Original Article

Exploring Student Teachers' Perspectives of School Administrators Support during School Practice in Uganda

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the collaborative potential between universities and schools in enhancing teacher training, focusing specifically on student teachers' perceptions of support from school managers during school practice (SP). The purpose of this research was to assess how various forms of support from school managers impact student teachers' experiences and perceptions during practical training. Utilizing a qualitative case study design, the research involved a sample of 24 student teachers in the third and final year of study. Data collection tools included semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, which provided in-depth insights into the participants' experiences. Thematic analysis of the data revealed that student teachers perceived significant support from school managers in areas such as induction processes, equitable load distribution, managerial guidance, professional development opportunities, and motivational practices. However, a notable concern emerged regarding the negative perceptions arising from the absence of practising teachers during SP. The findings suggest that while overall support from school managers was viewed positively, there are areas for improvement. The study recommends that universities should actively strengthen collaboration with placement schools by establishing formal partnerships, thereby enhancing the support system for student teachers during school practice experiences.

INTRODUCTION

School Practice (SP) plays a pivotal role in the preparation of student teachers (STs), providing them with the necessary skills and knowledge to transition from theoretical learning to real-world teaching experiences. It is a form of work-integrated learning that takes place in placement schools, where STs are mentored by both university supervisors and school administrators. According to Darling-Hammond (2020), this collaborative model enhances the practical understanding of pedagogy and fosters professional growth by immersing STs in a variety of school activities beyond classroom instruction. School practice serves not only as a key element of teacher training but also as a crucial avenue for developing the competencies required for effective teaching.

School Practice is a crucial component of teacher training, where student teachers (STs) engage in work-integrated learning at placement schools under the guidance of university supervisors and school administrators (Darling-Hammond, 2020). This collaborative effort is essential for preparing STs for the teaching profession, as it allows them to participate in various school activities beyond classroom teaching.

The concept of university-school partnerships in teacher training gained traction in the early 1990s in England, later spreading to the USA, Australia, and other countries (Broadley, 2011; Perry et al, 1999). These partnerships are founded on the understanding that while universities provide theoretical training, both institutions can collaboratively enhance teacher preparation (Teitel, 2008). Various models of school-university partnerships have emerged, such as the apprenticeship model, which emphasizes practical teaching under the mentorship of experienced teachers (Roche, 1979; Teitel, 2008). However, earlier models often failed to offer comprehensive exposure to diverse school activities (Benavides et al., 2018).

In Uganda, SP is a mandatory requirement for all pre-service teachers, who must successfully complete two sessions of SP in the second and third year of study to qualify as professional teachers (Universities & other Tertiary Institutions Act, 2008). During SP, STs follow lesson plans, engage in teaching, and participate in extracurricular activities as directed by school managers (Chimhenga, 2017). This paper aims to explore STs' perceptions of the support they receive from school managers during SP within the Ugandan context, highlighting the importance of effective partnerships in teacher preparation (Muzata 2019; Jones, 2019).

According to the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES, 2013), student teachers (STs) require collaborative support to develop essential pedagogical skills, including lesson planning, creating instructional materials, and maintaining teaching files. Beyond classroom instruction, STs are expected to participate in school assemblies, attend staff meetings, oversee preparations, and engage in extracurricular activities (Chimhenga, 2017; Abongdia et al., 2017). This development should occur under the supervision of school managers, ensuring that STs gain the necessary experience and skills to become qualified teachers. However, with all its well-intended goals and expectations, literature and experience indicate a range of challenges. Practising teachers go on holiday and often take leave during student SP (Tuyizere, 2018), leaving STs with excessive responsibilities.

University supervisors typically evaluate STs during lessons, while other aspects of SP are overseen by school managers. This has led to criticisms of teachers for inadequate preparation of lesson plans and schemes of work (MoES, 2014). Consequently, it raises concerns about whether STs recognize and appreciate the support provided by school managers. While existing research has explored various stakeholders' perceptions regarding SP (Kagoda & Sentongo, 2015; Saban & Cocklar, 2013), there is a lack of studies specifically examining STs' perceptions of the support they receive from school managers, highlighting the need for further research in this area.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical framework

This study is grounded in Systems Theory, originally proposed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy in 1968 and further developed by Meadows (2008) and Germain (2015). The theory posits that all living systems

function through the interactions of their components. The organization and communication among these parts, as well as their interdependence, define the system (Bertalanffy, 1968). Specifically, Meadows describes a system as an interconnected set of elements organized to achieve a common purpose, comprising three main components: elements, interconnections, and functions. This means there is interaction between the parts of the system that eventually define it (Meadows, 2008).

