



Scottish
Attachment
In Action

Attachment and Trauma in Initial Teacher Education in Scotland

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Introduction

Teaching has been increasingly recognized as a profoundly complex relational activity which engages educators with young people's emotional health and attachment needs (Kearns & Hart, 2017). Teachers' emotional commitment in the "caring" dimension of their role has a favourable influence on the learning and development of all children, while contributing significantly to supporting learners impacted by experiences of adversity (Davis, 2003). In understanding the centrality of relationships in children's lives, attachment theory is of great significance, as it provides a solid foundation for explaining the intricacies underlying socio-emotional human development (Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth, 1979). According to this framework, attachment represents a long-lasting affective bond established in early life between a child and their caregiver. Attachment behaviours prompt support-seeking and physical closeness from a main protective figure (i.e., attachment figure) in times of distress (Cassidy, 1999). The child-caregiver repeated interactions accumulate over time into internal working models (IWM). These function as behavioural scripts comprised of relational beliefs about oneself and others, which underpin the core of young people's behavioural manifestations (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005).

It is crucial to note that the experiences and skills gained through a child's first dependency on others for a sense of protection equips them with the abilities needed to handle frustrations, build self-confidence, and form pro-social relationships—all of which are required to foster positive involvement with learning (Parker et al., 2016). Beginning with Pianta and Steinberg (1992)'s seminal work connecting attachment theory to teacher-child interactions, numerous studies have associated attachment to school readiness and successful academic outcomes (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Commodari, 2013; Geddes, 2006). Indeed, it is becoming more widely acknowledged that designing learning environments for children in attachment and trauma-informed ways can minimize children's challenging behaviours, improve their social-emotional competence and thus, foster improved learning outcomes (Furnivall et al., 2012). Furthermore, attachment- and trauma-informed education environments are becoming identified as crucial for vulnerable children who have been exposed to trauma, as learners spend a significant amount of time in these settings, which are relatively safe and provide them with encouraging and positive relational bonds (L'Estrange & Howard, 2022).

With the rising acknowledgement of the significance of wellbeing and trauma-informed education, the long-rooted behaviourist approach to teaching in the United Kingdom's education systems have been challenged. Indeed, the current Scottish educational landscape seeks to promote learner centric values such as self-agency, empowerment, and emotional connection instead of obedience and control (Parker et al., 2016). Accordingly, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2021) noted that one of the Scottish Government's key priorities is to promote the health and well-being of children and young

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people. For instance, Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) outlines the necessity of nurturing students in order to enable them to develop the competencies they need for healthy mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing at school and in their everyday lives. Likewise, it emphasizes that “relationships lie at the heart of the learning process and are fundamental to improving outcomes for all our children and young people” (Scottish Government 2010). Similarly, ‘Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) (2006)’ acknowledges that every learner is entitled to adequate support from adults, with nurturing student-teacher relationships being a crucial aspect in helping children develop to their full potential.

Despite this, much progress toward the successful implementation of attachment and trauma awareness in Scottish schools needs to be accomplished. Rose and colleagues (2019) argue that this progress is constrained by curricular frameworks lacking the support of all staff, insufficient training provided to implement the goals (Murray-Harvey, 2010), and, most importantly, curricular frameworks failing to address the central role of pupil–teacher relationships (McLaughlin & Clarke, 2010). As discussed before, applying the attachment framework to the dyadic teacher–pupil relationship could serve as an effective means of improving teaching practices and enhancing student outcomes (Riley, 2009). However, many teachers have little awareness of the influence of attachment patterns on children’s behaviour and thus, they may perceive a child as disruptive, controlling or attention-seeking (Rose et al., 2019). In reality, the child might be actually signalling their need for comfort and safety (Furnivall, 2012). Importantly, it is still unclear the extent to which teachers are familiar with attachment theory’s principles early in their training. Kearns and Hart (2017), two scholars at the University of Aberdeen, argued that teacher education programmes overemphasise the role of subject-centric pedagogy and behavioural classroom management skills, while undermining the importance of relational practices.

Therefore, our study aims to advance the current understanding of attachment-informed teaching as conceptualized in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes across Scottish universities. As there is little evidence available on the type of attachment-related courses offered within these institutions, our study seeks to interview teaching staff regarding this topic. In doing so, we will rely on semi-structured interviews to capture the main characteristics of attachment-related courses, their perceived usefulness and focus on attachment. Overall, our investigation seeks to reveal the current understanding of attachment-informed teaching practices in Scottish universities, while outlining the nationwide similarities and discrepancies in conceptualizing attachment in ITE programmes.

Scottish Attachment in Action (SAIA), a charity committed to raising awareness on the importance of attachment theory and its implications for policy, practice and education, has recently released an exploratory report mapping attachment-informed practices in Scottish education (SAIA, 2022). The report revealed that initial teacher training programmes across Scotland lacked consistency and depth of coverage of attachment theory and its implications

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for practice in the classroom. Whilst there has been some research and piloting involving developing attachment theory coverage in initial teacher training at several universities (Kearns & Hart, 2017; Parker et al., 2016), there is a lack of overarching evidence covering how attachment theory is currently being taught to trainee teachers across universities in Scotland as a whole. In light of this, we believe this project could benefit universities running initial teacher training programmes, the students undergoing teacher training and the experience of pupils within education. Academics who participate will help establish a more comprehensive view of what is understood by attachment theory in education, how it can benefit trainee teachers and how current courses teaching attachment are applied in a useful way to the classroom environment. Therefore, gaining insight into existing similarities and disparities in teacher education can help crystallize a more integrated and congruent approach to attachment-related training across Scottish universities. This constitutes a pivotal step in attaining a nationwide consensus on how attachment theory is understood and taught. This project will equally impact future teachers, as it is hoped that the implications of this research will highlight “what has worked” and will contribute to enhancing attachment-informed practices in teaching. From continuing to develop these practices, SAIA aims to contribute to strengthening inclusive approaches and the positive experiences of children within education.

