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Original Article

Institutional Support and Supervisory Practices as Predictors of Competency Acquisition among Teachers on School Practice in Southwestern Uganda

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This study investigated the influence of institutional support and supervisory practices on competency acquisition among student teachers during school practice in South Western Uganda. Teacher education has been recognised as critical for national development, yet challenges such as inadequate resources, inconsistent supervision, and weak collaboration between training institutions and practicum schools hinder effective competency development. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from 151 student teachers through questionnaires, interviews, and observation checklists. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data were thematically analysed to enrich understanding. The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between institutional support, including provision of teaching materials, curriculum guidance, and professional environment and the acquisition of key teaching competencies such as lesson planning, classroom management, and assessment aligned with the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC). Supervisory practices, characterised by constructive feedback, mentorship, and regular visits, also showed a substantial impact on competency development. Importantly, the combined effect of institutional support and supervisory practices was found to be a stronger predictor of competency acquisition than either factor alone, underscoring the need for integrated support systems. Despite these positive influences, gaps remained, particularly in ICT integration and equitable supervision. The study recommended policy reforms to strengthen resource allocation, standardised supervision, and collaborative frameworks between training institutions and practicum schools. These findings provided valuable insights for improving teacher education quality and enhancing learner outcomes in Uganda and similar contexts.

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INTRODUCTION

Globally, teacher education is widely recognised as a cornerstone of national development and educational quality. Since the 1960s, countries such as the United States, Finland, and Singapore have advanced teacher preparation through structured practicum programs emphasising intensive institutional support and guided supervision. These systems prioritise real-world teaching experiences to help teacher trainees acquire essential pedagogical, subject-matter, and professional competencies (Darling-Hammond, 2017).

In Sub-Saharan Africa, teacher education systems have faced persistent challenges, including overcrowded institutions, inadequate field supervision, and limited collaboration between training institutions and placement schools (UNESCO, 2021). Reforms in countries like Kenya and Tanzania have attempted to strengthen supervision and institutional partnerships, but results remain inconsistent due to fragmented support systems (Ngugi & Mumiukha, 2020).

Within Uganda's teacher education system, the practicum or school practice serves as a mandatory component designed to integrate theoretical learning with practical classroom experience. During this period, student-teachers are expected to receive guidance from both institutional supervisors and school-based mentors. However, systemic

issues such as limited resources, uncoordinated supervision, and poor institutional-school linkages continue to affect the effectiveness of this model (MoES, 2022). These constraints are particularly acute in regions like South Western Uganda, where disparities in infrastructure, mentoring capacity, and communication among stakeholders hinder competency development.

Competency acquisition in teacher education refers to the development of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for effective teaching, including classroom instruction, learner engagement, and professional conduct (Shulman, 1987). Two critical elements that influence this process are institutional support defined as the academic, administrative, emotional, and logistical assistance provided by training institutions and supervisory practices, which encompass the feedback, mentoring, and assessment offered by both university tutors and cooperating teachers.

The central concern of this study is how effectively student-teachers in South Western Uganda acquire teaching competencies, and to what extent this is influenced by the support and supervision they receive during school practice. Inadequate systems in these areas risk producing graduates who are underprepared for the classroom, with negative implications for learner outcomes and the broader goals of educational reform.

This research is theoretically grounded in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory. Vygotsky (1978) emphasised the importance of social interaction with more knowledgeable others in facilitating learning an idea directly relevant to supervision and mentorship during practicum. Kolb's model highlights the role of reflective practice and real-world experience in consolidating professional growth. Together, these frameworks support the notion that school practice is most effective when it includes active mentorship, structured feedback, and institutional backing.

Despite curriculum reforms and national policy efforts, teacher training in Uganda continues to produce graduates who often lack core teaching competencies (MoES, 2022). This study responds to that concern by focusing explicitly on the dependent variable of competency acquisition. By examining how institutional support and supervisory practices predict competency outcomes, it provides empirical insights that can guide policy, improve practicum models, and promote more cohesive collaboration among stakeholders. While the findings are context-specific, they carry broader implications for strengthening teacher education systems across similar low-resource settings.