In this context, the school-university partnership is viewed as a system where school managers and pre-service teachers collaborate to achieve specific outcomes during SP. Rather than merely analyzing individual components. Systems Theory emphasizes the relationships and arrangements that connect these parts into a cohesive whole. This framework helps highlight the interactions between school managers and student-teacher mentorship during SP.

Systems Theory also sheds light on the dynamics between a system's structure and behaviour, illustrating how these elements interact with the environment. While universities focus on theoretical teaching, schools are responsible for practical teacher training, with both entities playing vital duties (Makaaru & Broadbent, 2019). This study uses Systems Theory to explore how universities and schools collectively support student-teacher mentorship and to assess STs' perceptions of the support provided by school managers.

Empirical review

Student teachers' perceptions of support from school managers vary globally. In a study conducted in Kenya on student experiences, it was found that cooperating teachers often lack awareness of their supervisory roles. The study suggests that these teachers should receive training to improve their engagement with student teachers and mitigate negative perceptions about SP (Koross, 2016).

Research indicates that during SP, practising teachers often take holidays, leaving STs with overwhelming responsibilities that can foster negative attitudes toward teaching (Muzata, 2019; Tuyizere, 2018; Kagoda & Itaaga, 2013). While findings from Uganda reveal inadequate supervision from lecturers, they do not clarify the underlying reasons or address STs' perceptions of university and school supervisors. Consequently, STs frequently lack adequate guidance and support, leading to disengagement from SP.

Additionally, studies show that interactions between school managers and universities can be ineffective due to differing beliefs, resulting in confusion and conflict for STs (Byrd & Fogleman, 2012; Portelance & Caron, 2016; Purdy, 2018). The supervisory process involves three key stakeholders—STs, university supervisors, and cooperating teachers—but historical conflicts arising from differing philosophies negatively affect STs' perceptions of SP. Mannathoko (2015) further illustrates this issue, showing that STs in Botswana felt inadequately supported in pedagogy during SP, particularly in creative and performing arts. Many reported a lack of assessment and guidance from supervisors, who often avoided lessons in this area due to a lack of knowledge.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted an interpretive paradigm with a qualitative approach, specifically utilizing an embedded single case study design. Interpretivism posits that knowledge is constructed individually through diverse narratives (Luckmann & Berger, 2011). This approach was instrumental in exploring how student teachers perceive the collaborative role of school managers and university supervisors during SP. By actively engaging with participants, the researcher aimed to reconstruct university-school collaboration and gain a nuanced understanding of the experiences of student teachers.

Population and Sample

The target population consisted of student teachers from Uganda Christian University, specifically those posted to selected government and private secondary schools in Mukono Municipality for SP. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants who were in their third academic year and undertaking their second SP, thus ensuring a holistic perspective from those with prior experience. A sample of twenty-four student teachers was drawn, with twelve participants from each of the two placement schools.

Twelve student teachers were interviewed and the other twelve engaged in two focus group discussions (FGDs), providing rich qualitative data on perceptions of support from school managers.

Data Collection Tools

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions guided by a set of pre-determined questions. Participants were informed about the study's purpose and significance, and their consent was obtained via signed consent forms. The interviews were systematically recorded to facilitate the organisation and analysis of the data.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data, an inductive thematic analysis approach was utilized, allowing for the exploration of student teachers' perceptions regarding the support received from school managers during SP.

FGDs were transcribed verbatim, and a thorough reading of the transcripts provided an initial understanding of the data. Coding was conducted manually, resulting in a codebook that included codes, descriptions, labels, illustrative quotes and references as indicated in the sample later in the section. The transcripts were analyzed line by line to refine codes and categorize themes, ultimately addressing the research question.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were paramount in this study. Participants were fully informed about the study's purpose, the right to withdraw at any time, and the confidentiality of responses. The informed consent process ensured that participants voluntarily agreed to engage in the research, fostering an ethical research environment.