Overall, this project has two main aims: 1) to advance the current understanding of attachment-informed teaching as conceptualized in ITE programmes across Scottish universities and 2) to assess the barriers and facilitators that will enable wider implementation of these practices in the classroom.

Method

Participants and Recruitment

Participants were recruited by emailing academics at Scottish universities that ran ITE programmes, with them being selected based on their involvement in the implementation of ITE programmes at their respective institutions. Six academics from different Scottish universities took part in our initial questionnaire. Following the completion of our first questionnaire, four individuals agreed to participate in semi-structured interviews.

Design and Materials

The study collected data via a questionnaire (see Appendix A) and semi-structured interviews (see Appendix B). Questionnaires were administered using Microsoft Forms and Microsoft Teams was used for the interviews, including the recording of the interview and the transcription. All information was stored on the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) compliant database, OneDrive.

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Data Collection

The data collection process took place between June and July 2022. The initial questionnaire captured relevant information regarding academics' professional role within ITE, their perceptions of attachment and trauma within education, and ways of improving ITE programmes. Participants' responses from the questionnaire were explored in the following stage of our study through online semi-structured interviews. These techniques are valuable because they facilitate an in-depth exploration and portrayal of participants' perceptions, self-beliefs while eliciting narratives meaningful to the individuals (Evans, 2017). Before administering the interviews, respondents received an email containing information regarding the purpose of data collection. At this stage, they were ensured that their anonymity will be protected at every stage of the study. They were also asked for permission to audio record the interview sessions, being informed that these were only used for the current study. Participants' responses were discarded after completing data analysis. It is important to mention that while an interview schedule based on open-ended questions was pursued to discuss the topics of interest, there was space and flexibility for respondents to answer questions on their own terms and present any issues relevant to them. In this way, the interviews were similar to a "flowing conversation" (Rubin & Rubin, 2012), as the questions resembled "storytelling invitations" (Hollway & Jefferson, 1997).

Data Analysis

Transcripts were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, a six-phase qualitative approach developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Although the phases of this analytical approach are sequentially structured, data analysis was not a linear process, but recursive and iterative. The analysis developed gradually, as we explored its different phases. Therefore, further iterations of earlier phases occurred, as unexpected interpretations and insights led to reconsideration of previous meanings.

Ethics

Ethical approval was granted by Scottish Attachment in Action and this research was designed and completed in compliance with the research guidelines of the British Psychological Society. Formal consent was obtained via signed form and verbal consent was obtained at the beginning of each interview. The study information sheet was sent in advance to allow time to withdraw. In pursuit of ongoing informed consent, participants were reminded that responses would be considered anonymously, participation was voluntary, and they were free to leave at any point or not answer questions posed at any point. Following Scottish Attachment in Actions GDPR guidelines, data collected was stored on a secure server and the transcript was anonymised prior to analysis so contributions were unidentifiable. All data was discarded after the completion of the analysis.

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Data Analysis

Preliminary Analysis of the Questionnaire

Participants' professional roles within the ITE programmes delivered in their institution ranged from director of placements, lecturer in the education department, head of the ITE programme, PGDE Pastoral convenor to supervisor of children and young people's mental health and social and emotional learning. All participants seemed to be familiar with attachment theory, and 4 out of 6 agreed that attachment theory and issues around trauma have a place in ITE courses. Moreover, respondents noted that the ITE programmes delivered in their institutions cover a masters in Primary Education and a PGDE in both Primary and Secondary Education. Importantly, only one ITE is delivered solely at the undergraduate level. Importantly, most participants agreed that attachment theory and issues surrounding trauma are present in the content covered by the ITE programmes, with only one participant revealing there is a minor coverage of trauma in their university. Thus, although these topics do not seem to play a central role in ITE courses, participants revealed ITE focuses to a large extent on the importance of a relational approach to teaching. It is worth noting that all participants mentioned trainee teachers have the opportunity to practise the concepts learned theoretically in the ITE courses through their placements, which are embedded in the structure of each university programme.

On one hand, all participants (excluding one who preferred not to answer) mentioned that time is the biggest barrier to further covering attachment theory and trauma in more depth in ITE. On the other hand, respondents emphasised the need to recognise attachment and trauma's impact on children's learning as a facilitator in developing more similar content like this in ITE. Furthermore, participants outlined the importance of this topic for trainee teachers, who need to develop a comprehensive understanding of their role in equally supporting young people throughout their learning journey.

Reflexive Thematic Analysis

The data analysis conducted identified four main themes: 1) The Impact of Integrating Attachment Theory & Trauma into ITE; 2) Varying levels of coverage of Attachment & Trauma in ITE; 3) Barriers to Implementing Attachment and Trauma In ITE; and 4) Facilitating Factors to Implementing Attachment and Trauma In ITE. Each of these will be discussed, beginning with the first theme.

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The Impact of Integrating Attachment Theory & Trauma into ITE

The first theme identified that most participants acknowledged that covering attachment theory and trauma within ITE programmes would lead to positive experience for a) the trainee teacher and b) the learners.

A. The Impact On the Trainee Teacher's Experience

Participants described the positive impact of understanding attachment and trauma on the trainee teachers' outlook within their future career. Ruth emphasised that:

"I would hope that at the end of ... their learning with us they go into schools feeling confident that they can actually take a step back and think about behaviour before they make an action." (Ruth)

Ruth argues that the impact of teaching attachment theory and trauma would be to give trainee teachers the opportunity to reflect on the behaviours of their pupils within the classroom. Ruth implies that this will allow trainee teachers to take more suitable courses of action when responding to pupils.

