Education Quarterly Reviews

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Professional Learning Opportunities and challenges among Student-Teachers during the Teaching Practice in Nyamagana District, Tanzania

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Abstract

This study investigated professional learning opportunities that student-teachers attained and the challenges they encountered during the teaching practice in Nyamagana District. Questionnaire and interview guide were used to collect the data. One hundred and eighty (180) student-teachers (respondents) from 14 higher learning institutions who were doing the teaching practice in secondary schools in 2018 were selected using simple random sampling. Furthermore, purposeful sampling procedures were employed in selecting few student-teachers who were leaders of the group from each school. The results showed that teaching practice increases student-teachers' confidence and competence in lesson preparation, content, records management, classroom management, and moral values. It was also revealed that teaching practice helps student-teachers to be exposed to mentorship and teaching experiences. In the case of challenges, it was revealed that student-teachers face a problem of lack of sufficient instructional materials, insufficient orientation, poor working environment, lack of adequate skills to manage students with special needs and aggressive behaviour as well as over-crowded classrooms. Again, it was revealed that schools had no appropriate strategies for creating professional learning community and variation in assessment strategies and conflicting comments from assessors were other the challenges. The study recommends an integrated approach for effective implementation of teaching practice where school-based cooperating teachers, school-based mentors and University supervisors should work collaboratively to ensure a student-teacher has room to explore, discover and acquire professional attributes regarding teaching. A blended mentorship approach which includes face to face and online sessions for student-teacher is thought to be a worthy strategy to improve teaching practice.

Keywords: Professional Learning, Community of Learning, Teaching Practice, Mentorship

Introduction

This paper addresses the professional learning opportunities and challenges perceived by student-teachers during the teaching practices. In Tanzania, teaching practice for student teachers is a vital aspect of teacher preparatory programme in teacher education institutions. On this, teacher education institutions place the teacher trainees in teaching practices with the aim to enable them to put their pedagogical skills, content, knowledge and professional skills into practice. The basic assumption is that teaching knowledge, and skills are situated in the day to day lived experiences of teachers and best understood through critical reflection with others who share the same experience (Vescio, Ross & Adams, 2008). While exercising their teaching duties and professional responsibilities, they are likely to improve their professional knowledge and skills. The school is assumed to be the best place for them to realize their creative potentials and their ability to teach. Most student-teachers use this

teaching practice opportunity to integrate their theoretical knowledge into the real practice and interact fully with the community they expect to serve when they graduate.

It is logical to argue that the teaching practice period gives the room for student-teachers to assess their competence and attitudes towards teaching profession. It can also be seen as a period where student-teachers are supported to realize the actual classroom teaching, reflection on the classroom practices, innovative opportunities and challenges that emerge as they interact with their immediate clients. According to Kiggundu and Nayimuli (2009), during the period of teaching practice, student-teachers are exposed to situations involving controlling and managing learners and establishing a working relationship with mentors, school administrators and University supervisors. On this basis, teacher education institutions have the responsibility to ensure student-teachers have effective support and supervision from the college and the school they are placed. The question is, are there adequate efforts in supervision to ensure that student-teachers realize the value of teaching practice? Are student-teachers able to realize the opportunities during the teaching practices? Based on these questions, it was possible to assess how student-teachers value and make use of pedagogical theories attained from colleges to meet the practical needs of the classroom and teaching profession.

The Need for Quality Professional Learning

A well-educated and learning society can be created by teachers as they interact with learners in ingraining them the critical and competitive spirit for development. On this basis, teaching becomes a more multifaceted task that demands highly specialized skills and knowledge so as to foster students' effective learning. The quality of teachers has been identified as a key determinant to the variations in students' learning (Wenglinsky 2000; Darling-Hammond 2000). A teacher should possess the qualifications and professional knowledge required to fulfil the learning needs of the learners in a diverse context. The question, therefore, is how teachers are prepared to become effective in their work? Do they have adequate opportunities to learn from teacher education programmes? It is not possible to locate the specific parameters, but there must be some standards to ensure teachers' quality is achieved and this can be reflected on how a teacher carries out the teaching responsibilities. According to Liakopoulou (2011), the way in which a teacher carries out his work is determined by the union of his personality traits and acquired knowledge. A good teacher should possess a wide range of qualifications, including mastery of the subject matter, mastery of the pedagogical techniques and possession of ethical values of teaching, just to mention a few.