Table 1. Sample qualitative code book

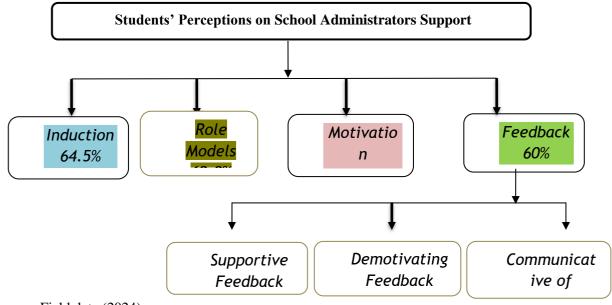| Theme	Sub Theme	Codes	References
Perceptions of student teachers about school managers' support	Perceptions of support during induction	"Inducted to become competent school members" "Welcomed STs, making them feel at school and adjust accordingly" "Orienting them into the school culture" "Guided on the topics to be covered and the materials that could aid them in teaching." "We received a warm welcome when delivering their introductory letters." "Teachers were not available; a few could come to school, and others were still on holiday."	64.5%
	School managers' motivation during SP	"School managers guide us in handling the new curriculum." "They do not motivate the teachers..." "They are not available; always they leave only one teacher in school," "At this school, school managers are rigorous and follow the rules to the dot." "I would not recommend anyone to that school…" "Recognize the pivotal role performed by school managers "Cordial relationships that permitted dialogue." "School managers support in the absence of university supervisors "Complained that practising teachers were always absent and this demotivated them."	59.21%
	Perceptions of role model actions by school managers	"The strict nature school managers who followed the rules to the dot." "School routines are not questionable you are expected at school at the time and participate in all school activities."	62.8%

		"All lessons are a must-attend missing a class is equivalent to withdrawing your timetable." "Disappointments at schools which cared less whether you appear school or not."	
	Perceptions on Feedback	"The first time I entered the class to teach geography, for example, there were some illustrations where I used fingers." "…would tell you openly and this is not right, I do not think there is any time she would not comment negatively."	60%
	Demotivating Feedback	"This time, she saw my file and told me to buy a box file and I was going to buy a box file but in my heart, I was tortured." "There's no space for in-depth analysis, which is crucial for identifying actionable insights."	52%
	Communicative of feedback	"While teaching about happiness I used other materials and students. A student did something, and I told her to step out. She was sad and unhappy,… but entered smiling and said, 'Thank you, teacher'. The supervisor commented you should have drawn a person sad and another happy."	58%

FINDINGS

Perceptions of Student Teachers' School Administrators Support

Data from the interviews and FGDs with the student teachers culminated into outstanding themes. Their frequencies were analysed using percentages (selection criterion: 50% and above), to determine and select how student teachers perceived supervisory support from school administrators or host school supervisors. The students' perceptions were then modelled on four major domains: induction, motivation, collaboration and feedback (figure 1). As a final point, the perceived issues are accordingly explained according to the data.

Figure 1 Perceptions of Student Teachers School Administrators' Support during School Practice

Source: Field data (2024)

The findings indicated that while the student teachers valued the support they received through induction and ongoing training, the overall perception of its effectiveness was only moderate, at

64.5% (see Figure 1). They recognized the positive role practising teachers played in helping them acclimate to the school culture, yet noted that only a small number of teachers were available for support. It was observed that most practising teachers did not attend school while the student teachers were present. Nonetheless, the few teachers who participated in the orientation and induction activities were greatly appreciated. Some student teachers expressed disappointment regarding lesson assignments, as their expectations about the Director of Studies (DOS) distributing lessons were not fulfilled. Instead, they were instructed to meet with individual subject teachers, which proved challenging. A participant from FGD2 remarked,

> "Teachers were not available; only a few came to school, while others were still on holiday. The school seemed to prefer using student teachers over paying regular teachers."

In FGD1, students emphasized,

> "They induct us to become competent members of the school, and the inductors include various staff such as security personnel, teachers, deputies, DOS, and others."

The student teachers recognized the school's efforts in this regard, as they received support while delivering introductory letters and adjusting to the school environment, particularly during their first week of SP. One student FGD1 shared,

> "My experience at the school was wonderful and perfect because I was welcomed from day one... the deputy responsible for administration and academics greeted me warmly."

Another student FGD2 remarked,

> "I encountered a very hospitable teacher who was welcoming when we arrived; I don't even know his name." However, another student in FGD2 noted, "For some practising teachers, it was still holiday time."