B. The Impact On the Child's Experience

Most participants also identified that it would be impactful on children's experiences within the classroom environment. Kate highlighted that:

"it can be transformative. I think it can be life changing... when one adult begins to give them that attention for the right reason and that love and nurture, you know, we don't use the word love very much in an educational context, but really that's what it is... One individual teacher could be the first adult who begins to change a child's view of themselves and their view of the world." (Kate)

Kate articulates that the coverage of attachment and trauma can have "transformative" effect on the child's educational experience. Kate implies that this transformation extends beyond their academic achievements and establishes a profound effect on the child's internal view of themselves and external view of the world.

Varying levels of coverage of Attachment & Trauma in ITE

The second theme identifies that there is a large degree of variation of coverage of attachment and trauma across different ITE programmes in Scottish universities.

Some participants referenced the use of external professionals, such as *PlaceToBe* Counsellors and Virtual School Headteachers to allow trainee teachers to achieve greater depth in knowledge of attachment and trauma. Ruth explains that:

"our virtual school head... comes and speaks to the students in fourth year [and]... talks a little bit more around professional practice, the role of the virtual school and how the virtual

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school supports children who're looked after and how that links in with the learning they've been doing on attachment theory and trauma as they've gone through the programme. And that's designed to help them start linking things back together in terms of planning and pedagogy." (Ruth)

Here, we can see that Ruth acknowledges that bringing external professionals into their ITE programme allows students to connect their learning on attachment and trauma to professional practice. Ruth infers that by bringing external professionals into the programme, this achieves a greater depth of understanding of how attachment and trauma holds relevance to pedagogy and trainee teachers' future planning.

Conversely, some participants highlight that attachment theory is one of many theories that are relevant within ITE and offer limited coverage. Consider the following quote:

"I think it is something that students need to be aware of. However, what I would say is that there are lots of theories that could be equally argued to be as important. Attachment is just one, one part of that. Ehm so I think it would be difficult to argue a case that you would have, you know, a substantive amount of time on attachment." (Sonia)

Sonia's opposing view reflects that some participants argued that attachment was one of many theories that were relevant within ITE programmes. Due to this Sonia implies that there should not be a large amount of time devoted to the coverage of attachment theory. Within the data, it was also referenced by all participants that undergraduates received greater coverage of attachment and trauma than postgraduates.

Barriers to Implementing Attachment and Trauma In ITE

The third theme identified focuses on the systemic barriers preventing a nationwide, uniform coverage of attachment and trauma in ITE programmes across Scottish universities. This main theme is underpinned by five other subthemes, which are discussed in depth below.

a) Lack of Time

The first subtheme identifies time constraints as a significant impediment to the wider adoption of attachment-informed and trauma-sensitive educational techniques in ITE. Consider the following quote:

"we just need time. You know, the...four top modules in the PGDE, they're huge....there's huge demands on, the on the time. We can't, we can't do all. We keep trying to tell ourselves. It's just initial teacher education. We can't put everything in." (Daniel)

Here, Daniel responded to a question addressing the impediments to the widespread use of attachment and trauma within ITE. His response that "we can't do it all" implies that ITE courses can only focus on certain aspects, and thus, covering attachment and trauma topics is a challenge, since "we can't put everything in". Consequently, it may be deduced that the existing

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structure of ITE programmes is inadequate in accommodating the application of these approaches.

Ruth concurs with Daniel that the ITE schedule has limitations in terms of what it can educate trainee teachers in postgraduate courses:

"...there's just not enough time. So, it is typically to your training to be a primary school teacher and you've got the one-year course. You have got to learn how to teach 14 subjects. You have got to learn how to teach seven year groups. You've got to learn how to do that in a variety of different ways, in context and classes, and you've got to do that while also learning about all this theory and all this understanding as well. And fundamentally that there isn't enough time to do this in initial teacher education only, it needs to be built on as they go through their careers."
(Ruth)

Ruth emphasises the numerous learning-related responsibilities that trainee teachers must simultaneously undertake while learning about attachment theory and trauma-related practices. This is a significant issue since "there isn't enough time to do this in initial teacher education only"; thus, these practices should be addressed beyond ITE and throughout a teacher's career. In this sense, attachment-informed and trauma-sensitive methods are conceptualised as a key tenet of a teacher's practice that must be "built on" as one advances in their career.

In discussing the barriers regarding the usage of attachment and trauma-informed teaching approaches in the classroom, Sonia responded as follows:

"For teaching education, it's always time. You know, no matter whether it's a postgraduate program or an undergraduate program, it's always time because there's so much that we need to learn in education, that we can't, our role in teacher education is not, It is not to look at every single thing. It's not to look at every single theory or additional support need, you know, or every curriculum area in-depth. Our role is not to do that, we can't do that. Our role is to introduce you know, parts of that in a broad spectrum, and our role is actually to educate our students in terms of how they immerse themselves in that themselves" (Sonia)

Her answer reflects the idea that ITE programmes have their own time constraints, making it difficult to dedicate more time to frameworks like attachment theory. Therefore, these programmes do not intend to be exhaustive. Instead, they are designed to introduce students to a variety of topics that they will be expected to further analyse and understand throughout their career. This implies that, despite the intricacy of subjects like attachment theory and trauma, a quick introduction to them is still useful since it provides students with fundamental concepts, allowing them to "immerse themselves" in these techniques as they advance in their teaching roles.

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B) Lack of Academic Accessibility of the Topic

The second subtheme describes the barriers that prevent attachment theory from being more widely used in ITE courses, namely the lack of accessibility of this topic for trainer teacher educators.

For instance, Daniel mentions that he became aware of attachment theory on his own, rather than being introduced to it during his teacher training:

“We would never have included attachment theory in our course unless I'd read a little bit about it, and I've been exposed to it through teaching higher biology and ...understood from my own, you know professional experience. Now, we know the case is not strongly made in any books on or any of the general books on how to become a teacher, how to become a secondary science teacher. It's not really this case...isn't really strongly made. It's not really even really strongly made within the additional support needs literature, so I'd like to see a stronger case for it to be made within the, within all of that literature that sort of floats like clouds above teachers.”

