

Supervisors' Assessment Practices: Implications for Diploma Level Student Teachers' Learning during Teaching Practice

Hawa Mpate

Lecturer, Department of Educational Psychology and Curriculum Studies
Mkwawa University College of Education, P.O.Box 2513, Iringa Tanzania
Email: cutecleopa@gmail.com; hawa.mpate@udsm.ac.tz

Abstract

This study explored the implications of supervisors' assessment practices for student teachers' learning during teaching practice in Moshi Rural District, Kilimanjaro. A qualitative approach, informed by a multiple case study design, was employed. Data were collected from 19 participants, including five supervisors (tutors), six student teachers from a diploma teacher training college, five mentor teachers, and three school heads across three public secondary schools. Interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), classroom observations, and document analysis were employed to collect data. The findings revealed various assessment practices used by supervisors and their implications for student teachers' learning during teaching practice. While some practices were effective, others were poorly organised, untimely, and of low quality—characterised by rushed, overly objective, grade-focused, and inconsistent evaluations. Supervisors also faced constraints such as limited time and financial challenges, hindering effective assessment. The study recommends that teacher training colleges strategically time assessments to align with key milestones in the student teaching experience.

Keywords: *teacher education, practicum, teacher educators, secondary schools, pre-service teachers*

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Introduction

The global concern regarding the quality of teacher preparation has persisted for decades, prompting numerous countries to intensify their efforts in enhancing the teaching practice aspect of teacher education. Notably, countries like Australia have introduced the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, signifying a robust step toward improving teacher preparation (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2013). Similarly, the United Kingdom has implemented teaching standards to evaluate student teachers during teaching practice and to accredit Initial Teacher Education (ITE) (Beauchamp, Clarke, Hulme, & Murray, 2015). Moreover, in the United States, England, Finland, and South Africa, there is

a noticeable surge in prioritising partnerships between teacher education colleges/universities and teaching practice. Efforts to strengthen teacher education, involving the refinement of teaching practices, stem from the recognition that learning to teach is intricately tied to its context. Teaching practice is a period when student teachers spend a prescribed time in the real context of teaching (in schools), where they learn different techniques to teach by being in the real classroom. During teaching practice, student teachers gain a deeper understanding of teaching's complexities (Darling-Hammond, 2012; Schlesinger, Jentsch et al., 2018; Zeichner, 2010). Although the importance of teaching practice is widely recognised, the ideal conditions for this learning are debated. The literature highlights teaching practice as crucial for developing pedagogical reasoning skills.

Various studies have explored factors influencing student teachers' learning during teaching practice, including the role of school administrators (Montecinos & Walker et al., 2015), peer interactions (Tindowen, Bangi et al., 2019), and the roles of mentor teachers and supervisors (Maddamsetti, 2018; Barahona, 2019). Among these factors, supervision by teacher educators, who are referred to in this study as supervisors, stands out as the most crucial aspect affecting student teachers' learning during teaching practice. This is primarily because supervisors who instruct student teachers at the college level often build stronger, more collegial relationships with them than mentor teachers or school heads (Jacobs, Hogarty et al., 2017). While mentor-student-teacher bonds may also form, they are typically less impactful due to the temporary nature of student teachers' roles in practice schools compared to their lasting connection at the college.

To date, research on the role of supervisors in assessing student teachers' learning in Tanzania remains limited despite their crucial significance. Existing literature, such as Mahende and Mabula (2014) and Mungure (2017), has primarily focused on the impact of mentor teachers' support on professional development. Their findings highlighted a lack of adequate support hindering student teachers' progress. Similarly, Kihwele and Mtandi (2020) and Kihwele and Chuma (2020) investigated student teachers' teaching practice experiences, revealing deficiencies within teacher preparation programs that cause undue stress. While these studies offer valuable insights, they fall short of addressing supervisors' assessment practices in augmenting student teachers' learning during teaching practice. This research aims to bridge this gap by delving into the implication of supervisors' assessment practices for student teachers' learning. The term implication in this study means the positive and negative consequences resulting from supervisors' assessment practices on student teachers' learning.

Research objectives

- i. To examine the supervisors' assessment practices during teaching practice.
- ii. To examine the implication of the supervisors' assessment practices for student teachers' learning to teach during teaching practice.

Literature Review

This review examines supervisory practices in assessing and supporting student teachers during teaching practice, focusing on how evolving assessment methods impact their learning, competence, and confidence. It identifies effective strategies, challenges, and the implications of these assessments through various studies.

Effective assessment strategies***Organisation of assessment***

Efficiently organising assessments is pivotal in ensuring successful teaching practices and significantly influences other assessment methods. In this context, the organisation of assessment refers to the timing and frequency of evaluations conducted by supervisors during teaching practice. Literature underscores the importance of timely assessments for student teachers, allowing for accurate progress monitoring (Goff et al., 2020). However, ongoing debates persist regarding the optimal timing of these assessments. Some studies advocate for the immediate assessment upon the student teachers' commencement in teaching practice, aiming to swiftly identify challenges and provide timely solutions (Waldis et al., 2019). Yet, this approach, while beneficial for supervisors in aiding student teachers, tends to evoke apprehension among student teachers who are still acclimatising to the teaching environment (Kihwele & Chuma, 2020).

In contrast, Kihwele and Chuma (2020) highlighted the pivotal role of allowing student teachers to settle into their teaching practice before undergoing supervisors' assessment. This settling period fosters a deep contextual understanding, bolstering their confidence in teaching and yielding more favourable assessment outcomes. Consequently, the timing of assessments should strike a balance—neither too premature nor excessively delayed—to mitigate the extremes' impact. The frequency of assessments also emerges as essential for a successful teaching practice. Supervisors, beyond mere assessment, ought to sustain continuous monitoring of student teachers' progress in their teaching practice (Mungure, 2017). Achieving this entails supervisors making multiple visits to practice schools, cultivating strong relationships with these institutions, and dedicating ample time to engage with both student teachers and resident educators (Maddamsetti, 2018).