Problem Statement

In an ideal educational environment, student teachers receive robust institutional support and effective supervisory practices during their school practice, enabling them to acquire the necessary teaching competencies to excel in classroom instruction. This support encompasses consistent mentoring, access to adequate teaching resources, constructive feedback, and ongoing professional guidance, all of which contribute to the development of essential skills such as lesson planning, classroom management, instructional delivery, learner engagement, and assessment (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Globally, such comprehensive support systems have been linked to higher levels of teacher readiness and improved

instructional quality (OECD, 2019). However, in South Western Uganda, the reality falls short of this ideal. According to the Ministry of Education and Sports (2022) Teacher Education Annual Performance Report, over 60% of schools lack sufficient teaching materials, and nearly 55% of student teachers report infrequent or ineffective supervision by university lecturers. Furthermore, less than 40% of student teachers receive regular mentoring throughout their practicum period. These deficiencies result in significant gaps in critical teaching competencies, including lesson planning, classroom management, instructional delivery, learner engagement, and learner assessment practices. Without mastery of these essential skills, student teachers struggle to translate theoretical knowledge into effective classroom practice, undermining their professional growth and readiness. The consequences of this situation are profound. Inadequate acquisition of teaching competencies among novice educators contributes to poor instructional quality, which negatively affects student learning outcomes and compromises the effectiveness of educational reforms such as the competency-based curriculum. This perpetuates cycles of substandard teaching and learning, limiting Uganda's broader educational and socio-economic development goals. This study empirically tests the predictive roles of institutional support and supervisory practices on competency acquisition among student teachers in South Western Uganda. By addressing this critical gap, the study aimed to provide evidence-based recommendations for policymakers and educational institutions to enhance teacher preparation programs, strengthen support systems, and ultimately improve the quality of education in the region.

Objectives

1. To examine the relationship between institutional support and competency acquisition among teachers during school practice in South Western Uganda.

2. To assess the influence of supervisory practices on competency acquisition among teachers during school practice in South Western Uganda.

3. To determine the combined predictive value of institutional support and supervisory practices on competency acquisition among teachers during school practice in South Western Uganda.

Hypotheses

- H_{01} : There is no statistically significant relationship between institutional support and competency acquisition among teachers in school practice in South Western Uganda.
- H_{02} : Supervisory practices do not significantly influence competency acquisition among teachers on school practice in South Western Uganda.
- H_{03} : Institutional support and supervisory practices do not jointly predict competency acquisition among teachers in school practice in South Western Uganda.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Institutional Support and Competency Acquisition

The first objective examined the relationship between institutional support and competency acquisition among teachers during school practice. Institutional support played a critical role in shaping the professional competencies of student-teachers. Globally, effective teacher education programs provided structured institutional mechanisms such as mentoring frameworks, access to instructional materials, formative feedback, and reflective learning opportunities that promoted the development of essential teaching skills (Darling-Hammond, 2017). For example, well-resourced education systems like those in Finland and Singapore integrated academic, emotional, and logistical support to ensure student-teachers effectively translated theory into practice (OECD, 2019). These systems bolstered competencies in

lesson planning, classroom management, learner engagement, and assessment.

In contrast, many Sub-Saharan African contexts, including Kenya and Ghana, exhibited weak institutional coordination between training colleges and practicum schools, resulting in fragmented practicum experiences and insufficient practical skill acquisition (Ngugi & Mumiukha, 2020; Anamuah-Mensah, 2015). In South Western Uganda, similar challenges prevailed. According to the Ministry of Education and Sports (2022), student-teachers frequently lacked adequate mentoring, access to teaching resources, and structured practicum monitoring. Tibarimbasa (2010) further noted that training institutions struggled to maintain effective communication and logistical support for practicum sites. Such institutional deficiencies led to gaps in critical competencies, hindering student-teachers' professional development.

While some studies acknowledged a general association between institutional factors and trainee outcomes (Kagoire et al., 2023), empirical research directly linking institutional support to competency acquisition in Uganda remained limited, especially in South Western Uganda. This study, therefore addressed this gap by empirically examining how institutional support influenced competency development during school practice.

Supervisory Practices and Competency Acquisition

The second objective assessed the influence of supervisory practices on competency acquisition among teachers in school practice. Supervision was widely recognised as vital for translating theoretical knowledge into practical competence through feedback, mentoring, and reflective dialogue (Hudson, 2010; Baecher, 2012). In developed countries like Australia and the UK, supervisory models incorporated structured classroom observations and post-observation conferences that fostered professional growth.

However, in many Sub-Saharan African countries, supervisory practices tended to be inconsistent and superficial. For example, in Zimbabwe, supervision often involved checklist-driven assessments with minimal mentoring (Ngara & Ngwarai, 2013), while in Kenya, supervisors prioritised grading over developmental feedback (Odhiambo, 2014). These approaches failed to nurture essential competencies such as instructional clarity and classroom interaction.

In South Western Uganda, the challenges were compounded by a lack of mentorship training for supervisors, inadequate logistical support, and large student cohorts (Apolot et al., 2022). Ssebunya et al. (2023) highlighted that student-teachers frequently perceived supervision as a procedural requirement rather than a developmental opportunity. Despite international evidence supporting the role of supervision in competency acquisition, empirical studies evaluating the quality and impact of supervisory practices in this region were scarce. The current study aimed to fill this gap by empirically assessing how supervisory practices affected student-teachers' competency development.