The findings indicate that student teachers received induction and training to become competent members of the school community and were supported settling in and beginning SP, despite some mentioned challenges. Following the induction, it was observed that the student teachers looked to some practising teachers as role models, as discussed below.

Role Models

Study findings revealed that approximately 62.8% of the student teachers viewed staff at the schools as positive role models, helping them develop valuable skills. However, the remaining 37.2% did not identify any role models among the host teachers, indicating a relatively moderate perception. Those who did find good role models acknowledged a significant impact on their professional growth and performance. One student from FGD1 shared an experience where, after unscheduled supervision, she received a warning and was advised to create a detailed lesson plan for future evaluations. She appreciated the supervisor's guidance, stating,

> "I took her advice seriously. Next time, I want to ensure all my pages are filled out, and I ended up copying her approach."

Student teachers noted that school managers were strict and adhered closely to rules, which provided a strong example to follow. They were expected to be present at school every working day and during all hours, regardless of whether they had scheduled lessons. This expectation helped them learn how to conduct themselves as professional educators, even while still in training. One student recalled,

> "At this school, they insisted on your presence even if you weren't teaching. They would call out, 'Where are you? Don't you know you're supposed to be in school?"

In FGD1, students emphasized that even without assigned duties; they were expected to participate in various events simply because they were student teachers. One noted,

> "Here, even if we're not given specific responsibilities, we still need to show up for events. Teachers will ask, 'Don't you realize you're a teacher here? What are you doing?"

The demands of SP were high; student teachers had to work diligently to meet both requirements and assessments that contributed to their final grades. One student shared,

"There was a night I didn't sleep because a supervisor criticized my teaching materials. I was teaching about fieldwork and took students outside how could I bring a mountain into the classroom? She marked three 'no's on the evaluation sheet for my materials."

Students felt they could not question school rules or expectations about daily attendance. Auma, a student teacher, commented,

"At this school, they want you there even if you don't have a class. Missing anything is unacceptable."

Missing an activity was seen as a serious infraction, and if a student teacher was absent, they would face consequences. One recalled,

"I remember we had fellowship every Wednesday, and we stayed in the staffroom because we were new. The chaplain randomly picked two of us and asked, 'What are you doing here?' Duties at this school are expected of everyone."

Student teachers were expected to attend and teach every lesson. Missing a class meant negotiating with students to find time to make it up. One student explained,

"I was in the staffroom at 7:30 am when the dean came looking for me. He said, 'You're making noise in here, and your students are waiting.' I didn't have a lesson planned because the timetable changed without my knowledge. The Dean reprimanded me for missing class, and I had to convince students to allow me to teach them outside of scheduled times."

However, some student teachers reported disorganization in certain schools, where attendance seemed unimportant, which negatively impacted their experience of SP and the support they received. One student in FGD1 expressed her frustration, saying,

"I wouldn't recommend this school to anyone; no one cares about your presence or absence here."

Overall, while school managers served as good role models by upholding school rules and regulations, some student teachers expressed frustration over the inconsistency of the managers' attendance. This disconnection was demotivating, leading some to say they would decline a job offer at such a school.

Motivation

Figure 1 indicates that approximately 59.21% of student teachers had a moderately positive view of the collaborative support provided by supervisors and host schools. Some student teachers expressed frustration over delays in supervisor visits, attributing it to supervisors being assigned to many different schools. However, many viewed this delay as a chance to further prepare for supervision, though some felt anxious while waiting. Those student teachers who experienced significant support credited school administrators with playing a crucial role, stating that without their help, managing the SP would have been difficult. The relationship between student teachers and school managers was generally positive, fostering open dialogue. Student teachers noted that the support from supervisors during SP helped them identify weaknesses and build confidence.

Abaine, a student teacher, emphasized the essential support from supervisors, saying,

"We cannot do without them during SP."

This encouragement motivated them to engage fully in the SP process and acquire important skills for their professional development. Another student highlighted,

"When my supervisor came to observe my next class, she began to appreciate my progress, and I learned a lot from her guidance, which boosted my confidence."

In FGD2, student teachers noted that school managers inspired them through both positive and constructive feedback, which helped them improve their skills during SP. For instance, one student in FGD1 mentioned that school managers assisted with implementing the new curriculum and managing classroom dynamics. They shared experiences about transitioning from old to new curriculum materials

and how school managers provided essential guidance during this process.