Assessment quality

The quality of assessment encompasses various facets highlighted by researchers. Nonetheless, it is argued that both objectivity and subjectivity play pivotal roles in supervisory assessment quality (White & Forgasz, 2017). Studies indicate that acknowledging both aspects helps mitigate assessment challenges, particularly concerning honesty and fairness (Barahona, 2019). Objective assessment refers to adherence to specified skills outlined in teacher education programs (Charteris & Dargusch, 2018). This type of assessment has emphasised the technical aspects of teaching due to heightened attention to teaching standards globally within teacher education programs (Barahona, 2019). Consequently, many teacher education programs have assessment measures tailored to assess specific pedagogical elements like lesson planning and teaching materials (Baecher & McCormack, 2015). While objective assessment aids in establishing a common ground among supervisors, it tends to overlook flexibility, scope, individual differences, and contextual—elements considered crucial for effective assessment.

On the contrary, subjective assessment offers flexibility, guided by supervisors' knowledge and beliefs about what constitutes effective teaching, taking into account social aspects and personal values (Marasigan, 2018). It revolves around supervisors' perspectives and established norms of what defines excellent teaching, often diverging from prescribed assessment criteria (White & Forgasz, 2017). Research indicates that subjective assessment promotes active engagement among student teachers and provides supervisors with opportunities for critical reflection on their roles and practices (Russell, 2017; Sheridan and Tindall-Ford, 2018). Despite its importance, subjective assessment might dilute the assessment standards set by teacher education programs as it tends to align more with supervisors' normative views.

Implication of effective assessment

Professional growth and development

Assessment practices that promote professional growth and development are essential for preparing pre-service teachers for their future roles. According to Darling-Hammond (2006), assessments that focus on practical teaching skills, classroom management, and instructional strategies contribute to the comprehensive development of pre-service teachers. This approach ensures that they are not only knowledgeable but also capable of applying their knowledge effectively in real classroom settings.

Reflective practice

Reflective practice is a crucial element facilitated by robust assessment practices. Slade et al. (2019) posit that reflective practice allows pre-service teachers to critically

analyse their teaching experiences, leading to deeper learning and professional growth. Assessment methods that encourage reflection, such as self-assessment and peer feedback, help student teachers develop a reflective mindset, which is essential for lifelong learning and adaptation in their teaching careers.

Uniformity and consistency in assessment

Uniform and consistent assessment practices are vital for ensuring fairness and reliability in evaluating pre-service teachers. Research by Smith and Tillema (2003) indicates that discrepancies in assessment criteria and practices can lead to confusion and inequity among pre-service teachers. Standardised rubrics and clear guidelines are recommended to address these issues and provide a coherent framework for assessment.

Research Methods

Study context and approach

The research adopted a qualitative approach to explore the implications of supervisors' assessment practices for the overall learning experiences of student teachers during their teaching practice. The study employed a multiple case study design in which supervisors' assessment practices and the implication of assessment practices for student teachers' learning were the cases to be studied. Case study design was preferred because it provide an opportunity for a comprehensive and detailed examination of the assessment practices employed by supervisors during teaching practice. This depth allows researchers to gain a profound understanding of the complexities and nuances involved. Moreover, case study design allows the deployment of a variety of data collection methods, such as interviews, observations, and document analysis, providing a rich and multifaceted perspective on the research question (Yin, 2015).

The research focused on the Kilimanjaro region, chosen purposively for its significant number of diploma teachers colleges, making it a substantial producer of teachers at the diploma level of education compared to other regions. Kilimanjaro region has six (6) Diploma teachers training colleges, followed by Mwanza and Dodoma with four (4) teachers training colleges, Arusha, Kagera, Mbeya, Morogoro, and Dar es Salaam with three (3) teachers training colleges each. The rest of the regions have the least number of teachers' colleges ranging from 1-2. Specifically, the study centred on the Moshi rural district among the six districts within the region. Moshi district was purposively chosen because it is a prominent educational centre in the Kilimanjaro Region, hosting three well-established teachers' training colleges. As a major academic hub, the impact of supervisors' assessment practices in Moshi could be more pronounced, providing valuable insights into how such practices affect student teachers' learning and development.

Selection of the study samples

The study employed a purposive sampling technique to select participants from both the teacher training college and secondary schools. Initially, three secondary schools were chosen based on their proximity to the selected teacher training college. The three schools that were within less than five kilometres of the selected teacher training college were chosen. This is because the experience shows that those schools are the most preferred schools by student teachers for teaching practice. The selection of student teachers was made after the selection of secondary schools, where six student teachers (two posted in each of the sampled schools) were purposively selected. In each school, the two student teachers were selected based on their experience of teaching practice, the class and the subject they taught. Therefore, in each school, one student teacher was chosen from among those who are doing their first year of teaching practice and the other doing their second year of teaching practice. Again, one student teacher was among those who taught science subjects (Physics, Chemistry and Biology), and the other one taught arts subjects (Geography, English, Civics, Kiswahili and History). Moreover, one student teacher was selected from among those who were teaching form one and the other who was teaching form three. These differences gave wider student teachers insights into the supervision practices.

