. They become more mature as human beings. I think it changes their lives, to be honest … They came as girls and left as mothers. (Primary school teacher)

Several participants also emphasized that personal differences between the pre-service teachers made it hard to generalize the effect of the experience, and that individual variations between the Norwegian students were greater than their cultural similarities. As one teacher said: 'Each one is different, it's an individual thing.' In the group discussion, it was also pointed out that the cohorts of students varied from year to year. Some were more outgoing and extrovert, while others kept more to themselves. Thus, to some extent, the participants found it hard to generalize about changes related to what might be referred to as intercultural competence, based on the practicum experience.

One of the respondents noticed that after the students had been in the town for a while, they got to know the people and the local culture, and that prevented stereotyping: 'They learn not to judge the book by its cover.' Several of the interviewees pointed out that it is important for the students to mix with local people after school hours in order to get to know the local culture and community. It was also important for them to understand the conditions that the learners are coming from, because this affects their performance at school, as this quote highlights:

We took them to the houses of some of the poor disadvantaged learners, and we told them how people live when they are really poor. Teenage pregnancy is a problem and also single parents and HIV/AIDS … If you want to understand the challenges of learning in our schools, you need to understand the background of our learners. (Primary school teacher)

Similarly, in the group discussion, several participants pointed out that being immersed in the local community was pertinent for the students' learning experience. In this discussion, it was also underlined that the students generally become more competent if they are integrated in activities outside school. This was further specified in an interview with an educational officer: 'They need to be friends with the local people, and they need to mix with local people. I think that mostly they cope well in the local society, but they should not drink too much alcohol.'

As the last sentence in the quote exemplifies, there is a tension between the wish for the students to be involved in the local society and a concern for their security. This ambiguity is further illustrated by this quote from one of the principals: 'We are probably warning them too much, so they are a bit afraid of socializing.'

The material indicates that the participants believe that immersion in the local community is important for the pre-service teachers in order for them to develop intercultural competence and understand what is encompassed in the concept of interculturality, although they also fear that this very immersion might be problematic for security reasons.

Discussion

Although the Namibian partners were generally positive about receiving Norwegian pre-service teachers for their practicums, differences in educational and cultural backgrounds also created challenges. This resonated most strongly in the Namibian partners' critique of the Norwegian students' lack of authority and handling of discipline in the classroom. When comparing the findings from this study with those from the previous study of Norwegian pre-service teachers in Namibia (Klein and Wikan, 2019), we find that the very things the Norwegian students identified as difficult for them were the same issues that the Namibian partners critiqued from the other side. The pre-service teachers reported especially that authoritarian teachers and their use of psychological and corporal punishment were problematic, as well as teacher-centred education and the focus on repetition and rote learning.

To discuss this complexity further, there is a need to consider the cultural and educational backgrounds of both the Norwegian students and the Namibian teachers. Although Namibia has emphasized learner-centred education in its national curricula ever since independence, several studies have noted that rote teaching remains the main method and that there is a long way to go in relation to the implementation of learner-centred approaches in Namibia (O'Sullivan, 2004; Chisholm and Leyendecker, 2008). O'Sullivan (2004) explains the observed lack of implementation of learner-centred education at the classroom level with reference to four factors: teachers' professional capacity, limited resources, cultural factors and learner background. A similar set of factors is found in several case studies from the Global South investigating the implementation of learner-centred education (Schweisfurth, 2013).

In many sub-Saharan countries, the formal Western educational model imported through the missionaries was authoritarian in practice. The characteristics of this educational model were: respect for authority, strict rigidity and tolerance for monotony. This has remained the prototype for educational organization in southern Africa. In addition to this, child-rearing practices in indigenous society were also authoritarian, characterized by a paternalistic culture and a sharp hierarchical distinction between children and elders (Tabulawa, 1997).

The Norwegian students come from a culture where egalitarian child-rearing is dominant (Bendixsen *et al.*, 2018), and the professional identity of teachers is based

on constructivist ideas (Kyriacou *et al*., 2009). These ideals do not adapt easily to the classroom management strategies employed by the local teachers in Namibia. Further, strategies that might work well in a Norwegian context do not have the same effect in a Namibian classroom where the number of children is higher and the learners are used to, and expect, a more authoritarian teacher model.

However, an exchange of ideas and negotiations of teacher identity also occur in these encounters, which demonstrates some of the potential of such programmes to contribute to interculturality. When looking at the Namibian practicum classroom as a third space, it is important to consider what emerges when the subjects' positions (or cultures) interact. The concept of hybridity opens up multifaceted patterns of cultural exchange and teacher identity formation, and we find several examples of this in the material. One illustration of this is the approving description from a Namibian teacher of how the Norwegian students solved a fight through dialogue and sitting down with the learners. Another example is how exchange of ideas over educational systems gives food for thought on the present organizational structures at the local level. We can also detect that the Norwegian students learn to cope with the various backgrounds of the learners and employ different teaching strategies adapted to the local context. Thus, they are maturing as individuals at the same time as they are developing their identities as teachers within this third space, as indicated in the metaphor used by one of the interviewees: 'They came as girls, but left as mothers.'