(Daniel)

This quote reflects Daniel's experience with the “books on how to become a teacher”, which he claims do not cover attachment theory. The fact that the literature that “floats like clouds above teachers” fails to capture the relevance and meaning of attachment for teaching is portrayed as an impediment for expanding the implementation of these relationally aware educational practices in ITE courses. Indeed, Daniel suggests that unless he read about the topic, his department “would never include attachment theory in our course”. This clearly reveals a paucity of readily available materials for trainees on attachment-informed teaching practices.

Along similar lines, Ruth explains that this topic is not necessarily familiar to teachers:

“...attachment theory is not particularly clear or conversant for teachers. I think there is there's a lot of framing it in slightly different ways that are very similar. There are some, there are some good examples of literature which is available to teachers, but it often can be in quite a long book or not readily accessible.” (Ruth)

Here, Ruth argues that the literature on attachment theory is “not readily accessible”, emphasizing this as a factor which impedes teachers to become accustomed with the key principles of attachment theory. Additionally, the fact that “there's a lot of framing it in slightly different ways that are very similar” outlines the disparities existing in comprehending this theory, which is being contested to this day. As a result, it is implied that the absence of accessible and uniform definitions, notions and ways of teaching attachment theory represents a barrier to increasing its usage in education.

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c) The absence of uniform thinking on attachment across universities

The third subtheme pertains to the lack of agreement among the academics we surveyed on what attachment is and how it may be implemented in the classroom.

For example, Sonia explains below how she understands the notion of attachment:

"...I probably look at attachment theory possibly in more of a deficit sense... that child has too much attachment and that causes issues or too little attachment where there isn't any and that can be that there's no parenting going on in their background, so there isn't anything or anyone for them to attach to...And if we look at adverse childhood experiences, that's an issue because to mitigate any trauma, one of the main things is that if you've got a secure person, which it can actually often be a teacher, which is why we're so important." (Sonia)

This statement reveals a "deficit" oriented approach to attachment theory, as Sonia perceives attachment as a behavioural characteristic which can range from "too much" to "too little". She also identifies teachers as being "secure", alluding to educators' role as attachment figures who are "so important" to the educational experiences of young people. However, this quote may over emphasise teachers' involvement to "mitigate any trauma" of children, leaving unclear the extent to which educators can address the effects of adverse childhood experiences in the classroom.

Complementary to this perspective on attachment, Daniel's understanding of this framework is based on higher human biology:

"...my understanding of attachment theory really comes from teaching higher human biology. Attachment theory is covered in higher human biology. It's just the Mary Ainsworth's book it's just this other guy called Bowlby...I guess my reading around that is really been...how attachment theory has impacted on children's behaviour within the classroom. So yeah, very, very naive understanding of early psychological experiments on attachment theory, coupled with (umm) some reading around how children with poor attachment or insecure attachment can cause problems within the classroom and when their needs are not being met within the school" (Daniel)

According to Daniel, young people's "poor attachment" can lead to classroom issues. Thus, it might be construed that is not the child's behaviour that "causes problems", but rather his attachment style. Importantly, Daniel emphasizes his "naive" academic understanding of the topic while omitting his practical, real-life experiences. As a result, it is unclear how attachment principles are translated into practice from his standpoint.

Contrary to Daniel and Sonia, Ruth provides a viewpoint that captures the link existing between attachment and trauma:

"...I think the best way to think about attachment theory is...a means to think through how the behaviors you're observing could link back to underlying causes of trauma that are worth considering when thinking about how you might respond to..the behaviour and attachment

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theory enables an understanding pathway for practitioners, but also if anybody working with children or adults who are impacted by trauma.” (Ruth)

Here, Ruth refers to attachment as an “understanding pathway” that enables teachers to comprehend the true meaning behind children’s visible behaviours. Consequently, teachers may use this approach not just to better understand the relationship between children’s actions and their underlying trauma, but also to identify suitable responses to existing behavioural challenges.

d) A challenge to restructure the content of existing programmes

The fourth subtheme addresses the challenge of restructuring ITE courses to focus on attachment and trauma-informed techniques. Daniel's response exemplifies this point:

“... I had to sort of fight quite hard with myself and my colleagues to get to...win that hour over for attachment theory and thinking about the teenage brain development so... It was so many competing influences in the course....And the General Teaching Council are really hot on professional enquiry and it takes over a huge amount of a PGDE. It is a quarter of a PGDE just on professional enquiry, and it seems to me disproportionate...I think the standards are skewed towards professional enquiry too much and we would like to win some of that time back for issues such as attachment theory.” (Daniel)

Daniel’s remark outlines his attempts to “fight quite hard” to incorporate an hour of attachment theory instruction into the PDGE curriculum. This demonstrates the difficulty and resistance associated with changing the existing structure of the PDGE programme in his university. Additionally, Daniel believes that the General Teaching Council should restructure the PDGE, which currently focuses too much on “professional enquiry” and should dedicate more time to other topics like attachment theory.

Similar to Daniel, Kate emphasizes the problems connected with reorganizing ITE courses that have been functioning the same way for a long time:

“it's difficult to change things in a university because the course is designed, somebody's been running it for years...it has good feedback. It's sometimes difficult to change although ehm the university, courses have to be reaccredited. I think it's every five years, the GTCS has to, has to ehm, you have to submit any change, you have to submit information about your course and the GTCS has to say, yeah that's fine. So, It may be that you know, a facilitator might be the GTCS to say, OK, in your designated courses or your reassigned courses. We want to see more of this, this and this, and that would help to change it. But again, that is coming from elsewhere and coming from above...Barriers are usually systems and individuals in universities, I think.” (Kate)

This statement implies that altering the present structure of ITE courses might be challenging, because if the course has been "running" for years and has had "good feedback," there will be resistance to any changes, as it is simpler for a course structure to remain unchanged if it does

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not present any issues. In addition, the reaccreditation procedure that happens once every few years limits the flexibility of introducing new subjects in courses based on evolving pedagogical innovations and educational interests. This issue, coupled with the fact that changes are “coming from elsewhere and coming from above,” seem to negate the salience of a bottom-up approach fostering continuous change centred around the needs and priorities of ITE teachers and young people.