Student teachers were considered crucial participants as they could provide first-hand accounts of their assessment experiences. Five supervisors assigned by the college to assess these selected student teachers and guide their teaching practice were also identified and invited to participate in the study. Supervisors were pivotal participants due to their direct involvement in conducting assessments and possessing valuable insights into the assessment practices. Moreover, five mentor teachers involved in mentoring the selected student teachers in the three schools participated in the study. Likewise three heads of selected schools were also involved in the study based on their administrative position. Mentor teachers, having significant interaction with student teachers during their teaching practice, and school heads, contributing administrative perspectives, were considered important contributors to the research. In total, the study comprised 19 participants.

Data collection methods

To ensure triangulation, this study employed four data collection techniques: interviews, focus group discussions, observations, and document analysis.

Interviews

Interviews were carried out with supervisors, mentor teachers, and school heads to gather first-hand insights into their perspectives on supervisors' assessment practices. A series of focused questions were used to delve deeper into the participants'

experiences (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). In total, 13 individual interview sessions were conducted—one with each supervisor, mentor teacher, and school head. These interviews took place within the schools during regular working hours. The sequence began with interviews conducted during the supervisors' visits to the schools to assess student teachers. Subsequently, mentor teachers and school heads were interviewed to corroborate and crosscheck the information provided by the supervisors. Each interview session lasted between 30 and 45 minutes, allowing for a thorough exploration of the subject matter. With participants' consent, the discussions were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy and detail.

Observations

Non-participant observations were employed to supplement the gathered data. The observation was non-participant since the researcher herself did not participate in assessing the student teachers; she merely observed a supervisor while assessing the student teachers. This method enabled direct observation of supervisors' assessment practices, providing deeper insights into their behaviours beyond what was self-reported in interviews. Observations offer a unique advantage by uncovering social processes and dynamics within everyday practices (Best & Kahn, 2006). The observations focused on various aspects of assessment, such as supervisors' assessment of student teachers' classroom teaching and their feedback sessions. These observations were conducted while supervisors assessed student teachers and during subsequent feedback sessions. With mutual consent from both the student teachers and the supervisors, the researcher observed the assessment activities within the classroom. The researcher observed only during the supervisors' assessments, ending when the supervisor left the class. Six classroom observations were conducted, with detailed notes recorded in the researcher's notebook.

Focus group discussions (FGDs)

The utilisation of focus group discussions was instrumental in fostering an environment where participants could build upon each other's insights and experiences, cultivating a collective perspective on the investigated phenomenon (Yin, 2015). Since only six student teachers from all three schools participated in the study, a single focus group discussion encompassing six student teachers from all the studied schools was conducted to augment the data derived from interviews and observations. The researcher informed the student teachers from each school of the date and the venue where FGD would be held. Focus group discussion was done in one of the studied schools at the agreed time and date. The student teachers from the other two schools joined their fellow students at the selected school as a venue for FGD. Student teachers engaged in a discussion facilitated by the researcher. Lasting approximately 45 minutes, this forum provided a platform for in-depth

exploration of the student teachers' perspectives on assessment practices and their contribution to the learning process. The valuable responses generated during the discussion were recorded and securely stored for analysis.

Document analysis

Document analyses were employed to acquire supplementary information to counterbalance the limitations of the primary data collected (Bryman, 2016). With the explicit agreement of the participants, various documents were scrutinised in this study. These included assessment forms from both supervisors and heads of schools and the lesson plans prepared by student teachers. Fifteen lesson plans and five assessment forms were collected and analysed. The different documents were analysed for various purposes. For example, lesson plans and teaching aids were analysed to examine various comments and suggestions given by the supervisors. On the other hand, assessment forms from both the supervisors and the head of schools were analysed to see different teaching aspects that were assessed, grading systems, and the types of comments inherent in various aspects of teaching.

Data analysis

Inductive thematic analysis served as the methodological approach to analyse the data. Initially, all information gathered from interviews and focus group discussions, observation and document analysis underwent transcription. Subsequently, the transcripts and accompanying field notes were comprehensively reviewed to ascertain their overarching significance. The analysis involved four distinct coding cycles, culminating in the creation of a data map. This map delineated various data categories, including the supervisors' assessment practices, the implications of the assessment practices, and the challenges supervisors face when assessing student teachers. This formed the foundation from which key themes emerged during the analysis process. The resultant findings were rigorously interpreted, fostering discussion and ultimately leading to the formulation of conclusions and recommendations.

Ethical considerations

The researcher followed several steps to obtain the necessary research permit. First, a permit letter was obtained from the Vice Chancellor of the researcher's institution, as required by Tanzania's National Research Ethics Board. This letter introduced the researcher to the regional and district administrative offices in Kilimanjaro and Moshi. Afterwards, the researcher received a permit to access the teacher education college and participating schools. To ensure confidentiality, schools were labelled with codes (e.g., School A, B, C), and participants were coded as S (supervisors), MT (mentor teachers), HoS (heads of school), and ST (student teachers).

Findings

Objective One of this study aimed to examine supervisors' assessment practices during teaching practice. Data from interviews, focus group discussions, document analysis and classroom observation, revealed the following findings:

Organisation of the assessment

Data showed insufficiency in the organisation of assessments, particularly concerning the scheduling of supervisor visits to the schools and the frequency of these visits during the teaching practice period.

Timing and adequacy of assessment

The findings highlighted significant dissatisfaction with the timing and frequency of assessments. Most supervisors conducted assessments very late in the teaching practice period, with four out of five supervisors visiting schools during the sixth and seventh weeks. Given that the teaching practice spanned eight weeks, these meant assessments were carried out merely one or two weeks before its conclusion. For instance, one student teacher mentioned: *"We waited for so long for the supervisors to come and assess us until the sixth week, which is when we got assessed by our supervisors. I felt that my supervisors did not assist me well as I already faced many problems in teaching (ST2, FGD).* Another student teacher added:

Our supervisor came to assess us at the very end of teaching practice, almost the seventh week. I regard it to be very late because we depend on their feedback as soon as possible. On my side, I really relied on a supervisor, and given the fact that he came late, I felt disappointed and not well supported (ST5, FGD).