Another aspect where the application of a postcolonial approach is useful is related to issues of race and racism, which are mentioned in several of the interviews. In this respect, the Namibian interviewees are generally positive about the effect that the Norwegian students have on the learners and the local community. The racist attitudes that some of the respondents have encountered in earlier dealings with white people are not prevalent when they report on their impression of the Norwegian pre-service teachers. Thus, when Norwegian students behave in a conventional (non-racist) manner, they are given credit for this due to the former (negative) experiences the interviewees have had with white people. Here they are ascribed a role as positive agents of change between the races in post-apartheid Namibia. It is interesting to note that although the Norwegian pre-service teachers are critical of some societal and cultural features of Namibian society and the educational system, as reported in Klein and Wikan (2019), this is not perceived as neo-colonial attitudes by the Namibian partners.

Nevertheless, there are strong reasons to believe that the Norwegian students are ascribed a higher status because of their European origin and/or white skin. This is reflected both in the learners' behaviour and also in how the teachers and parents respond positively to having white European students at the school, which seems to confer on it an elevated status. The same phenomenon was reported in a similar study from the Solomon Islands by Major and Santoro (2016), who found that the pre-service teachers were accorded a respect that they had not necessarily earned just by virtue of being white and from Australia. Thus, due to their privileged background (and whiteness), the Norwegian pre-service teachers are given a more superior position than their student roles should imply. This shows how colonial structures still have agency in postcolonial settings. Inherent ideas of European superiority over non-European people and cultures continue to have effects on the self-identity of the colonized, as described by Agbenyega and Klibthong (2011). Along the same lines, Major and Santoro (2016) write that a feature of many postcolonial societies is that Western superiority is taken for granted and unquestioned. Thus, a major focus for debriefing sessions after the practicum for the Norwegian pre-service teachers is to discuss and be reflexive about their role and the privilege their origin might have in different postcolonial settings.

Conclusion

Overall, the Namibian partners were positive about receiving Norwegian pre-service teachers for their practicums, and pointed to many benefits resulting from this arrangement. Both the learners and the Namibian teachers gained insight into another part of the world, through prepared lessons and by interacting with the pre-service teachers. The interviewees emphasized that the pre-service teachers helped to break down the barriers between the races for the learners. The Namibian teachers emphasized that the arrangement was good for the exchange of ideas, methodologies and teaching strategies. It further seemed that the Namibian partners agreed that the Norwegian pre-service teachers matured both as individuals and professionally as teachers through the practicum experience. Many interviewees expressed that immersion in the local community was pertinent for the learning experience. However, it was difficult to generalize the intercultural competence outcome for the pre-service teachers, due to significant individual differences between them.

Still, some friction is noticeable, and the main challenges can be related to differences in cultural and educational backgrounds. Through the encounters with the Norwegian pre-service teachers, the Namibian partners were exposed to ideas such as constructivist approaches to teaching and learner-centred education. Although these concepts are also found in the Namibian curricula, they have had limited impact at the classroom level. This might be due to lack of resources, lack of understanding and deficiency in teacher training (Chisholm and Leyendecker, 2008; O'Sullivan, 2004). Another hypothesis could be that learner-centred education is perceived as being based on Western neo-colonial ideas and that it does not fit local cultural norms and patterns. Seen in this light, the Norwegian students' presence and ideas about learner-centred education, and the Namibian partners' disapproval of this, might be interpreted as local responses and resistance towards Western neo-colonial ideas being implemented from the top down. The local teachers are at the receiving end of both Western-based curricula and Western students conveying many of the same ideas. Chisholm and Leyendecker (2008) have called for more research on local responses and the sources of receptiveness and resistance to global ideas in relation to the implementation of curriculum reforms in sub-Saharan Africa. It seems as if these concerns might also be relevant in relation to pre-service practicums for teachers from the Global North. Much of the same ambiguity unfolds in these encounters and is at the core of understanding conflicting viewpoints between ideals about learner-centred education and local educational realities.

Based on the findings from this study, it seems that the best way to achieve the goal of interculturality is through a stronger focus on the immersion of the pre-service teachers in the local community. This may give them a broader understanding of the school and its place in a postcolonial context. Pre-service teachers may become more capable of understanding the local realities in which Namibian teachers and learners operate, and, thus, create dialogue at a higher level of understanding so that spaces of encounter and mistrust become spaces of learning and compromise.

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