Without effective professional learning, teachers cannot possess these attributes. In the Tanzanian education context, teaching practice has been considered as the best strategy to equip student-teachers from teacher education institutions with necessary pedagogical and didactic skills of teaching. Locating the professional learning outcome of the teaching practices to student-teachers raises an interesting question. Where can the professional learning outcome be pegged? It has been a common practice in most teacher education institutions where supervisors visit student-teachers for assessment and feedback, but, the professional learning outcomes are not availed in public. Possibly, a number of questions exist: can student-teachers realize the professional learning opportunities from the teaching practices? Are there any challenges that hinder student-teachers to learn from teaching practices? A more difficult question to educational practitioners is what support is available for student-teachers in realizing the professional learning opportunities? It makes sense to set the working definition in this paper regarding professional learning. The concept is considered as a learning opportunity gained by student-teachers from the actual practices as they interact with school teachers and the entire school community. Again, in this paper, the concept of mentorship has been considered as the contribution of school teachers to student-teachers in sharing experience and making a critical reflection on the fundamental issues of teaching. Therefore, the desire to conduct this study is built around two issues. First, the need to locate the perceived professional learning opportunities and challenges of teaching practice among student-teachers. Second, the need to raise awareness on the role of mentorship to professional learning among student-teachers. The following questions were examined in details:

a. What are the perceived professional learning opportunities of teaching practice among student-teachers?
b. What are the perceived challenges to professional learning among student-teachers during teaching practices?

The Consideration of Situated Learning Theory

Situated learning theory was developed by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger in the early 1990s, reflecting the ideas by Dewey, Vygotsky, and others (Clancey, 1995) who claim that learners are more inclined to learn by actively participating in the learning experience. The theory holds that learning, as it normally occurs, is a function of the activity, context, and culture in which it occurs. This suggests that learners are likely to create the meaning as they are involved in daily activities. On this basis, it is expected that student-teachers are likely to improve their professional knowledge and skills as they are engaged in teaching while learning from others. The immediate impression one could draw from this theory is that learning is situated in a social interaction experience where every member of the community of learners has the chance to learn from one another. During the teaching practice, student- teachers are likely to learn from students whom they teach, school teachers, heads of schools, parents, mentors, and supervisors from the college who visit them for assessment.

Lave and Wenger (1991) emphasize that novices begin learning by observing members of the community and then slowly move from the periphery of the community to fully participating members. What could be the logical implication to student-teachers as learners? It is possible to argue that, when student-teachers are at school, they are likely to learn from the complex and diversified school environment and be able to think critically and perform their duties as a community of learners. It is envisaged that the school environment and culture should support active engagement, discussion, evaluation, and reflective thinking. This discussion raises an interesting question: does the school environment provide the professional learning opportunity to student-teachers? One possible response is that professional learning can take place through activities, student-teachers are engaged in trying to solve real-life contextual problems. It is on this theoretical underpinnings this study was thought to address student-teachers understanding, thinking and practices during the teaching practices. The theory explains the complementary ingredients of an integrated view of professional learning among student-teachers.

Methodological Consideration

The study employed simple descriptive statistics backed up with verbatim quotations from research participants focusing on student-teachers' perceptions and experiences regarding teaching practice. The study involved 180 student-teachers from 14 Universities who were doing teaching practice in seven schools in Nyamagana District, Tanzania in 2018. Figure 1 next provides a summary of respondents across the Universities.
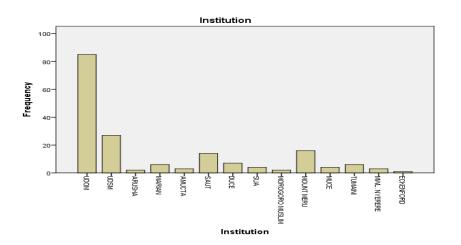

Figure 1: Number of Respondents across Universities

The closed-ended questionnaires were administered to student-teachers who were selected randomly with the aim to get a general overview of teacher's perceptions while the interview was conducted among few purposefully selected student-teachers for complementarity reasons. The respondents on the closed-ended questionnaire indicated their response on a four-point Likert scale of SA ("Strongly agree"), A ("Agree"), D ("Disagree") and SD ("Strongly disagree") with 4, 3, 2 and 1 scoring values apportioned to their response respectively. The decision rule was determined at 2.50 by obtaining the mean score of the scoring values. Thus, each item means less than or above 2.50 was either rejected or accepted. The responses from interviews were subjected to thematic analysis.