However, there was a unique case where one supervisor visited the school early during the second week of the eight weeks of teaching practice. One student teacher said, *"Unlike others, my supervisor came early. It was during the second week of my teaching practice. I felt very good as he could help me with some challenges as early as possible" (ST4, FGD).*

Even though assessments were carried out very late, they were also often limited to a single assessment for most student teachers. Out of six student teachers, only two received two assessments, while the remaining four were assessed once. The subsequent quotes substantiate this observation *"Supervisor came to assess us only once, and we did not get a chance to get assessed for the second time" (ST2, FGD).* In a similar vein, another student teacher confirmed, *"...we were told by the college management that our supervisors shall give us two assessments. Unfortunately, my supervisor came once. Honestly, I did not learn much from him" (ST3, FGD).*

When the mentor teachers were asked on a similar matter, one had the following to say:

The supervisors' visits are not timely and not enough for the student teachers to learn from. I think they need to re-check their schedule and properly organise themselves to make sure that they assess student teachers in a timely and sufficient manner (MT4, I9, school B).

The researcher sought to understand why supervisors conducted late assessments. It was found that delays in funding from the Ministry of Education Science and Technology, due to bureaucratic and logistical issues, were the cause. One supervisor highlighted this problem:

Yes, I agree that it sometimes happens that we do go for assessments late, and because of the limited time, we are forced to conduct one assessment so that at least every student-teacher is reached. We don't believe that this is our fault. It takes a long time for the college management to send a request to the ministry and receive funds for us to go for assessment (S3, I3, School B).

From this finding, it is apparent that assessments were not conducted on time and were not sufficient.

Quality of assessment

Good assessment

The findings revealed that there was a good assessment where some supervisors arrived at schools on time, had a pre-observation discussion with student teachers, planned the observation and systematically conducted the assessment. For example, one student teacher reported.

Our supervisor came on the second week of teaching practice. He had a very good discussion with us, asking whether we faced any challenges. We shared our two weeks' experience at school, and he advised us on the proper way to deal with all the challenges. Thereafter, he assessed us and had one-on-one feedback sessions. Indeed, I really benefited from his (ST2, FGD).

Another student teacher from a different school narrated her positive experience with her supervisor. She said;

I liked the way my supervisor commented on my lesson and helped me through the lesson plan preparation. It helped me. Last year, I had a different experience where I did not get enough time to learn from

my supervisor.

This finding shows that some student teachers had a positive experience of their supervisors' assessment practices.

Rushed assessment

The findings revealed a match between the timing and frequency of supervisors' visits and the nature and quality of assessments conducted. It became evident that supervisors had very restricted timeframes to assess student teachers, resulting in rushed assessments that placed undue pressure on both the student teachers and the school's schedule. This time constraint led to hurried assessments, often forcing resident teachers to surrender their class time to accommodate the supervisors for assessments. This situation created additional stress for student teachers, as the hurried assessments impacted their learning experiences. This situation is elucidated below:

Sometimes, supervisors, when they come for teaching practice, do the assessment quickly. Sometimes, we are forced to give out our lessons so that they can accomplish the assessment. I am not sure if, in this way, student teachers get time to learn from them (HoS3, Interview 13, School C).

Student teachers added that supervisors assessed in a hurry, and some of them left the class even before the end of the lesson and went to the other school. *"My supervisor spent a very short time in the classroom and left even before I finished my class. I wondered if he gauged me fairly because there were more activities I accomplished in his absence (ST3, FGD).*

The observational data highlighted that all supervisors were allocated a double lesson period (80 minutes) to assess each student teacher. However, it was observed that only two supervisors utilised a substantial portion of this time, with durations of 60 and 68 minutes, respectively. Contrastingly, the remaining supervisors spent considerably less time on assessments, ranging from 33 to 40 minutes, indicating a significant variance in the time dedicated to assessing student teachers in the classroom.

Objective versus subjective assessment

The evidence indicated a heavy reliance on the standards outlined by the teacher training college for assessments. The assessment forms used by supervisors were burdened with an extensive checklist of

pedagogical artefacts to assess, which in turn overwhelmed the assessment practice. These forms comprised ten aspects, encompassing a total of 34 characteristics that supervisors were required to observe and comment on simultaneously. Supervisors were tasked with meticulously observing and then assigning points to each teaching characteristic under every aspect. This detailed and extensive checklist imposed a significant workload on supervisors during the assessment process, potentially affecting the depth and quality of their assessment (See Appendix 2 and 3 supervisors' assessment forms).

From four out of six classroom observations, it was evident that the supervisors were more focused on completing the assessment forms than actively observing the student teachers' activities in the classroom. This prioritisation of paperwork seemed to take precedence over the actual monitoring of the student teachers' teaching practices. However, in the remaining two observations, a different approach was observed. These supervisors were diligently observing the student teachers before assigning points on the assessment forms. One of the supervisors went a step further by collecting the student teachers' teaching aids and thoroughly examining them before grading them in the assessment form. This demonstrated a more comprehensive and attentive assessment process compared to the others, who were predominantly occupied with form completion.