Moreover, student teachers in FGD2 acknowledged that while supervisors might be delayed, school managers often stepped in to support them in their absence. One student remarked,

> "Our supervisor was two weeks late, but it allowed us to prepare better."

Another added that the entrepreneurship teacher was instrumental in helping them with the new curriculum and classroom organization. The student teachers in FGD2 expressed satisfaction with the support provided by school managers during SP. They appreciated that even if supervisors visited infrequently, they took the time to discuss assessments and provide feedback, emphasizing the importance of the supervisor's role:

> "I'm grateful that after teaching, my supervisor takes time to go over the assessment procedures with me and points out my strengths and weaknesses."

Interestingly, student teachers recognized that the role of SP supervisors was to guide rather than to find faults. A student from FGD1 explained,

> "Their main purpose is to guide us, and through that guidance, we improve."

Supervisors were open to offering both positive and constructive feedback, aiming to motivate students and help them address their weaknesses. One student recounted,

> "The supervisor would openly say, 'This isn't right, but you did well overall. Just remember to open the windows for fresh air next time,' and that advice was very helpful."

However, some student teachers in FGD1 reported feeling anxious about their performance due to the frequency of negative feedback from supervisors. They expressed concerns that supervisors sometimes did not allow them to finish lessons, leading to feelings of bias in evaluations.

> "My experience was different; my supervisor visited almost daily, even when I wasn't

> teaching, and all her comments were negative, which made me question my performance."

Student teachers who were not diligent struggled to meet the demands of SP, facing pressure from both school managers and learners to perform well. One student stated,

> "Now I make sure I don't miss any lessons. You can't miss classes here; if you're not serious, you won't manage because you could be embarrassed about your performance."

Despite these challenges, student teachers did not feel demotivated. They indicated that they often took on additional responsibilities, such as teaching extra lessons, but felt underappreciated. One student expressed,

> "They don't reward us for doing extra lessons, unlike other schools where you're recognized for your efforts."

Student teachers voiced concerns about the frequent absenteeism of practising teachers, which contributed to negative perceptions of SP and the teaching profession. One remarked,

> "Teachers are often absent, leaving only one person in charge. We're usually in the staffroom, and when the other teachers are unmotivated, it affects us as well."

Students noted that practising teachers often took leave, as confirmed by Jane, an SP supervisor, who stated,

> "Practicing teachers neglect their responsibilities, shifting the workload onto student teachers, which is demoralizing."

The student teachers would benefit significantly if practising teachers guided them throughout SP. Jane added,

> "These student teachers are essentially covering for the regular teachers, who often take leave instead of supporting their learning."

Furthermore, student teachers felt that their presence allowed practising teachers to pursue part-time jobs outside of school, often receiving last-minute requests to cover classes for absent teachers.

"I often got calls asking me to handle a class because the teacher was off for a part-time job."

Ultimately, student teachers needed recognition for exceeding expectations, as the lack of support from school managers sometimes dampened their motivation during SP. The absence of practising teachers during critical times led to feelings of being overworked and unsupported, which negatively impacted their perceptions of the experience. Supervisors motivated them to improve their teaching skills, yet some student teachers felt that certain supervisors came with a critical mindset focused solely on finding faults, which was discouraging.

Feedback Support

Generally, about 60% of the participants moderately echoed that feedback they were getting from school teachers and officials was owed to the collaborative support intentions. Specifically, feedback was investigated on three levels, namely: supportive feedback, demotivating feedback and communication feedback. The results of the three categories are presented hereafter.

Supportive Feedback

On whether the feedback the student teachers were getting from school administrators was adequate and thus supportive, about 60% (Figure 1) said yes, denoting that almost 40% were not satisfied with the feedback they were receiving on pertinent organizational and professional issues from school teachers. Nonetheless, 60% of student teachers expressed gratitude for the school managers' valuable feedback about performance, which was very helpful for improvement and allowed room for dialogue in a more supporting and motivating manner rather than fault-finding. This was encouraging to the students, mainly in addressing weak areas.

A student teacher in FGD1 said,

"The first time I entered the class to teach geography, for example, there were some illustrations where I used fingers, and she told me never do it again she guided me to get a

paper and make it like a stick; from there, I learnt never to use a stick or my fingers."