Results

    a. What are the perceived professional learning opportunities for teaching practice among student-teachers?

Table 1: Perceived Professional Learning Opportunities (N=180)

S.N	Item	SA	A	D	SD	X	Decision
1.	Improved my understanding of ethical practices in teaching	114	63	2	1	3.61	Accepted
2.	Improved my skills in the use of ICT for teaching	9	78	34	59	2.21	Rejected
3.	Improved my ability to collaborate with fellow teachers	119	54	2	5	3.59	Accepted
4.	Improved my confidence in lesson presentation and subject matter	138	36	3	3	3.72	Accepted
5.	Improved my confidence in responding to students' challenges	113	62	5	0	3.60	Accepted
6.	Improved my ability to relate ethically with my students	85	87	5	3	3.41	Accepted
7.	Improved my ability in report writing regarding my duties	78	93	6	3	3.37	Accepted
8.	Improved my ability in file and records management	90	73	13	4	3.38	Accepted
9.	Improved my skills in lesson planning, formulation of lesson objectives and lesson evaluation	121	52	4	3	3.62	Accepted
10.	Improved my skills in Audio-visual materials development	51	86	32	11	2.98	Accepted
11.	Improved my communication skills when teaching	113	58	6	3	3.56	Accepted
12.	Improved my skills in managing students with special needs	25	63	29	63	2.28	Rejected
13.	Improved my skills in coping with cultural diversity among colleagues and students	80	84	14	2	3.34	Accepted
14.	Promoted my understanding of school and instructional leadership	96	79	5	0	3.51	Accepted
15.	Promoted my ability to be committed to the assigned duties	101	69	8	2	3.49	Accepted
16.	Promoted my ability to supervise extra-curricular activities	91	80	7	2	3.44	Accepted
17.	Promoted my skills in monitoring students' behaviour	106	70	2	2	3.56	Accepted
18.	Promoted my skills in guidance and counselling practices	79	88	10	3	3.35	Accepted
19.	I have gained general experience and interest in the teaching profession	75	89	10	6	3.29	Accepted
20.	Received constructive feedback from the University supervisors	117	53	5	5	3.57	Accepted

(Test Mean 2.5)

Table 1 shows the various perceived professional learning opportunities by student-teachers during the teaching practice exercise. A mean value of 2.5 was used as the test mean (cut off point). Any item with a mean of 2.5 and above was considered to be actually an opportunity for professional learning as perceived by the majority of the student-teachers. On this basis, 18 out of 20 items listed in Table 1 were the perceived professional learning opportunities while the remaining 2 were considered as minor opportunities as perceived by the student-teachers. The two rejected aspects "Improved my skills in the use of ICT for teaching" and "Improved my skills in managing students with special needs" were found to be associated with other factors such as limited teaching and learning facilities as revealed during the interview.

Findings from Qualitative Interview

The interview question focussed on identifying the learning opportunities from teaching practices. The themes generated from the raw data are summarised in table 2 next;

Table 2: Generated Themes from Qualitative Analysis

S.N	Theme	Representative Quote
1.	Mentorship	*"..... the guidance we receive from heads of schools and school-based supervisors has been so encouraging. We have been exposed to sufficient ethical responsibilities as teachers through meetings and group orientations. Although we have been receiving strong mentorship from heads of schools, some school-based teachers are always not available for consultation. Some of us sometimes misbehave because they lack proper mentorship from mentors who are assigned to them" (Student-Teacher B, 2018)*
2.	Exposure to the teaching profession	*"......the teaching practice has been useful as it gives us the opportunity to relate the theoretical principles we learn at the college and the actual practices. The exposure we get from school-based teachers and supervisors expands our perception of the teaching profession" (Student-Teacher F, 2018)*
3.	Increased Interest in the teaching profession	*"...... the teaching practice has helped us to improve our personal interest in the teaching profession. Before joining the University, I never thought of becoming a teacher, but now I really enjoy teaching. Although there are some few challenges in the classroom teaching, I have come to realize that when you teach, you learn. This broadens my thinking ability, and I become more proactive all the time" (Student-Teacher C, 2018)*

The results from table 1 and 2 indicate that teaching practices provide more opportunities for student-teachers to improve their professional learning. It was agreed by most respondents that teaching practices increase student-teachers' confidence and competence in lesson preparation, content, records management, classroom management, moral values, just to mention a few. The findings corroborate with the study findings by Andabai (2013) who found that student-teachers benefited greatly in participating in teaching practice because they were able to build proper confidence and competence in lesson preparation and developed skills and attitudes of a teacher during the exercise.