The detailed analysis of the graded assessment forms highlighted an obvious contrast in grading approaches between supervisors. Those who prioritised completing the assessment forms without a comprehensive observation of the student teachers tended to assign scores within a moderate range, neither too low nor excessively high (see Appendix 3). In contrast, the supervisors who dedicated their attention to actively observing the student teachers and completing the assessment forms displayed more variation in their grading. This group tended to assign grades either below the marginal scale or surpassing it, indicating a broader spectrum of assessment outcomes compared to the more conservative and standardised grading of the first group (See Appendix 2).

Grade-oriented assessment

The findings showed that assessment focus and student teachers' perceptions centred mainly on grades. Supervisors prioritised assessing all student teachers quickly, aiming for timely evaluations rather than in-depth ones, as supported by their quotes.

Although the main purpose is to have a look at how they are progressing, time constrains us. Therefore, we rely on our assessment forms to assess so that they have a grade at the end of the teaching practice

(S1, Interview1, School A).

The findings indicated that student teachers were notably more prepared for supervisor visits compared to periods when there was no expectation of assessment. When the possibility of supervisor visits arose, student teachers tended to intensify their preparation efforts, particularly in crafting lesson plans and creating teaching aids. Table 1 evidences this situation.

Table 1

A Number of Lesson Plans Collected for Each School (A, B and C) for Every Week

School	A								B								C							
Weeks	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8
Lesson plans	1	-	-	1		2	1	-	-	-	1	-	1	3	1	-	-	-	-	1	1	2	-	-

Analysing the practices across schools A, B, and C revealed fascinating insights into the preparation and submission of lesson plans during the teaching practice period. In School A, a mere five lesson plans were submitted throughout the entire duration. Interestingly, the highest number of submissions (2) occurred in the sixth week. Singular lesson plans were submitted in weeks one, four, and seven, with an absence of submissions in the remaining weeks. School B displayed a slightly different trend, with three lesson plans submitted in the sixth week and one each in the third, fifth, and seventh weeks. Notably, no submissions were made in the first, second, or eighth week. Meanwhile, data from School C unveiled two submissions in the sixth week, one in the fourth, and another in the fifth week. Similar to the other schools, no lesson plans were provided in the first, second, seventh, or eighth week.

These findings underscore a significant pattern: the peak submission of student teachers' lesson plans (7) aligned precisely with the sixth week, coinciding with supervisors' scheduled visits to the schools. Interestingly, each student teacher appeared to prepare a teaching aid specifically tailored for assessments during this period (refer to Appendix 4 and 5). This pattern distinctly reflects heightened preparedness among student teachers, especially as their teaching practice progressed.

Moreover, a mentor teacher emphasised that the nature of assessments conducted by supervisors and subsequent responses from student teachers were indicative of a pursuit for grades, affirming the observed trend:

Before the assessment, pre-service teachers will prepare themselves and the lesson very well. Their purpose is to obtain grades. After

assessment, none of them will do any of the activities. They become lazy and relaxed (MT5, I10, School C).

Confirming that assessment was grade-oriented, the perceptions of student teachers towards assessment revealed the same. One student teacher said: *"I think the focus of our supervisors is more of making sure that we are being assessed and graded"* (ST1, FGD).

Lack of uniform assessment

There was a notable difference in assessment practices between school mentors and supervisors. School mentors, who are subject teachers assisting student teachers, assess them based on teaching experience and knowledge without specific guidelines. In contrast, the college-provided assessment forms for school heads focus solely on professional behaviour, neglecting teaching aspects. This gap may cause inconsistencies in evaluating student teachers. Aligning assessment criteria between mentors and supervisors is crucial for a thorough evaluation of both teaching skills and professional conduct, potentially through a standardised form that integrates both aspects.

Understanding the head of the school's view on the provided assessment forms could shed light on potential areas for improvement or the need for a more comprehensive evaluation approach. Their opinion might provide insights into how these assessments impact the overall evaluation of student teachers and how these forms could be improved for a more comprehensive assessment:

...we are given these assessment forms, which are not purposively made to check the student teachers in the classroom. However, the aspects being assessed in this form are equally important. My concern is on how much our assessment contributes to their assessment. If less than the supervisors' assessment contribution, then there is a danger that most of the information about student teachers' learning is left with the school (HoS2, Interview 12, School B).

The author aimed to delve into the rationale behind the existing assessment practices discussed earlier. Various participants from distinct categories put forth different explanations. Mentor teachers and heads of schools highlighted a prevalent perception of insufficient commitment and seriousness among supervisors. One mentor teacher articulated this viewpoint, shedding light on potential reasons behind this observation: Top of Form *"These people (supervisors) sometimes are not serious, not committed to their job, and they take everything for granted. They have nothing to lose"* (MT3, Interview 8, School B)

Conversely, supervisors disclosed another major challenge. In addition to the previously reported funding delays, they cited an overwhelming number of student teachers to supervise as a key issue. According to one supervisor, there was a mandate for each supervisor to assess a minimum of twenty (20) student teachers within a two-week timeframe, adding to the workload pressure. Top of Form

Imagine.... that each one of us is required to conduct two assessments for twenty students within only two weeks. It isn't easy to navigate through this. It is a must that every student and teacher get assessed because it is part and parcel of their program accomplishment. We do everything possible to ensure that all student teachers are assessed even once (S5, Interview 5, School C).

Supervisors noted that the design and structure of the assessment and feedback forms created significant challenges in their roles. The forms were seen as too cluttered with criteria, which required supervisors to evaluate and provide feedback while also observing student teachers. Consequently, many supervisors felt pressured to prioritise the listed criteria over a thorough assessment of the student teachers' actual teaching practices, as confirmed by one supervisor:

The assessment forms are so comprehensive. There are so many aspects to be evaluated while observing a pre-service teacher. Most of us focus on commenting on those aspects while ignoring the ongoing lesson. Therefore, we miss the important points to comment on (S1, Interview 1, School A).