Facilitating Factors to Implementing Attachment and Trauma In ITE

The third major theme covers the factors that participants believe are essential for advancing the use of attachment-informed and trauma-sensitive approaches in ITE across Scottish universities. This theme is divided into two other subthemes, which are detailed below.

a. The need for ITE Staff with Expertise in Attachment and Trauma

One important subtheme captures the importance of ITE staff being composed of academics with expertise in attachment and trauma in order to ensure these subjects are prioritised within ITE. Consider Daniel’s comment below:

“We’ve would never include attachment theory in our course unless I’d read a little bit about it, and I’ve been exposed to it through teaching higher biology and...read, “Poverty Safari”...and understood from my own, you know professional experience.” (Daniel)

Daniel suggests that unless he “read a little bit” about attachment theory and understood his importance, his department would not consider including this subject within ITE. This reveals the salience of having people with expertise in these subjects for them to advocate the importance of teaching these aspects to trainee teachers. This equally reveals the importance of staff having this kind of expertise.

A similar opinion is shared by Sonia:

“One of the things that can impact what’s in a programme is the expertise that’s within the ITE teams. So if you’ve got a member of staff who is, whose expertise is research... is all around attachment theory, then it may well be that that plays a role in how much of that input is in the programme” (Sonia)

Here, Sonia reveals her opinion that having ITE staff with expertise in attachment and trauma can influence the type of “input” or subjects covered in a programme. Considering this, having “a member of staff..whose expertise is all around attachment theory” is outlined as a key facilitating factor in advancing the use of these educational practices within a given ITE programme.

b) Reliance on Educational Leadership for Promoting the Importance of Attachment-informed Practice and Trauma-Sensitive teaching Approaches

This subtheme depicts the role that educational leadership efforts have in expanding the adoption of attachment-informed and trauma-sensitive pedagogical practices. Consider the following quote:

“we need to be told by the government or by the GTCS that we have to do it. And then if we were told we had to do it, then we would all find a way of doing it” (Kate)

Here, Kate notes that if authorities like the “government” or the “GTCS” would impose the usage of an educational practice, then “we would all find a way of doing it”, meaning that change will surely occur under the pressure of these types of organizations. This also means that the support of key education actors is pivotal in provoking systemic change, mobilizing staff within universities to act accordingly and implement the proposed change.

In a similar way, Sonia describes the way educational policies imposed by the Scottish government facilitate specific educational content to be prioritised:

“...governments are always sending policies down, policies for this, policies for that, policies for the next thing. They actually overload schools and... ITE providers. But actually, what can happen is if there's a specific policy that's comes down, like for example when GIRFEC came down, it was a big, big focus on that. When 1 + 2 for languages came down, there was a big focus on that. So, it changes, so that can be helpful in terms of policy context impacting the input that we do, but it also can also be a hindrance because there's so much that comes down and we have these discussions with the Scottish Government about what, what is, what is realistic here in terms of what can schools do in any one academic year?” (Sonia)

From Sonia’s quote, it is evident that government policies can be helpful to instil educational change and help to “focus” on new curriculum topics. It is through this higher-level support that these policies are implemented. However, there is a disadvantage to this support, and that is the overwhelming nature of these policies that “overload schools”, implying they place too much pressure on schools to adopt transformations. On this basis, it seems that change is facilitated through the governmental efforts, however, teachers can perceive this as being staggering “there’s so much that comes down”.

Discussion

This project aimed to investigate the topic of attachment and trauma within ITE programmes across Scottish universities. It used a Reflexive Thematic Analysis framework to examine: (1) the impact of integrating attachment and trauma into ITE programmes; (2) the varying levels of coverage of attachment and trauma in ITE; (3) the barriers of implementing attachment and

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trauma coverage into ITE; (4) the facilitators of their implementation. The four main themes identified by data analysis will be presented and discussed in reference to previous research below.

Considering the first theme of *“The Impact of Integrating Attachment Theory & Trauma into ITE”*, previous research has indicated that integrating attachment theory into ITE programmes promotes children’s wellbeing across education (Kearns & Hart, 2017). Indeed, the interviewees shared this understanding that trainee teachers' knowledge of attachment theory and trauma could lead to more positive classroom experiences. Our research highlights that most participants acknowledged the impact of understanding attachment theory and trauma on trainee teachers and children. Furthermore, these findings indicate a readiness to further nurture an understanding of this issue; the question now is what resources can be employed to promote this topic and assist academics in sharing their understanding of it among themselves.

When exploring what is already in place within ITE programmes across Scotland, the second theme *“Varying levels of coverage of Attachment & Trauma in ITE”* identified that there were inconsistencies on the breadth, depth, and delivery of content regarding trauma and attachment. Some universities covered attachment and trauma in-depth, for example, bringing in external professionals, such as Virtual School Headteachers and *Place2Be* counsellors to develop this input. Whereas other university institutions interviewed described input on trauma and attachment theory as being very limited. This study’s findings confirm recent qualitative research, which found that the coverage within ITE programmes is ‘patchy at best’, despite it having an essential place within ITE (SAIA, 2022). Emerging international research also affirms that trainee teachers worldwide are underprepared in attachment and trauma-informed educational practice (McClain, 2021; L'Estrange & Howard, 2022). Our study identifies a lack of academic consensus across Scottish universities on the pedagogical salience of these topics. The disparity of understanding of the topics of attachment theory and trauma by key academics leading ITE programmes, might help explain the variation in levels of delivery of this type of content across universities.