While teaching practice has been perceived to improve teaching competence among student-teachers, some could not benefit. This is contrary to the findings by Mapolisa and Tshbalala (2014) who found the most outstanding positive experience of the student-teachers who appreciated the support system offered to them by their mentors. Consider the response from student-teacher B, in table 2. It was revealed that some mentors were not available for consultation. It makes sense to assert that student-teachers need proper guidance from experienced teachers. Their absence could lead to some misconducts such as negligence of duties among student-teachers. The findings are in agreement with the study by Kagoda and Sentongo (2015) who found that teacher trainees benefited from school-based teachers as they gained experience in teaching, methods, skills, and techniques of content delivery during the teaching practices. Although some school-based teachers tend to ignore the importance of mentorship, the task remains to be more essential for professional learning. In the study by Mpofu and Chimhenga (2016), student-teachers perceived mentorship to be an important aspect, and they expressed the need for mentors to be understanding, good models, treat them as a teacher-candidate, not as a student and to give constructive feedback. A mentor is assumed to be the most knowledgeable individual who can assist a novice teacher to improve the professional skills and values. It is possible to question the moral integrity of those school based-teachers who are assigned the mentorship responsibilities to student-teachers. Do they really understand their professional responsibilities as mentors? Student-teachers really need mentors who have moral obligations so that they assist them to transform from being student-teachers to qualified professionals in teaching. In adding value to the teaching profession, student-teachers appear to appreciate the moral commitment of some teachers who helped them to develop insights towards teaching.

Increased interest in the teaching profession was another opportunity mentioned by student-teachers which complement the findings in table 1 in which many respondents agreed at the mean score of 3.29 on the same. This may have the logical implication for student-teachers to consider teaching as a profession. The findings corroborate with the research findings by Koross (2016) who found that student-teachers benefited greatly in participating in teaching practice because they were able to decide whether or not to take teaching as a profession. They developed an interest in teaching as they were exposed to the problems and prospects of the teaching profession. What kind of teaching practice is needed to support student-teacher professional growth? Participants were of the view that the exposure they get through teaching practice can improve their teaching in the future. It is the researchers' view that teaching practice should be considered to be an avenue for student-teachers to assess their personal, professional competence and commitment. It should help them to develop deeper insights into their understanding of teaching and learning strategies and professional responsibilities in teaching. In the 21st century, teachers need to possess multiple skills and understanding regarding the content, learners and professional attributes.

b. What are the perceived challenges to professional learning among student-teachers during teaching practices?

Table 3: Perceived Professional Learning Challenges (N=180)

S.N	Item	SA	A	D	SD	X	Decision
1.	Lack of strong co-operation from the subject teachers and student-teachers	8	17	61	94	1.66	Rejected
2.	Lack of adequate Instructional materials and resources in your school	81	63	24	12	3.18	Accepted
3.	Inadequate teaching practice orientation before the commencement of teaching practice exercise	65	24	49	42	2.62	Accepted
4.	Lack of a good working environment at school that supports my ability to come up with innovations regarding my subject	84	45	35	16	3.09	Accepted
5.	The poor relationship between student-teachers from different Universities	22	11	61	85	1.83	Rejected
6.	Lack of respect among students to student-teachers	31	30	62	57	2.19	Rejected
7.	Too much workload and responsibilities for student-teachers at my school	6	28	71	75	1.81	Rejected
8.	Student-teachers are not formally introduced to permanent teachers thus making us feel inferior and irresponsible	12	14	66	88	1.72	Rejected
9.	Student-teachers are excluded from the staff meetings and other decision-making meetings	34	34	47	65	2.21	Rejected
10.	Student-teachers are facing difficulties in planning the scheme of work, lesson plan and lesson notes	11	37	68	64	1.97	Rejected
11.	Student-teachers are facing difficulties in managing students with special needs	87	48	38	7	3.19	Accepted
12.	Student-teachers are faced with the poor learning environment and over-crowded classrooms	94	44	32	10	3.23	Accepted
13.	Teaching practice is a period of stress and anxiety for student-teachers	21	21	53	85	1.88	Rejected
14.	Student-teachers are mistreated with the school teachers	16	22	60	81	1.85	Rejected
15.	Lack of strong supervision from the school administration	14	18	66	82	1.80	Rejected
16.	School-based teachers discourage student-teachers as they are not role models to them	21	25	73	61	2.03	Rejected
17.	Student-teachers meet some aggressive students, and they have very little control over them	78	34	48	20	2.94	Accepted
18.	Student-teachers are not fully involved in all school activities	19	24	54	83	1.88	Rejected
19.	Student-teachers are not allowed to interact with the permanent teacher and are even assigned a different staffroom	23	8	59	90	1.80	Rejected
20.	Supervision and assessment is not conducted on time	10	19	59	92	1.71	Rejected