This singular focus on grades might lead to a situation where the emphasis shifts away from genuine learning experiences, resulting in limited educational growth (Darling-Hammond, 2012). Top of Form

Implications of the assessment practices for student teachers' learning to teach during teaching practice

Objective two of this study aimed to examine the implication of the assessment practices on student teachers' learning to teach during teaching practice. The findings revealed the following:

Implication for the timing and adequacy of assessment

The delay in assessments led to dissatisfaction among student teachers. Many had encountered various challenges during their teaching practice, hoping that timely supervisor visits could help address these issues. However, the delayed assessments limited the opportunity for rectification. Moreover, conducting assessments only

once for many student teachers, rather than the recommended two evaluations outlined in the Diploma Teacher Education curriculum, had significant implications. Firstly, student teachers heavily relied on their supervisors' expertise and felt inadequately prepared without regular evaluations. Secondly, the infrequent visits from supervisors led to feelings of isolation among student teachers, creating a disconnect between their college learning and practical experience.

Implication of the good quality assessment

In a few cases, supervisors arrived at the practice schools early and had time to discuss with the students the experiences they have had since they arrived in the teaching practice.

Good-quality assessments provide detailed, constructive feedback that helps student teachers understand their strengths and areas for improvement. This feedback is crucial for developing effective teaching practices and refining instructional strategies. When student teachers receive timely and meaningful feedback, it boosts their confidence and motivation. Knowing that their efforts are recognised and guided constructively encourages them to continue improving and striving for excellence in their teaching.

Implication of the rushed assessment

The assessment's quality suffered due to being rushed, excessively objective, grade-oriented, and lacking in interactivity. Most supervisors allocated minimal time for assessments, leading to several significant repercussions. Firstly, this approach exerted pressure and significantly disrupted the school timetable, compelling resident teachers to sacrifice their lessons for the

assessment of student teachers. Secondly, rushed assessments placed additional pressure and dilemmas on student teachers. In three instances during assessment sessions, supervisors departed before lesson conclusions, leaving student teachers to continue alone. This limited supervisors' chances to uncover vital teaching skills demonstrated by the student teachers. Moreover, rushed assessments raised concerns among student teachers about the validity and fairness of such assessment methods.

Implication of objective versus subjective assessment

The findings showed that most of the supervisors were objective when assessing the student teachers. This stemmed from supervisors' limited assessment time and the overwhelming nature of the assessment forms. This made it challenging for them to consider other valuable skills demonstrated by student teachers, even if these skills were not explicitly listed in the assessment form. On the other hand, other supervisors employed objective and some elements of subjective assessment.

This kind of supervisor had the chance to observe some of the important aspects of teaching that were not in the assessment. Hence, they made a valuable assessment and contributed positively to student teachers' professional growth.

Implication of grade-oriented assessment

The focus on assessment forms led the assessment to be more inclined toward grading rather than effectively measuring the specific teaching skills intended for evaluation. Analysis of documents revealed that supervisors often overwhelmed student teachers with lists of pedagogical skills outlined in the assessment forms, with ratings aimed at producing final grades at the end of the lesson assessment. This approach fostered a belief among student teachers that obtaining good grades was the primary concern. Therefore, student teachers tended to prioritise extensive preparation for their lessons and presented an impressive personal outlook when informed about the supervisors' assessment, aiming solely to impress and secure good grades rather than focusing on developing their teaching skills.

Implication of the lack of uniform assessment

The lack of uniform assessment implied that supervisors held the authority to assign final grades, while mentor teachers and Heads of Schools primarily focused on assessing behavioural attributes. However, there was a lack of evidence to explain the consequences if a student teacher received a lower ranking in behavioural attributes despite performing exceptionally well in teaching skills. This dynamic implied an imbalance of power in the assessment practices, favouring supervisors over mentor teachers and Heads of Schools. The primary purpose of assessment is to support the professional growth and development of student teachers. When assessments are not uniform, it undermines this goal. Student teachers may miss out on valuable insights and constructive feedback that are essential for their development. Uniform assessments ensure that all student teachers receive comprehensive and coherent guidance.

Discussion

It is evident from the findings that the organisation of assessments, particularly in terms of timing and frequency, was unsatisfactory. If assessments are not conducted at appropriate times, they may fail to provide meaningful feedback to student teachers. Assessments conducted too early may not accurately reflect the student teacher's progress or abilities, while those undertaken too late may miss opportunities for corrective action. Optimal timing is crucial to ensure that student teachers receive timely, actionable feedback that can guide their professional development. Adequate assessment involves not only the timing but also the content and methods used. Weaver et al. (2024) argued that inadequate assessments

may lack comprehensiveness, failing to evaluate all relevant aspects of teaching competence. This could lead to gaps in student teachers' skills and knowledge, as critical areas may be overlooked or underemphasised.

The findings also revealed that assessments were often conducted hurriedly. Rushed assessments typically lack depth and fail to capture the full range of a student teacher's abilities. This hurried approach may emphasise superficial aspects of teaching while overlooking crucial areas like classroom management, lesson planning, and adapting to diverse learning needs. Kihwele and Chuma (2020) found that such rushed assessments can lead to an incomplete or inaccurate understanding of a student teacher's readiness for the profession. It was evident that most assessments by supervisors were focused on grades. Prioritising grades over formative assessment shifts the emphasis from learning and development to simply achieving a score. This approach can pressure student teachers to concentrate on meeting grading criteria rather than developing genuine skills, leading to a narrow view of success. Instead of engaging in reflective practice and continuous improvement, student teachers may become conditioned to prioritise grades, potentially distorting their perception of teaching practice. These findings align with similar observations by Ong'ondo and Borg (2011).

