

# Reimagining the Transition from Basic Education Teaching to Higher Education Lecturing: Insights from Early Career Academics

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## INTRODUCTION & AIM

In South Africa's dynamic and ever-evolving educational landscape, shaped by shifting sociopolitical forces and global trends, the journey from classroom teacher to university lecturer is far from simple. For novice teacher educators of the global *lingua franca* - English, moving from Basic Education (BE) to Higher Education (HE) is not merely a change in context - it is a profound transformation of identity, pedagogy, and understanding of students. This Narrative Inquiry explored the lived experiences of early career academics navigating this transition, shedding light on the challenges they encounter, the strategies they adopt, and the wider implications for teacher education, policy, and curriculum development in South Africa's higher education system, and beyond.

### Key Research Question:

How do novice English lecturers negotiate and experience the transition from Basic Education to Higher Education, and in what ways do they navigate associated pedagogical and contextual changes while constructing their professional identities?

### Key Research Objective:

To explore how novice English lecturers experience and negotiate the transition from Basic Education to Higher Education, including their lived experiences and the ways in which they construct their professional identities during this process.

This research, underpinned by Mezirow's (2018) *Transformative Learning Theory* is significant as it seeks to unpack the complex transition of English teachers moving from BE to HE, a shift that involves far more than a change in teaching context. By exploring the lived experiences of novice lecturers - their challenges, successes, and adaptations in pedagogy and classroom dynamics - it offers insight into how they navigate new expectations in HE. Importantly, the study also examines how these early career academics construct and reshape their professional identities, drawing on prior experiences to inform their current practices. In doing so, it not only deepens understanding of this critical transition but also highlights ways to better support novice lecturers in building meaningful, successful academic careers.



## METHOD

Using a qualitative narrative research design, this study incorporated semi-structured interviews, solo vlogs, and visual reflective artefacts to uncover the thematic challenges that surface during the transition.

**Semi-structured interviews** were employed to elicit rich, personal accounts, allowing participants to share their lived experiences in their own voices. Within a narrative inquiry framework, these interviews functioned as spaces for storytelling, privileging participants' meaning-making over fixed responses. The flexible structure enabled the researcher to probe emerging narratives, capturing the complexity of transitioning from BE to HE.

The digital age has expanded the range of media available for teaching and research, with vlogging emerging as a particularly impactful tool. Scholars such as Baskara (2017) highlight vlogging as an effective platform for educators to share ideas, reflections, and knowledge within the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, while Parkes and Kajder (2010) emphasise its value as a multimodal approach that fosters creative engagement, reflective practice, and teacher agency.

**Integrating vlogs** into academic research enriches traditional data sources by providing real-time, diverse perspectives and rich qualitative insights, thereby offering more nuanced and authentic accounts than conventional methods alone.

In this study, vlogging is complemented by an arts-based approach, where the participants developed **visual representations** to connect experiences from Basic Education to Higher Education. Such artefacts - ranging from visuals to memory prompts - served to evoke deeper reflection and storytelling, a common practice in narrative inquiry.

The combination of transcribed semi-structured interviews, vlogs and visual elicitation were subsequently analysed thematically, revealing recurring patterns and deeper insights into the transition from BE to HE. Ultimately, the methodology foregrounded narrative as both method and phenomenon, emphasising how experiences are storied, interpreted, and reconstructed over time.



## RESULTS & DISCUSSION

### Entering Higher Education as a Disorienting Dilemma:

This theme highlights that entry into HE is often experienced by novice English lecturers as a disorienting dilemma, marked by unclear roles, limited induction, and abrupt high-stakes responsibilities. These challenging entry conditions disrupt familiar expectations from BE and require lecturers to rapidly adapt to new institutional norms. Where support structures such as mentoring and training are present, transitions are more manageable; where absent, novices rely on informal networks, increasing pressure. Framed through Mezirow's theory, these experiences illustrate how disorientation can either enable transformative learning through reflection and dialogue or hinder adjustment, depending on the level of institutional support provided.

### Recalibrating Pedagogy for Adult Learners:

This theme reveals how novice English lecturers deliberately recalibrate their pedagogy when transitioning to HE, adapting familiar school-based practices to suit adult learners and teacher education contexts. While retaining elements such as dialogue, scaffolding, and engagement, they shift towards inquiry-driven, student-centred approaches that emphasise critical thinking, modelling of teaching strategies, and continuous feedback. This transition reflects a move from content delivery to reflective, communicative teaching, aligning with Mezirow's notion of transforming meaning perspectives as lecturers reshape their understanding of teaching adults who are preparing to become educators themselves.

### Reconstructing Academic Identity through Dialogue, Mentorship, and Collegiality:

highlights that academic identity reconstruction for novice lecturers is a deeply relational and context-dependent process, shaped through dialogue, mentorship, and institutional structures. Supportive collegial environments and mentoring relationships enable a stronger sense-making of their roles as teacher educators, while gaps in induction and bureaucratic pressures can complicate this process. Participants' experiences show that identity is co-constructed through everyday interactions and influenced by power dynamics, resources, and recognition, reflecting how transformation is both socially negotiated and structurally mediated within HE contexts.

### Perspective Transformation Evidenced in Practice Shifts and Scholarship Trajectories:

illustrates how novice English lecturers demonstrate clear signs of perspective transformation through evolving teaching practices and emerging scholarly identities. Participants move beyond content delivery to more reflective, inclusive, and inquiry-driven approaches - adopting strategies such as multimodal assessment, dialogic teaching, authentic tasks, and flipped learning. These shifts reflect deeper changes in how they understand their roles as educators, highlighting a progression from adaptation to meaningful transformation. Grounded in Mezirow's framework, these changes show how critical reflection, experimentation, and reintegration shape both practice and identity as lecturers become more intentional, ethically aware, and research-informed teacher educators.



## CONCLUSION

The shift from Basic Education to Higher Education is a complex and transformative process that reshapes teaching practices, professional identity, and scholarly engagement. This narrative inquiry shows that skills developed in BE provide a strong foundation for success in HE, while emphasising the importance of reflective practice, institutional support, and recognition. By foregrounding the lived experiences of early career academics, the study offers valuable insights into the challenges of this transition and highlights ways to strengthen staff development and support the growth of novice lecturers.

The study suggests that HE institutions should implement structured induction programmes tailored to lecturers transitioning from BE, incorporating mentorship, pedagogical support, and reflective practice. Recognising prior BE experience is essential in strengthening confidence and enriching teaching in HE, particularly in teacher education. Institutions should also promote engagement in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning to support the development of scholarly identities. Overall, inclusive and context-sensitive professional development initiatives are needed to empower novice lecturers and support their adaptation to evolving academic environments.

## REFERENCES

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