(Test Mean 2.5)

Table 3 shows the various perceived challenges to professional learning by student-teachers during the teaching practice exercise. A mean value of 2.5 was used as the test mean (cut off point). Any item with a mean of 2.4 and below was considered to be actually a challenge for professional learning as perceived by the majority of the student-teachers. On this basis, 14 out of 20 items listed in table 3 were perceived challenges for professional learning while the remaining six were considered as minor challenges as perceived by the student-teachers. The challenges include lack of sufficient instructional materials, insufficient orientation, poor working environment, lack of adequate skills to manage students with special needs and aggressive behaviour as well as over-crowded classrooms. It makes sense to emphasize that these challenges may limit student-teachers' creative potential to explore professional learning opportunities regarding teaching. The findings corroborate with the findings from the interview with some student-teachers as described next.

Findings from Qualitative Interview

The interview question focussed on identifying the professional learning challenges among student-teachers during teaching practices. The themes generated from the raw data are described in table 4 next;

Table 4: Generated Themes from Qualitative analysis

S.N	Theme	Representative Quote
1.	Lack of appropriate strategies for creating a professional learning community	"……. When we arrived here at this school, we were isolated from school-based teachers. There is no specific place where you can meet a teacher who handled the lesson to you. This limits us to model some good characters from them. It is like they run away from us. I think these school based-teachers should consider us as learners who are ready to learn from them and the schools must create the learning community culture"(Student-teacher G, 2018)
2.	Variation in assessment strategies	"…….. As you can see, we are from different Universities but undertaking similar degree programmes. My challenge is in the different format we have in preparation of lesson plans. The colleagues have their own structured lesson plan, but some of us, have to design ours. Some student-teachers from other Universities are required to prepare the portfolio, and they are assessed in a portfolio and classroom teaching while others are assessed in the classroom only. These variations, sometimes bring confusion. I am of the view that Universities, must harmonize and come up with a standard assessment tool….." (Student-Teachers F, 2018)
3.	Lack of proper guidance from classroom teachers	"…… We expect class teachers who handled the lesson to us to be present in our classroom teaching for proper guidance and feedback, but this never happened to our school" (Student-Teacher C, 2018)
4.	Conflicting comments from assessors	"…… as you can see, we are fifty-five student-teachers from six Universities, but most of us after the assessment, we find conflicting comments, especially on the lesson plans. When we compare comments on the components of the lesson plans, we find that every University has its own way and format of the lesson plan. When we ask school based-teachers, they have their own way too. My problem is: what should be our take?. It is really confusing……" (Student-Teacher A, 2018)

The findings from table 3 and 4 reveal that there are many challenges regarding teaching practices. Lack of sufficient facilities at schools has been one of the challenges highlighted by most participants. The findings are in line with the findings by Mungure (2017) who found that there were no teaching and learning resources, especially for science student-teachers such as laboratories to practice science skills and other materials such as manila sheets and models. In Turkey, it has been found that student-teachers faced difficulties about not being able to find appropriate materials for the experiments, realizing that the materials were broken before the activities, and coming to school with incomplete or incorrect materials (Takaoğlu, 2017). Lack of suitable materials to meet the learning purposes may be interpreted that student-teachers are not really practising what they are taught in Universities. On this, one student-teacher was quoted saying:

> *"the school has the laboratory as a building, but when you get in, there is no apparatus, specimens, some circuits are not working. In this condition, how can you teach chemistry?..... it becomes very difficult for us when preparing the lesson plan, you find the topic is to be taught by using some apparatus, but when you go in the laboratory it is empty"* (Student-Teacher H, 2018)