The review of the assessment form and classroom observation showed that most supervisors were objective in their assessments, while a few used both objective and subjective methods. While objectivity has its advantages, it can miss important aspects of teaching, such as relationship-building, addressing individual needs, and fostering an engaging, inclusive classroom. These qualities often require subjective judgment. Therefore, balancing objective and subjective assessments is essential for a comprehensive evaluation of a student teacher's abilities. These findings support White and Forgas (2017), who argued that both subjectivity and objectivity are key to quality assessments. The findings also revealed inconsistent assessment practices among supervisors and mentor teachers when evaluating student teachers. This lack of uniformity can result in conflicting feedback, causing confusion and hindering student teachers' development. It may also lead to unequal treatment, where some students receive lenient assessments while others face stricter scrutiny based on differing standards. Uniform assessment practices are essential for maintaining fairness and equity.

Conclusion

The research examined supervisors' assessment practices and their implications for student teachers' learning during teaching practice. While the findings highlighted some positive aspects of these practices, significant deficiencies were also identified, particularly concerning organisation, timing, and quality of assessments. Notable issues included a mix of good and timely assessments, rushed

evaluations, excessively objective criteria, an overemphasis on grading, and a lack of uniformity in assessments. The primary root cause of these shortcomings was linked to delays in the disbursement of supervision funds from the central government to the teacher education college, which consequently affected the timely and effective assessment of student teachers in schools. Additionally, the structure and layout of the assessment form used by supervisors contributed to the identified inadequacies. Beyond financial constraints, the study argues that some supervisors demonstrated irresponsibility and a lack of commitment during assessments, significantly undermining the quality of their practices. Effective assessment methodologies could create opportunities for supervisors and student teachers to engage collaboratively, sharing experiences, raising questions, applying knowledge, and identifying both opportunities and challenges. This collaborative approach is pivotal in enriching the learning experiences of student teachers during their teaching practice.

Recommendations

To enhance the effectiveness of assessment practices and bolster student teachers' learning during teaching practice, the following recommendations are proposed:

- i. The Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MoEST) should focus on creating an environment that supports efficient assessment of student teachers. Teacher training college management should proactively request teaching practice funds early and consistently follow up with MoEST. This approach will help ensure timely fund allocation, allowing supervisors to begin assessments as planned.
- ii. Teacher training colleges should strategically time assessments to coincide with key milestones in the student teaching experience. Assessments should also be comprehensive, utilising various methods to capture a well-rounded view of the student teacher's abilities. Implementing continuous feedback loops, where student teachers receive regular and constructive feedback, can further improve the effectiveness and timing of assessments.
- iii. Supervisors are vital and should actively support student teachers' growth. The study suggests informing student teachers of their supervision entitlements and encourages them to assertively claim these from their supervisors.

Limitations of the study

Despite the limited sample size utilised in this study, the findings can potentially apply to other teacher education contexts with similar characteristics. The diverse experiences shared by participants in this study offer valuable insights for evaluating initial teacher education programs across different countries and programs.

Declarations

The author declares that no financial interest or personal relationship has influenced the work.

Data availability

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Appendix 1: *Head of school assessment form*

Translated Heads of Schools Assessment Form

No	Pre-service Teacher's Name	Assessment Criteria																															
		Punctuality				Discipline				Collaboration with others				Engagement in Extra Curricular Activities				Competence in Executing Responsibilities				Commitment				Honesty				Confidentiality			
1		A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D
2																																	
3																																	

Description A= Excellent B= Very Good C= Average D=Weak

General Comments from the Head of School:

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Head of School's Name..... Signature..... Date

Appendix 2: Supervisor's Assessment Form A

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING
J. TEACHERS' COLLEGE
TEACHING PRACTICE ASSESSMENT FORM

STUDENT NAME: XXXXXXXXXX REGION: XXXXXXXXXX DISTRICT: XXXXXXXXXX GROUP: DIP 1 (Hk)
 DATE: 10/06/2017 SUBJECT: XXXXXXXXXX CLASS: XXXXXX SCHOOL: XXXXXX TIME: 4.0.10

NO	EVENT	TOTAL	SCORING POINT	EXAMINER'S COMMENTS
1.	LESSON PREPARATION (6) Marks (a) Format and sequence (b) Clarity of specific objectives (c) How stages are related to specific objectives (d) Correlation of teacher's and pupils activities	1 2 2 1	04	Good format & sequence Specific objectives related to stages & pupils activities. But some few corrections were
2.	MASTERING OF SUBJECT MATTER (6) Marks (a) Certainty of the taught topic (b) Sequence and logic of reasoning (c) Relevancy with specific objectives (d) Ability to master the subject	2 2 1 1	05	Good mastery of subject matter It was sequence reasoned logically it was relevancy
3.	PROGRESS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING PROGRESS (a) Ability to find the pupils prior knowledge (b) Correlation of prior knowledge and presented subject matter (c) Pupils participation (d) How to reinforce the pupils knowledge	2 2 2 1	07	Improve ways of for prior knowledge Good, correlated enough Advocate your pupils
4.	TEACHING AND LEARNING MATERIALS (8) Marks (a) Having them in the class (b) Attractiveness to pupils (c) Improvisation (d) Compliance with specific objectives (e) Ability of using them	2 2 2 2 1	06	Teaching materials prepared. Some how attractive Not much creative it complies and able to use it.
5.	SKILLS OF EXPLAINING (3) Marks (a) Logical ability of explaining (b) Audibility of his/her voice in the class (c) Decency and clarity of language	1 1 1	03	Excellent in explaining Very good voice language is clear Decency
6.	USES OF CHALK BOARD (3) Marks (a) Proper arrangement of writing and general use (b) Neatness and correctness of hand writing (c) Ability of facing the chalk board when writing	1 1 1	02	Good arrangement Not neat handwriting improve it please Good standing in
7.	LEARNER'S ACTIVITIES (7) Marks (a) Correlation with specific objectives (b) Adequacy of time to pupils activities (c) How pupils participated in performing their activities (d) Adequacy and type of task given to pupils	2 2 2 2	06	Correlated to specific Provide more time Find a better ways Provide more tasks Students
8.	DISCIPLINE IN THE CLASS (2) Marks (a) Ability of solving problems (b) Class management and control	1 1	02	Good class control and able to solve prob
9.	CANDIDATE'S PERSONALITY (2) Marks (a) Neatness of the body and dressing (b) Mildness to pupils	1 1	02	Excellent look look and having teacher personality
10.	CANDIDATE'S REMARKS ABOUT THE LESSON (5) Marks (a) Ability to evaluate the lesson taught (b) Ability to identify problems and success areas (c) Acceptance of the advice given by examiner	2 2 1	4 1/2	Excellent look and having teacher personality Able to evaluate is a lesson Positive minded human
TOTAL		50%	41 1/2	B