In discussing the third theme, namely the *“Barriers to Implementing Attachment and Trauma in ITE”*, we found the central impediments (or subthemes) to be 1) the lack of time, 2) the lack of academic accessibility of the topic, 3) the absence of uniform thinking on attachment across universities and 4) the difficulty in restructuring the content of existing ITE programmes.

Our findings revealed that time limitations are a significant factor affecting academics' perceptions of the availability to address attachment and trauma in the ITE programmes. According to the categorization provided by the British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (BECTA) (2004), this type of educational obstacle may emerge at two levels: individual (e.g., the teacher) and institutional (e.g., the school). On the one hand, it may be argued that time constraints are an obstacle manifesting at the level of the educator, since they

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reflect the way in which ITE teachers manage to deliver all course content in a fixed length of time. This categorization, on the other hand, overlooks the wider institutional constraints that go beyond the control of ITE instructors. More specifically, given that certain topics are prioritised in the ITE curriculum, teachers will arrange their teaching schedule to cover all essential material, devoting less time to supplementary information. In other words, the lack of time to discuss attachment and trauma is due to the prioritization of other topics whose academic worth is indicated by the quantity of coverage they get. Similar to the issue of integrating Information and Communication Technology (ICT) education in schools due to teachers' lack of time to schedule and deliver this type of content (Bingimlas, 2009), interviewees appeared overwhelmed by the amount of information they needed to cover, with little space remaining to deliver additional, yet essential content. However, this barrier goes beyond BECTA (2004)'s school-level classification by illustrating the meaning of a macro-level or "system-level barrier" (Balanskat et al., 2006). In essence, this illustrates an impediment resulting from and reinforced by the current educational environment and framework, which gives too little attention to the need of preparing teachers in an attachment-informed and trauma-sensitive approach. This disregard translates into a failure to recognise the pedagogical significance of these themes as necessary to be integrated into ITE, while explaining the absence of any formal requirements to cover these topics in the curriculum. When looking at this problem from a broader perspective, it becomes clear there is still a lack of awareness that attachment and trauma are integral to each stage of the instructional process, which means that they are also modelled through the teaching process itself. Thus, the way ITE teachers deliver their content is another way of modelling these principles. In this sense, although presenting this information should have reserved a certain amount of time, it is important to foster a deeper understanding that these topics are an intrinsic part of teaching itself.

According to our results, this issue relates to the inaccessibility of these topics within ITE. Indeed, the wealth of existing information on attachment and trauma and their intricate dimensions exacerbate the challenge of disentangling the key messages and potential pathways for practice. In this context, it is relevant to discuss the qualitative work conducted by Mclain (2021) who found that 60% of 15 American early education teachers reported feeling "somewhat prepared" to facilitate the learning of children impacted by trauma. The author interprets these results by attributing teachers' insecurity to the inadequate and limited coursework and learning opportunities on these themes in teacher preparation programmes. Similarly, to our findings, this implies that while trainee teachers recognise the salience of relational and trauma-based pedagogy, they are not exposed to it enough during their professional development to build their confidence for implementing it into their classroom practices. This gap in teacher training programmes can have a detrimental impact on student-teacher interactions. For example, educators who are unfamiliar with trauma and its effects on learning and development may mistake a child's actions as acts of disobedience or evidence of a learning problem (Baweja et al., 2016; Mclain, 2021). Therefore, our findings are consistent

with prior research in that they highlight the pressing need for ITE programmes to better equip teachers to support students who have experienced trauma and significant life adversities.

Our findings further indicated that the absence of a shared understanding of attachment across academics also hinders the widespread implementation of attachment and trauma-sensitive instruction. Here it is worth mentioning that while attachment theory is an influential framework to this day, it has been refined and merged with a variety of novel theoretical and philosophical theories and concepts (Mackenzie & Roberts, 2017). As a result, it may be argued that there is no longer a single "attachment theory," but rather a diversity of theoretical explanations for human attachment that have arisen throughout time (Mackenzie & Roberts, 2017). Each of these theoretical explanations addresses Biology, Psychology, and social interactions as significant elements, although they do so in different ways. This difference in conceiving attachment theory may explain the current disparity in attachment understanding among certain academics.

However, it could equally be argued that the issue of unified attachment comprehension is closely connected to the barrier of inaccessibility, since the lack of teacher training on attachment fuels the discrepancy in academic perspectives on this matter. It might be suggested that this divergence in perspectives is related not just to the lack of a uniform framework that conveys attachment-informed pedagogical ideas clearly, but also to the absence of standard training on these topics. According to earlier research on trauma training, instruction sessions on attachment might be helpful in unifying different academics' levels of comprehension. For instance, a 3-hour trauma training enhanced 180 educators' knowledge and abilities in handling students' trauma (Brown et al., 2022; L'Estrange & Howard, 2022). Accordingly, Foreman and Bates (2021) reported that a 90-minute trauma awareness training improved 41 teachers' knowledge, awareness, and self-efficacy competencies for supporting children impacted by life adversities. Additionally, a recent study by L'Estrange and Howard (2022) showed that a 6-week training on trauma continued to impact trainee teachers' knowledge, self-efficacy and resilience one year after the training occurred. Nevertheless, for these skills to be consolidated, authors suggest that trainee teachers need ongoing professional development and support.

Furthermore, the difficulty in restructuring the content of current ITE programmes represents an additional obstacle to the implementation of attachment- and trauma-informed practices. In this context, our findings relate to Dingwall and Sebba's (2018) evaluation report of the "Attachment Aware School" training programme undertaken by the Bath and North East Somerset Council, Bath Spa University, and its collaborators. In this training, 25 teachers developed a sophisticated understanding of attachment theory and its scientific foundation, while learning about the impact of childhood trauma on brain development and the strategies of emotion coaching. According to Dingwall and Sebba (2018), several experienced educators struggled to adjust their perspectives from interpreting children's challenging behaviours as

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"naughty" to being symbolic of their unmet needs. The authors also stated that establishing a new mindset at the school level takes time. This corresponds to our findings, which revealed that upgrading programmes that are already functioning well is difficult.