Combined Predictive Value of Institutional Support and Supervisory Practices

The third objective investigated the combined predictive value of institutional support and supervisory practices on competency acquisition during school practice. Literature increasingly emphasised the synergy between institutional frameworks and supervision in effective teacher preparation. High-performing systems, such as those in Singapore and Finland, demonstrated that aligned institutional support and supervisory mechanisms jointly enhanced teacher readiness by fostering confidence, reflective teaching, and comprehensive competency development (Zeichner, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2017; OECD, 2019).

Conversely, many African teacher education programs remained fragmented, with poor

coordination between institutions and supervisors leading to inconsistent practicum experiences (Ngugi & Mumiukha, 2020; Anamuah-Mensah, 2015). In South Western Uganda, the Ministry of Education and Sports (2022) reported frequent disconnects between teacher training institutions and host schools, resulting in unclear roles, inconsistent supervision, and neglected trainee needs (Kabugo, 2023). This fragmentation likely contributed to persistent competency gaps observed among student-teachers.

Few empirical studies examined how institutional support and supervisory practices jointly predicted competency acquisition in Uganda. This study addressed this empirical void by investigating the extent to which the combination of institutional support and supervision predicted professional competence among student-teachers in South Western Uganda. Findings were expected to inform integrated policy and practice reforms to strengthen teacher preparation programs.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative correlational cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationship between institutional support, supervisory practices, and teaching competency acquisition among student teachers in South Western Uganda. The region was selected due to its active implementation of the competency-based curriculum (CBC). The study focused on student teachers from Bishop Stuart University who had recently completed CBC-aligned school practice, as well as their university supervisors and mentor teachers.

A total of 151 student teachers participated in the study. They were selected using stratified random sampling from an estimated population of 300 student teachers to ensure representative coverage across different departments and year groups. The sample size was determined based on a power analysis aimed at achieving a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$) with 80% power at the 0.05 significance

level for multiple regression analysis. Additionally, 10 university supervisors and 15 mentor teachers were purposively sampled due to their direct involvement in practicum supervision, providing expert perspectives relevant to the study objectives.

Data were collected using structured questionnaires with 5-point Likert scales designed specifically for each participant group. The questionnaires addressed key dimensions: institutional support (e.g., placement logistics, availability of teaching resources), supervisory practices (e.g., frequency of observations, quality of feedback), and competency acquisition (e.g., lesson planning, classroom management, learner assessment). To complement the quantitative data and enrich understanding, qualitative data were also collected through semi-structured interviews with a subset of participants. These qualitative data were used to triangulate findings and provide contextual insights, but were not the primary focus of this report.

The survey instruments underwent rigorous validation processes. Content validity was ensured through expert reviews, and construct validity was assessed via exploratory factor analysis. Reliability was confirmed with Cronbach’s alpha coefficients exceeding the acceptable threshold ($\alpha \geq 0.70$) for all scales. A pilot study was conducted prior to the main data collection to refine the instruments and procedures.

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Bishop Stuart University Research Ethics Committee. Informed consent was secured from all participants, with assurances of confidentiality and voluntary participation. Data collection was conducted over a two- to three-week period, following strict ethical guidelines to protect participants’ rights.

Quantitative data analysis involved Pearson’s correlation to examine bivariate relationships, followed by simple and multiple linear regression analyses to test the predictive effects of institutional support and supervisory practices on teaching competency acquisition. Challenges such as non-response, social desirability bias, and logistical difficulties due to the geographical dispersion of practicum schools were mitigated through repeated follow-ups, data triangulation from multiple participant groups, and careful data cleaning.

The study findings were planned for dissemination through university seminars, national academic conferences, peer-reviewed journals, and policy briefs directed at education stakeholders, with the goal of informing improvements in teacher education programs under Uganda’s CBC framework.