EXPLANATIONS: A=50-45 B=44-35 C=34-25 D=24-15 F=14-0

EXAMINER'S ADVICE AND REMARKS: Generally the lesson was good, being confident and for
 intended tasks, teacher outlook and lovely to a students. Very nice
 some corrections identified must be dealt out accordingly.

EXAMINER'S NAME: Gyphon D.

Appendix 3: Supervisors' Assessment Form B

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING
TEACHERS' COLLEGE
TEACHING PRACTICE ASSESSMENT FORM

STUDENT NAME: Isabella Tshabalala REGION: Free State DISTRICT: Luthuli GROUP: 01
DATE: 10 Nov 2012 SUBJECT: Maths CLASS: Year 10 SCHOOL: St. John's
TIME: 08:30 AM

NO	EVENT	TOTAL	SCORING POINT	EXAMINER'S COMMENTS
1.	LESSON PREPARATION (6) Marks (a) Form and sequence (b) Clarity of specific objectives (c) How stages are related to specific objectives (d) Connection of teacher's and pupils activities	1 2 2 1	0.5 0.1 0.1 0.0	Well prepared - clear the purposes - well correlated - well correlated
2.	MASTERY OF SUBJECT MATTER (6) Marks (a) Certainty of the taught topic (b) Sequence and logic of reasoning (c) Relevance with specific objectives (d) Ability to master the subject	2 2 1 1	0.5 0.1 0.1 0.5	He mastered it - He mastered it - He mastered it - He mastered it
3.	PROGRESS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING PROGRESS (a) Ability to find the pupils prior knowledge (b) Connection of prior knowledge and presented subject matter (c) Pupils participation (d) How to reinforce the pupils knowledge	1 1 1 1	0.1 0.1 0.1 0.1	Participatory method - Pupils were asked - Pupils were asked - Pupils were asked
4.	TEACHING AND LEARNING MATERIALS (6) Marks (a) Having them in the class (b) Appropriateness to pupils (c) Improvisation (d) Compliance with specific objectives (e) Ability of using them	1 1 1 1 1	0.1 0.1 0.1 0.1 0.1	He adhered - Good - Good - Good - Good
5.	SKILLS OF EXPLAINING (2) Marks (a) Logical ability of explaining (b) Audibility of teacher voice in the class (c) Dexterity and clarity of language	1 1 1	0.1 0.5 0.1	He managed - Explanatory - It is appropriate - He managed
6.	USES OF CHALK BOARD (3) Marks (a) Proper arrangement of writing and general use (b) Neatness and correctness of hand writing (c) Ability of facing the chalk board when writing	1 1 1	0.1 0.1 0.1	He managed - Good handwriting - Good
7.	LEARNER'S ACTIVITIES (7) Marks (a) Connection with specific objectives (b) Adequacy of time in pupils activities (c) How pupils participated in performing their activities (d) Adequacy and type of task given to pupils	1 1 1 1	0.1 0.1 0.5 0.1	Good - Good - Good - Good
8.	DISCIPLINE IN THE CLASS (2) Marks (a) Ability of solving problems (b) Class management and control	1 1	0.1 0.1	He is a problem solver - Manageable
9.	CANDIDATE'S PERSONALITY (2) Marks (a) Neatness of the body and dressing (b) Manners to pupils	1 1	0.1 0.1	Interesting - Good
10.	CANDIDATE'S REMARKS ABOUT THE LESSON (5) Marks (a) Ability to evaluate the lesson taught (b) Ability to identify problems and success areas (c) Acceptance of the advice given by examiner	2 2 1	0.5 0.2 0.1	Well evaluated - He managed it - He adhered
TOTAL		50	37	Reasonable.

EXPLANATIONS: A = 50-45 (B=44-35) C=34-25 D=24-15 E=14-0

EXAMINER'S ADVICE AND REMARKS:
The lesson was well taught with the adhering of teaching principles participatory led students to explore the underlying behaviour. You need to highlight few specific objectives that to be covered. You managed to use friendly, simple language, You have provided contextual reflection of your content. Unless other use Good. effect

EXAMINER'S NAME: Isabella Tshabalala EXAMINER'S SIGNATURE: Isabella Tshabalala

Appendix 4: Teaching Aid A



Appendix 5: *Teaching Aid B*