Nonetheless, resistance to restructuring programmes to focus on young people's emotional and social dimensions stems from a variety of reasons. As discussed by Rose and colleagues (2019), the growing emphasis on the affective aspect of children's development as central to their ability to learn has been questioned on the grounds that this "therapeutic ethos" (Kevin & Hart, 2017) within education assumes a framework of weakness and emotional deficiency rather than one of self-efficacy (Ecclestone & Hayes 2009, Furedi 2003). For instance, Ecclestone and Hayes (2009) argue that interventions like this prioritize the emotional aspect of children's development over the intellectual, being anchored in the belief that children are constantly suffering from a "permanent consciousness of vulnerability" (Furedi, 2003)", which "diminishes" their agency and portrays them as needing emotional support in order to learn. Similar criticism, which is associated with the delivery of social-emotional learning programmes, is that while teachers may lack the necessary expertise in the field of mental health, they are charged with the therapeutic responsibility of assessing learners' emotional states and dysfunctional self-beliefs (Effrem & Robbins, 2019). Given that attachment- and trauma-informed pedagogy is a critical component of children's wellbeing, these topics are likewise vulnerable to these sorts of critiques, revealing some key arguments for limiting their wider implementation into teacher training programmes.

These ideas, however, fail to account for the reality that relational bonds and emotions are present throughout the school day, either fostering connection, engagement, and effective learning or impeding it (Roffey, 2011). Hattie (2010)'s meta-analysis of successful educational methods underlines the value of the teacher-student relationship in achieving satisfactory educational outcomes. As a consequence, the importance and the quality of these interactions occurring throughout the school day should not be overlooked, as they play a major part in generating either a good or negative learning environment, and so, facilitating or hindering educational attainment (Roffey, 2011).

Our fourth theme "*Facilitating Factors to Implementing Attachment and Trauma In ITE*" highlights that what is prioritised within ITE programmes is dependent on staff expertise. Consequently, there is inconsistency across ITE programmes, due to a dependence on staff interest in these topics. Kearns and Hart's (2017) research conducted within the University of Aberdeen's ITE programme, shows the development of their 15-credit course "Understanding the Emotional World of the Child". The research highlighted that programmes which prioritised relational dimensions of teaching allowed trainee teachers to successfully understand how attachment and trauma influence the relational basis of the teacher-pupil experience, both in terms of adult attachment and in terms of each child's emotional needs. As shown within this study's research, not all ITE programmes across Scotland have shifted their attention to

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attachment and trauma, some continuing to prioritise subject-centred pedagogy and classroom behaviour management. This is despite the GTCS's revised Professional Standards (2021) which have reinforced that "Becoming a Teacher in Scotland" involves promoting health and well-being; building positive relationships; and supporting those learners who have experienced trauma, as central professional values. A key facilitator to trainee teachers meeting these professional standards would be ensuring that all ITE staff across Scotland have the training and enhanced expertise on trauma and attachment. Indeed, wider expertise in trauma and attachment could positively shift the practice pedagogy of trainee teachers to more suitably meet the emotional and learning needs of students across Scotland (Brunzel et al., 2019).

Our research aligns with findings in other countries (TeachPlus, 2020), indicating that the Scottish government's legislation and the General Teaching Council for Scotland's (GTCS) standards do not provide sufficient clarity regarding the expectations for universities in the development of their initial teacher education (ITE) programmes. As such, these are subject to each Scottish universities diverse interpretation of how they choose to implement and prioritise policy and GTCS standards relating to trauma and attachment. Interviewees reflected that Scottish government and educational leadership can facilitate change and improvement in ITE programmes by offering key direction. Previous research has recommended that there be specific training regarding how to realistically and comprehensively include these aspects of curriculum into ITE programmes (TeachPlus, 2020). Promoting the understanding of attachment and trauma at a trainee teacher level could facilitate a whole school community shift on their approach to adversity and implementation of social and emotional elements of the curriculum (Rose et al., 2019). Therefore, an important facilitating factor would be ensuring that educational leadership offer direction on unified implementation across ITE programmes within Scottish universities.

In terms of methodology, the use of semi-structured interviews enabled us to acquire a more in-depth knowledge of what is in place inside ITE programmes with relation to attachment and trauma. Since semi-structured interviews are dynamic and open-ended, we were able to investigate innovative ideas and gain deeper insights (Kakilla, 2021). This is mirrored in our results on the enablers and challenges to strengthening attachment and trauma coverage in ITE programmes. However, there are also some methodological constraints to this method of data collection, as semi-structured interviews may provide less detailed and rich responses if there is insufficient knowledge of the issue of interest (Nguyen, 2015).

Furthermore, one limitation of our research was that we could only collect responses from professors at a few Scottish institutions that offered ITE programmes. Furthermore, the academics who were most eager to engage were likely to be the most knowledgeable on attachment and trauma. A further limitation of our study was that, due to time constraints, we were unable to examine the experiences of trainee teachers on ITE programmes across Scotland. Their viewpoints would have been crucial in understanding how ITE courses equip

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students to handle difficult classroom behaviours, while revealing how they perceive the gap between theory and practice. Furthermore, we were unable to explore the perspectives of children and young people on the subject. Future research should prioritise comprehending the experiences of trainee teachers who graduate ITE programmes, as well as the views of the children and adolescents they instruct.

Future Recommendations and Insights

One of the key messages from our research is that ITE programmes can play a pivotal role in supporting educators in preparing for, recognizing, and addressing the needs of young people affected by trauma (Lestrangle & Howard; Brown et al., 2022). Thus, finding feasible solutions to advance the progress towards a unified understanding of attachment and trauma and facilitate its wider implementation in ITE, some recommendations are offered below based on our insights.