In view of the above quote, it is possible to raise questions: how science subjects are taught? Do learners achieve better in science when they are taught theoretically? The literature suggests that science subjects can be taught better through inquiry-based methodologies. Writing on inquiry-based science education, Abdi (2014) stresses that learners become engaged in many of the activities and thinking processes that scientists use to produce new knowledge. On this basis, learners need a space (laboratory) and physical facilities to explore. Lack of such facilities and equipment in the laboratory may have negative effects on their learning. Reflecting on the government statistics regarding the availability of laboratories in the Tanzanian government and non-government secondary schools, the data indicate that there is a deficit of 2093 (43.6%) out of 4796 biology laboratories needed while 1918 (39.7%) out of 4827 chemistry laboratories needed and 2151 (44.8%) out of 4797 physics laboratories needed (URT, 2017). It is possible to underscore that, in this situation, student-teachers teaching science subjects lack sufficient skills in supervising and conducting practical sessions since, in some schools, there are no laboratories.

It was also reported that ICT facilities were insufficient in almost all schools that were involved in this study. Student-teachers had no opportunity to explore how ICT facilities could be used to facilitate their teaching. On this matter, one of the respondents stated:

> *".... We are living in an information society where every individual should have an opportunity to access digital information. The situation at our school does not reflect the same. We expected to be exposed to digital facilities that can facilitate our teaching, but our expectations are in vain now. The big school like this has two desktop computers which are used by the academic master and the head of school...."* (Student-Teacher D, 2018)
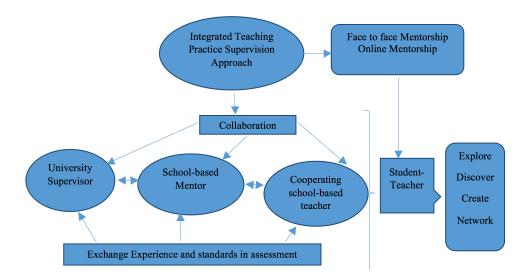
A critical reflection from the above quote lies in the number of available computers which are not used to support teaching and learning. This may limit the continuity in professional learning among student-teachers. At the University, most student-teachers are taught how to explore technological devices and use them to support their teaching, but when they go for teaching practice, the facilities are not enough. Based on the government statistics in Tanzania, there are 4796 government and non-government secondary schools with a total enrollment of 1,908,857 students. In these schools, there are 24,545 desktop computers, 1489 projectors, 789 radio and 5765 laptop computers (URT, 2017). The number of ICT facilities available does not match fairly with the total students' enrollment of which the strategies to bridge the digital divide in education might be slow. One would say that insufficient ICT facilities would result in poor development of the industrial economy. Among the strategies to realize competence and competitiveness, is to promote science and technology education. Technology has been identified as a driving force towards the realization of Tanzania vision 2025 in which it should be harnessed to enable people to meet their basic needs and increase productivity (URTPC, 1999). It is possible to argue that the realization of the vision 2025 may be difficult if there is no deliberate investment in technological devices in Tanzanian schools. Access to ICT facilities in schools by student-teachers may lead to the use of ICT in teaching and learning in the future although it is not a guarantee.
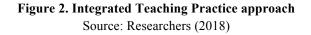
From the findings in table 4, it was also revealed that schools had no appropriate strategies for creating a professional learning community (PLC) for student-teachers. Most literature suggests that engaging teachers in PLC increase their professional knowledge and enhances students' learning (Vescio *et al*., 2008). In the context of the present study, PLC is taken to mean the collaborative culture created between school-based teachers and student-teachers for the purpose of professional growth. Based on the findings in table 4, this did not happen, instead, student-teachers witnessed the culture of isolation. The findings are contrary to the findings by Kagoda and Sentongo (2015) who found that student-teachers tend to isolate themselves from school-based teachers and sit behind in the staffroom. The logical implication is that the situation would lead to a lack of appropriate professional teaching skills among student-teachers that could draw from school-based teachers who are

considered as mentors. The key assumption behind PLC is mentorship in which student-teachers may have an opportunity to learn from experienced teachers. Writing on the role of mentorship as a key component of PLC, Fantilli, and McDougall (2009), stress that mentorship assists are beginning teachers to cope with teaching difficulties. Researchers of the present study are of the view that mentorship should be considered as a serious component of teaching practice in which school-based teachers should be well informed on their responsibilities as mentors. It is expected that classroom teachers as mentors, provide strong guidance to student-teachers in many aspects such as lesson preparation, actual teaching, and assessment of students' learning.

