

Thesis abstract

Promoting quality teaching in Albanian schools: where political history and pedagogy meet

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Since its dramatic exit from communist rule in 1991, Albania has faced multiple policy reforms aimed at modernising its education system. These reforms are driven by two social imaginaries informed by global movements in education — Albania's imagined Europe and the OECD's globally competent learner. The goal is to improve the quality of classroom practice and harmonise the standard of initial teacher education (ITE) with programs provided in Europe more widely. Despite adopting a 'learner-centred' approach to teaching, little change is evident in the quality of instruction in Albanian classrooms. Studies show that teachers remain chiefly tied to direct textbook instruction, unable to move far from the confines of the traditional teacher-led practices they experienced during their own schooling and throughout their teacher education. Thus, ITE remains a key national priority for improving the quality of teaching and learning in today's classrooms. With Albania's aspirations to emulate more developed parts of the world, this study adds to the literature on the dominant neoliberal discourse of globalisation and its effects on education policy development in non-Western contexts. While addressing the restrictive effects of globalisation on teaching quality in Albania, my multi-phase mixed methods study first explores Albanian ITE

by analysing Master of Teaching curricula from three Albanian universities. Next, the study explores the potential value of the NSW Quality Teaching (QT) Model as a tool in developing teachers' agentic capacities to continually improve the quality of their practice. Favouring an anti-dualist ontology, the study is anchored in Deweyan transactional realism and utilises an ecological approach to teacher agency as a lens through which the temporal-relational aspects of participants' experiences were viewed. Stakeholders at three different levels of Albanian ITE — namely, teacher-interns ($n = 20$) who had completed their Professional/Scientific Master of Teaching qualification; ITE students ($n = 6$); and teacher educators/policy experts ($n = 7$) — were introduced to the QT Model through professional development (PD) workshops. While the PD enabled practical engagement with the Model and the associated process of lesson coding, the teacher-interns also experimented with the Model and coding in their own classrooms, thus providing real-world insight into the Model's utility. To identify changes in teaching quality, quantitative data were generated by coding pre- and post-lesson observations using the QT Model's coding scales. Qualitative data, elicited through document analysis, participant interviews, and personal field

notes, provided contextual insights on Albanian ITE as well as participants' perceptions of the QT Model and associated coding. Together, these data demonstrate an uneven and generally weak pedagogical foundation laid by Albanian ITE, leaving pre-certified teachers without the means to produce the quality of teaching sought by the government. Responses to the QT Model and coding process were overwhelmingly positive, and the lesson observations indicate clear potential for direct, beneficial impact on the quality of classroom practice. Additionally, when teachers engage with QT PD by systematically reflecting *on*, *in*, and *for* practice, they build agentic capacity for ongoing pedagogical development. These results highlight the value of addressing teaching quality by investing in both teachers' general pedagogical knowledge and their analytical skills. With an ardent focus on teaching methodology informed by neoliberalism, I argue that Albania's attempt to emulate other nations in pursuit

of its imagined future has not demonstrated, and is unlikely to demonstrate, the desired educational outcomes it seeks. Rather, the government's current approach restricts teaching quality and the development of teachers' agentic capacity to the point that, if not addressed, the quality of classroom practice in Albania will continue to suffer. While there are no easy fixes, I contend that taking a holistic pedagogical approach rather than a technical-methodological approach to improving teaching practice is essential if quality teaching is to be attended to within the Albanian context.

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