Constructive feedback that helped the student teachers know how to address the challenge raised, all aimed at improving the student teaching. However, while giving feedback, some student teachers said this left a lot to be desired.

There was open criticism, and the supervisors did not shy away from passing on negative comments to the students, although they were aware that this was not what student teachers expected. Even when students strived to be perfect, if there were one or two aspects that needed to be improved, the supervisors were at liberty to take note of those areas that still needed to be corrected.

Overall, both school managers and SP supervisors provided supportive feedback after observing student lessons, though moderately (60%, figure 1). They would engage student teachers to suggest areas of improvement, as well as motivate the student teacher by highlighting their strengths. However, open feedback was ostracized by some students since it appeared to dent the privacy and self-esteem of the individual.

Demotivating feedback

Student teachers criticized the way supervisors were providing feedback that was discouraging (about 52%, figure 1). The students had expected supervisors to politely share feedback for it to more sense to student teachers, but some supervisors acted contrary to student teachers' expectations while delivering feedback, predominantly negative comments. The student teacher mentioned,

"Our problem is the university should provide enough and better materials, they should not force us to buy others, that is a bad approach, if supervisors do not want them, why did they provide them to us."

Student teachers in the FGDs highlighted that the university needed to provide adequate instructional and preparation materials. Student teachers in the FGD1 noted that the university distributed teaching materials to student teachers, which they ridiculed, and student teachers were tasked to buy others when

they already had a tight budget. In the interviewee's words, she said,

> "This time, she saw my file and told me to buy a box file and I was going to buy a box file but, in my heart, I was tortured."

In this aspect, student teachers felt they were blamed innocently because the university provided the materials which the lecturers considered of low standards to be used for SP and recommended others. The university needs to improve the quality of materials that are supplied to student teachers before they go to SP. Conclusively, there were supervisors who provided feedback that offended the student teachers because the comments were majorly negative. The University ought to do something.

Communication of feedback

Some supervisors did not communicate feedback in a professional way. About 58% of the student teachers believed it was proper to first appreciate the efforts and communicate good comments instead of negative ones to help student teachers positively accept all. Supervisors rather started with negative comments which were communicated in a rude way as a student teacher explained.

> "While teaching about happiness I decided to use other materials and the students. A student did something, and I told her to step out. She moved out sad and unhappy, but entered smiling and said, 'Thank you, teacher' and the supervisor's comment was you should have drawn a person sad and another happy."

A section of student teachers in the FGD1 further indicated that some university supervisors need to be more conversant with the fields they are supervising. Student teachers viewed some supervisors as inadequate in certain subjects. In the FGD1, a student teacher explained that the supervisor disregarded his teaching aids because he was inexperienced in geography. Another student teacher in the FGD2 faced a similar predicament when the supervisor was not knowledgeable about fine arts as a teaching subject he was supervising. The supervisor was good because he interacted with us after teaching; issues were clarified after

conferencing and discussing the lesson taught. A student teacher in the FGD2 shared an experience,

> "There is even a time I was teaching graphics and made some charts with some sketched calendars, so he was like those are not good, yet when instructing a learner, I do not write everything on the chalkboard but rather provide guidance to acquire skills. After having a conversation, I told him, "In fine art; I have to tell learners how to achieve.""

He understood and the next time I went with my artwork, after the exhibition, he asked was informed." Student teachers would get stressed and irritated whenever they were supervised by lecturers they perceived as uninformed of their duties and responsibilities.

Overall, the student teachers' perception was both positive and negative because of outrageous demands such as disregarding teaching materials issued by the university. This bred negative perceptions of the student teachers.

DISCUSSION

This study explored student teachers' perceptions of the support they received from school managers during their school practice (SP). The findings indicated that student teachers held a positive view of the collaborative support between school managers and university supervisors. This aligns with the systems theory employed in the study, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of various educational stakeholders. However, the collaboration often stemmed from individual initiative rather than a structured approach suggested by the university. As highlighted in the literature, effective collaboration occurs at the individual level, with meaningful interactions being crucial for student teachers' success. Midthassel (2017) emphasized that while partnerships exist between institutions, the real work is carried out by individuals, underscoring the significance of social interactions between student teachers and school managers.