The other challenges mentioned by the participants include variation in assessment strategies and conflicting comments from the assessors. The findings are in line with the findings from the study conducted in Zimbabwe by Majoni (2015) who found that supervisors' comments tend to confuse student-teachers and they become uncertain of the correct thing to do. Furthermore, Majoni found that some lecturers who come to assess student-teachers on teaching practice tend to be fault seekers. Reflecting on the matter, the researchers of the present study considered the approach to be unsafe, and this might compromise the quality of teacher education. It is expected that the supervisor and student-teacher relationship to be a shared one. The supervisor has the task to spend time in reflecting together with student-teachers so as to improve the practice. What is seen, is just conflicting comments instead of providing specific and descriptive feedback on the student-teachers' teaching. In a similar way, Chimhenga (2017) found that supervisors gave grades which did not reflect the comments made about the teaching performance of the student-teacher and some created fear to student-teachers. Under this condition, the professional working relationship cannot be achieved ever since the teaching practice is seen as a punitive task. Supervisors should be well informed on their professional responsibilities which encourage and support student-teachers to relate the teaching theories to classroom practice. After the classroom observation, the supervisor has an obligation to discuss with the student-teachers on various professional matters which may include effective use of teaching and learning materials, motivation, and teaching and assessment approaches, reflection, records management just to mention a few.

Participants of the present study had the view that the variations in terms of comments and assessment need to be harmonized. It is possible to develop a national teaching practice guideline in which all supervisors must observe. Again, there must be a well-harmonized lesson plan to guide student-teachers when planning for their teaching. This would minimize anxiety and fear among student-teachers who receive contradicting comments. It is possible that all Universities are offering teacher education programmes to agree on the key elements to be assessed rather than having different models of assessment. Student-teachers should be treated as adults who are ready to take teaching professional responsibilities after their graduation. To achieve this, there is a need of having an integrated supervision approach on teaching practice which considers a student-teacher as a self-determined learner.

Figure 2. Integrated Teaching Practice approach
Source: Researchers (2018)

It makes sense to stress that, collaboration should be the heart of each Party involved in teaching practice supervision in which everyone can learn from one another. The University supervisors, school-based mentors, and collaborating teachers should work collaboratively to help a student-teacher to explore, discover, create and acquire teaching professional attributes. It is assumed that learning in the digital age and for adults takes place through experience and reflection from multiple resource individuals.

Concluding Thoughts

Teaching practice seems to be the most important task for the student-teachers in promoting their professional growth. Student-teachers really acknowledged the usefulness of teaching practice as it provides for them an opportunity to explore and discover professional duties and responsibilities. It was found that mentorship could play a great role in improving student-teachers' professional commitment, although most school-mentors were not aware of the responsibilities. This calls for a formalized partnership between colleges and schools so as to create a friendly relationship in which a school-based mentor can have an opportunity to guide and coach a student-teacher on professional development.

Implications for Teacher Education

This study has a number of implications for teacher education. Firstly, student-teachers should be involved in a comprehensive orientation before they go for teaching practice with the aim to guide them on their teaching professional responsibilities. Workshops and seminars may be done at the college, but the continued online mentorship between University coordinators and student-teachers can also serve the purpose of advising and encouraging student-teachers to keep on track on their professional responsibilities. On this basis, this study suggests a blended mentorship approach which includes face to face and online sessions for student-teacher as a useful strategy to improve teaching practice.

Secondly, a collaboration between school-based mentors, cooperating school-based teachers and University supervisors would serve the purpose of effective teaching practice supervision. This would help a student-teacher make a personal reflection on the feedback brought forward by each party. It is possible for a student-teacher to learn and gain a professional understanding regarding the teaching profession when he or she receives constructive criticisms from the team.

Thirdly, higher learning institutions should harmonize and come up with clear guidelines on how schools should participate in the training of student-teachers. The guidelines may outline the responsibilities of University supervisors, school-based cooperating teachers, and mentors. Assessment procedures and tools may be developed to ensure uniformity and clarity for anyone who is involved in assessing student-teachers during teaching practice.

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