

WHAT WORKS BEST?

AN INTERNATIONAL LITERATURE REVIEW OF ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS FOR INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION



Alternative Initial Teacher Education (ITE) is generally understood as a programme leading to a teaching certificate (or licence) designed for persons who have not followed a traditional path through a university or college-based initial teacher training programmes.

The most recent research shows university-based ITE in South Africa is yielding neither the numbers in all phases and subjects, nor the quality of teachers required to meet the needs of the country's education system in the next decade (CDE 2015; Van Broekhuizen 2015; Gustafsson, 2015; JET 2014).

As a result, a number of alternative ITE programmes have been developed by not-for-profit private organisations to provide school-based and distance education ITE options for

both undergraduates and graduates to obtain their Bachelor of Education (B Ed) or Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) qualifications.

Typically, alternative programmes provide school-based teacher education while trainees carry teaching responsibilities. In many countries these programmes are known as alternative teacher certification programmes (ATCs).

From the international research on ATCs there are important lessons that South Africa can learn about what makes them (and traditional ITE) more or less effective. To access these lessons, in 2016 the Zenex Foundation funded JET to undertake a comprehensive literature review of ATCs in developed and developing countries and South Africa.

MAIN FINDINGS

Developed Countries



1. The debate about traditional and alternative pathways into teaching reveals significant philosophical and ideological divides.
2. ATCs differ from traditional ITE in that they focus on different pools of trainees, often screen candidates for subject matter competence and/or prior teaching experience, compress the schedule for preservice training and provide a different mix of professional knowledge and skills.
3. However the lines between alternative and traditional routes are becoming blurred. Many university programmes increasingly integrate coursework and classroom experience, and many ATCs resemble traditional ITE in content, rigour and expected outcomes and have strong partnerships with universities.
4. ATCs succeed in attracting candidates who otherwise might not have entered teaching.
5. Comparative evaluations of ATCs and traditional routes have shown that the differences among ATC programmes and among traditional university ones are greater than those between these two types.
6. There is a lack of strong empirical research on which the endorsement and criticism of alternative certification are based. Numerous studies have produced very mixed results about the comparative effectiveness of ATCs and traditional routes on student achievement.
7. The attrition rate of ATC teachers appears to be higher than traditionally certified teachers.
8. The effectiveness of ATC teachers is influenced by their personal background (academic record and previous classroom experience), their formal training (the coursework), and the context of their school placement (principal and mentor support, professional community, and availability of materials).
9. School context has the strongest effect on the outcomes of effective ATCs.
10. The most common weaknesses of ATCs have been found to be a lack of adequate and consistent mentoring of trainee teachers and too little individualised training.

- Overall, students of teachers from Teach for All (TFA), an alternative programme, perform 0.15 of a standard deviation higher in mathematics than those of control teachers and 0.26 higher than those of novice control teachers (with one to three years of experience), although in reading, there was no difference. However, a high proportion of TFA-prepared teachers leave teaching after two years.
- Some researchers believe that fast track schemes, like TFA, have the potential to communicate an understanding of teacher education that discounts the complex nature of teaching, in that the fast track approach implicitly suggests that few special skills are needed to teach.
- In the UK, data from the education department and Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) indicate that the vast majority of ITE partnership programmes were good or outstanding, and there was not significant difference in the proportion of quality passes across the different routes
- Teach First has been judged by Ofsted as good, or better than traditional ITE; a strength is the requirement that participants obtain a teaching qualification; and there is a positive correlational relationship between Teach First participation and pupil attainment. In addition, researchers have judged it to be more successful than the American model of TFA. Teach First has been established by other countries such as the Netherlands, Australia and New Zealand.

Developing Countries

- In developing countries, there is little research evidence that preservice teacher education provides the skills and develops the attitudes that produce better education for pupils in school.
- Research indicates that most university-based preservice programmes fail to achieve the desired quality or economies of scale necessary for most developing country contexts.
- Alternative routes that rely on considerable in-service training are far less expensive than university-based ITE.
- Research on effectiveness has found that in-service programmes can produce more teachers than traditional preservice models within a given time frame.
- Some studies have shown that teachers trained in ATCs performed as well, or better, than those trained in the traditional three-year preservice programme, although other studies of teachers trained in distance education programmes produced more mixed results.
- Several distance education programmes, such as ZINTEC in Zimbabwe, have shown considerable success in teacher retention.
- In developing countries, cost-effectiveness research comparing the quality of teachers produced and the cost of traditional and alternative ITE programmes warrants special attention.

South Africa

Two well-established alternative ITE programmes, the ISASA Mathematics and English Internship programme and Teach South Africa, have been independently evaluated and the findings align with the international ones. Overall the ISASA model achieved the expected outcomes, and Teach South Africa achieved an improvement in science results and choice of it as a FET subject. The selection of functional, supportive, host schools with committed teachers, effective mentors and good practice emerged as critical. Both models could be replicated subject to certain provisos and conditions.

The research evidence suggests that alternative programmes that combine a distance education teaching degree and school-based internships are a viable option for increasing the supply of competent teachers in South Africa.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The overall finding from the literature is that there are high-quality and low-quality programmes in the alternative and traditional ITE routes, and although high-quality ITE programmes of both types have been found to positively impact on student learning, in general both types need improvement.

Teacher education stakeholders have been urged to adopt a broad conception of teacher preparation that emphasises paths into the profession, rather than specific programmes.

Closer work between schools and universities and hybrid partnership models are advocated as the way forward to prepare teaching students so that their practice supports learning gains. Studies of strong ITE programmes show that 'learning to practice in practice', with expert guidance, is essential to becoming an effective teacher of students with a wide range of needs.

Teacher educators must be prepared to create partnerships with schools in their communities, confront and dismantle those regularities of the university that prevent investments in strong academic and clinical training, and behave as members of a profession. This will mean embracing a new form of professional accountability that leverages universally strong practice in all programs that prepare teachers. (Darling-Hammond, 2010)