Teachers need access to resources in order to build their knowledge of attachment and trauma. These resources may take the form of easily accessible articles or training courses, or they may take the form of a network of experts upon whom they may rely. Given the significance of endorsing a relational approach, teachers should be provided with the opportunity to build relationships not only among themselves but also across universities, establishing a community in which they can share their perspectives on learning and the lessons they have learned through practice. Additionally, this type of support should be ongoing, not limited to a one-time course, as the complexity of this topic requires regular exchange and consolidation of knowledge. This isolated trauma-specific treatments are insufficient; a trauma-informed system needs a system-wide commitment to change (Maynard et al., 2017). This perspective is in line with the fact that all school personnel, not just teachers, are engaged in responding to children's behaviour, which suggests that whole school staff should be undergoing attachment and trauma training as well (Dingwall & Judy Sebba). Additionally, proponents of trauma-informed education emphasise the need for instructors to seek clarity about their responsibilities in connection to pupils as well as understand boundaries when applying these practices (Brown et al., 2022; Venet, 2019). Teachers' role should be recognized as advocates who not only assist learners to overcome obstacles to their well-being but promote relationships as cornerstones to development. However, to engage successfully in this type of work, teachers need supportive communities as well (Brown et al., 2022)

For trainee teachers, they should be given time to reflect on how theory on attachment and trauma has come into place within the classroom when on placements. However, effective collaboration with schools is a critical component for the successful development of attachment-informed teacher education (Kearns & Heart, 2017), as it would address any potential discrepancies faced by trainees when applying theoretical concepts in practice.

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For ITE programmes, awareness of what works and what does not is crucial for accelerating progress. Universities across Scotland should have increased responsibility to be evaluating their ITE programme, so to be introducing changes which reflect the importance of understanding attachment and trauma and how it links to behaviour in the classroom.

A key document should be produced which provides a comprehensive view of how attachment theory and trauma link to the classroom environments. This will provide a more unified view on the topic and will be useful both for trainees and experienced teachers.

Conclusion

This research was a significant step in understanding the viewpoints of Scottish ITE teachers on the relevance and implementation of attachment- and trauma-informed education. The study developed an in-depth understanding of the obstacles, facilitators, and constraints of ITE programmes across Scottish universities, while connecting these variables to current literature. In line with previous research, we found inconsistent coverage of attachment and trauma within ITE programmes. Importantly, respondents had contradicting views on the significance of these topics within the classroom context and, therefore, its place within ITE programmes. Furthermore, our study identified that staff leading ITE programmes need consistent expertise on attachment and trauma and clear direction from educational leadership in order to improve the coverage of these topics. While it seems that extensive work is required to develop a uniform understanding of attachment and trauma across academics and to facilitate feasible ITE-level implementation of this topic, this research revealed possible next steps toward making attachment-aware and trauma-sensitive education a reality in every Scottish classroom.

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Appendix A

Preliminary Questionnaire Questions

1. What institution do you represent?
2. What are your responsibilities in the Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programme?
3. What ITE programmes are delivered in your institution? e.g., undergraduate, postgraduate
4. To what extent are you familiar with attachment theory?
 - a. To a large extent
 - b. Somewhat
 - c. Very little
 - d. Not at all
 - e. Other:
5. To what extent is attachment theory present in the courses offered by the ITE programmes?
 - a. To a large extent
 - b. Somewhat
 - c. Very little
 - d. Not at all
 - e. Other:
6. To what extent is attachment theory present in the courses offered by the ITE programmes?
 - a. To a large extent
 - b. Somewhat
 - c. Very little
 - d. Not at all
 - e. Other:
7. To what extent are issues around trauma covered in the courses offered by the ITE programmes?
8. What specific courses cover attachment theory and trauma-related topics and how many hours of learning do they require?
9. Are all students required to participate in these courses as core choices, or are they optional?
10. Is the delivery of this content regarding attachment and trauma conducted by a specialist in this area (e.g., a psychologist) or by non-specialist staff?
11. In case this type of content is not being delivered in your institution, what are the barriers to implementing and developing it?
12. What do you think would facilitate the development of this type of content focused on attachment and trauma-sensitive teaching?

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13. To what extent do you think attachment theory and issues around trauma have a place in ITE?
 - a. To a large extent
 - b. Somewhat
 - c. Very little
 - d. Not at all
 - e. Other:
14. To what extent do the courses in the ITE programme cover the importance of a relational approach to teaching?
 - a. To a large extent
 - b. Somewhat
 - c. Very little
 - d. Not at all
 - e. Other:
15. Does the ITE programme offer trainee teachers the opportunity to practise the concepts learned?
16. Do you have any additional comment/s on how issues around attachment and trauma are covered within ITE?

Appendix B

Interview Schedule

1. What is your role within Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in your university?
2. From your knowledge, what specific courses cover attachment theory and trauma-related topics? How many hours of learning do they require?
3. Is this a core component of the programme? Do you believe it is currently covered in enough depth within your institution?
4. To what extent have trainee teachers the opportunity to put formal theory into practice on the course?
5. Is there reflection within the course for students to understand their own attachment histories and their own patterns of behaviour in addition to learning from formal theory?
6. How would you define attachment theory?
7. What is your understanding of its relevance to educational practice?
8. What is your understanding of trauma-informed teaching practice?
9. How are trainee teachers influenced (in practice and mindset) by learning about attachment theory and trauma related concepts?
10. How do you think teaching these practices makes a difference to children's educational experiences?
11. In your opinion, what are the barriers to implementing and developing this type of content in ITE?
12. What do you think would facilitate the development of this type of content focused on attachment and trauma-sensitive teaching?
13. How do the current GTCS (General Teaching Council for Scotland) standards fit in with implementing attachment and trauma training within ITE?
14. In your opinion, how can leaders in education promote attachment informed practice in their policies and procedures? Or what can attachment theory contribute to policy?

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