The data revealed that student teachers appreciated the efforts of school managers in helping them acclimate to the school environment, especially

during the initial week of their practice. Additionally, they found camaraderie among fellow student teachers from other institutions, facilitating the exchange of experiences. This finding resonates with Koross (2016), who argued that perceptions of support vary across different contexts globally. The amount of support provided to student teachers significantly influenced their experiences; those receiving ample assistance perceived the exercise positively, while those lacking orientation viewed it negatively.

Furthermore, school managers supported student teachers' engagement in extracurricular activities, administration, and mentorship, which is consistent with the findings (Abongdia et al. 2017; Priye 2013). These activities extend beyond classroom teaching and are essential for developing the requisite skills of a professional teacher. Participating in co-curricular activities provides student teachers with a comprehensive school experience, enhancing their ability to assume administrative responsibilities.

However, some student teachers reported a lack of allocated responsibilities during practice. While the duration of SP is eight weeks, many were only assigned to teach a class sporadically and had to navigate the challenges of determining which classes to teach independently. This aligns with Koross (2016), who noted that cooperating teachers often lack awareness of their supervisory roles and recommends training to sensitize them regarding their responsibilities towards student teachers. Thus, the findings suggest that school managers must be educated about collaborative roles in supporting student teachers effectively.

Additionally, many student teachers reported feeling unmotivated due to being assigned extra tasks, such as supervising preps and additional lessons, without receiving recognition for their efforts. This lack of appreciation was exacerbated by the frequent absenteeism of practising teachers, which contributed to a demotivating environment. The finding corroborates with Apolot et al. (2018), which revealed that student teachers often receive limited support from regular teachers. Such an environment can hinder student teachers' performance, as effective motivation is closely linked to achievement (Komakech & Osuu, 2014).

The resulting negative perceptions of the school practice experience adversely affected their overall performance and satisfaction.

Moreover, the study highlighted the tendency of practising teachers to abandon responsibilities, shifting their workloads to student teachers. This phenomenon was particularly troubling, as the presence of student teachers often encouraged practising teachers to take on part-time roles, further increasing the workload for student teachers. The finding aligns with previous studies (Muzata, 2019; Tuyizere, 2018; Mapolisa & Tshabalala, 2014; Kagoda & Itaaga, 2013), which noted that practising teachers often take extended breaks during student teachers placements. The resulting imbalance, where student teachers felt exploited and overwhelmed, contributed to a negative perception of the support provided by school managers.

CONCLUSION

This study provides valuable insights into student teachers' perceptions of the support and guidance received from school managers during their school practice. Overall, student teachers expressed positive sentiments about the initial induction and support provided by school managers, highlighting the importance of a welcoming environment and the role of school managers in facilitating their adjustment to the school culture. However, challenges such as the lack of motivation, insufficient recognition of extra responsibilities, and the absenteeism of practicing teachers significantly impacted their overall experience. Additionally, the evaluation and assessment processes were found to be limited, affecting the comprehensive feedback necessary for student teachers' development. Addressing these concerns is crucial for enhancing the quality of school practice experiences.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, it is recommended that to enhance induction and support programs, there was a need to structure the programs to develop formal induction programs that provide a comprehensive orientation for student teachers, including information about school culture, expectations, and available support systems. This should involve input from both school managers and practising teachers.

In addition, establishing mentorship initiatives where experienced teachers are paired with student teachers to provide ongoing support, guidance, and feedback throughout SP can bridge the gap caused by teacher absenteeism and provide a consistent source of assistance.

To improve motivation and engagement there was a need for balanced workload distribution to ensure that student teachers are assigned a manageable workload that allows them to focus on teaching responsibilities without being overwhelmed by additional tasks. This may involve creating clear guidelines regarding the distribution of responsibilities among practising teachers and student teachers. Great encouragement of cooperative teaching to foster a collaborative teaching environment where practising teachers share responsibilities with student teachers, thereby enhancing teaching experiences while reducing feelings of exploitation. Revamping evaluation and assessment processes by revising evaluation tools to include more qualitative feedback opportunities, open-ended questions and space for comments allowing school managers and practicing teachers to provide detailed insights into student teachers' performance. Structured feedback can be adapted to have a schedule that allows for more frequent valuations of student teachers. This will provide student teachers with ongoing feedback opportunities for improvement and a framework that captures diverse perspectives on their performance, ultimately leading to more comprehensive feedback and support.

Educational stakeholders can create a more supportive, motivating, and effective environment for student teachers, ultimately improving training outcomes and readiness for professional teaching roles.

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