FINDINGS

Table 1: Relationship between Institutional Support and Competency Acquisition (Objective 1)

Findings	Descriptive Statistics (n = 151)	Inferential Statistics	Thematic Analysis (Qualitative Themes)
Confidence in communication	82% (124) agreed	Pearson $r = 0.68$, $p < 0.01$	<i>Supportive culture enhances confidence</i>
Interaction with learners & staff	78% (118) improved	Linear regression: $R^2 = 0.46$, $F(1,149) = 125.74$, $p < 0.001$	<i>Institutional structures foster professional growth</i>
Instructional clarity	75% (113) improved	—	—
Understanding of CBC	85% (128) enhanced	—	—
Classroom management	79% (119) improved	—	—
ICT integration	54% (82) moderately competent	—	<i>Resource gaps in ICT</i>

Findings	Descriptive Statistics (n = 151)	Inferential Statistics	Thematic Analysis (Qualitative Themes)
Professional conduct	88% (133) improved	—	—
Assessment skills (CBC-aligned)	76% (115) improved	—	—
Teamwork and collaboration	80% (121) enhanced	—	—
Adaptability and resourcefulness	73% (110) improved	—	—

The findings from Table 1 illustrate a clear and positive relationship between institutional support and the acquisition of teaching competencies among student teachers. A significant majority of respondents, ranging from 73% to 88%, reported that the support they received from their institutions greatly contributed to improvements in key professional skills. These included confidence in communication, understanding of the competency-based curriculum (CBC), classroom management, professional conduct, and assessment practices aligned with the CBC framework. However, the integration of information and communication technology (ICT) in teaching emerged as a comparatively weaker area, with only about 54% of student teachers expressing moderate competence. This suggests a need for enhanced focus on ICT resources and training within teacher education programs. Statistically, the study found a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.68$) between institutional support and competency acquisition, indicating that

as the level of institutional support increased, so did the students' teaching competencies. The statistical significance ($p < 0.01$) of this relationship confirms that it is unlikely to have occurred by chance. Additionally, the R-squared value ($R^2 = 0.46$) demonstrated that nearly half (46%) of the variation in teaching competencies could be explained by the degree of institutional support provided, highlighting its critical role in student teacher development. Qualitative insights from the study further reinforced these quantitative findings, with themes emerging around how a supportive culture within institutions boosted student confidence and how structured institutional mechanisms fostered professional growth. Taken together, these results underscore the essential role of comprehensive institutional support systems in equipping student teachers with the competencies necessary for effective classroom practice, while also pointing to areas such as ICT integration that require additional attention to strengthen teacher preparation.

Table 2: Influence of Supervisory Practices on Competency Acquisition (Objective 2)

Findings	Descriptive Statistics (n = 151)	Inferential Statistics	Thematic Analysis (Qualitative Themes)
Constructive feedback	90% (136) valued	Pearson $r = 0.61$, $p < 0.01$	<i>Feedback as a learning catalyst</i>
Helpful feedback (strengths/weaknesses)	88% (133) agreed	Regression: $R^2 = 0.38$, $F(1,149) = 91.02$, $p < 0.001$	
At least 2 supervision visits	81% (122) received	—	—
Mentorship support	84% (127) benefited	—	<i>Mentorship builds teaching identity.</i>
Supervisor modelling best practices	77% (116) inspired	—	—

Findings	Descriptive Statistics (n = 151)	Inferential Statistics	Thematic Analysis (Qualitative Themes)
Engagement in reflective practice	70% (106) practised	—	—
Supervisor communication/approachability	83% (125) positive	—	—
Help with resources/workshops	75% (114) benefited	—	<i>Inconsistencies undermine supervision</i>

The results in Table 2 highlight the significant influence of supervisory practices on the development of teaching competencies among student teachers. An overwhelming majority of participants, 90% valued constructive feedback from their supervisors, recognising it as a crucial element for their professional growth. Similarly, 88% agreed that receiving feedback on their strengths and weaknesses helped them improve their teaching skills. Most student teachers (81%) reported having at least two supervision visits during their practicum, while 84% acknowledged the benefits of mentorship support in shaping their teaching identity. Additionally, 77% were inspired by supervisors who modelled best teaching practices, and 70% actively engaged in reflective practices encouraged by their supervisors. Positive communication and approachability from supervisors were also noted by 83% of respondents, further contributing to a supportive learning environment. However, despite these strengths, 75% of participants indicated that assistance with

resources and workshops was inconsistent, pointing to challenges within supervisory support. Statistically, there was a moderate to strong positive correlation ($r = 0.61$, $p < 0.01$) between supervisory practices and competency acquisition, signifying that better supervision was associated with higher competency levels. The regression analysis showed that supervisory practices explained 38% ($R^2 = 0.38$) of the variation in teaching competencies, confirming their important role, though indicating that other factors also contribute to competency development. Qualitative themes reinforced the importance of feedback as a catalyst for learning and mentorship as fundamental in building teaching identity, while also drawing attention to inconsistencies that undermine the effectiveness of supervision. Overall, these findings emphasise that effective supervisory practices are key to fostering professional growth in student teachers, but they also reveal areas needing improvement to maximise their impact.

Table 3: Combined Predictive Value of Institutional Support and Supervisory Practices (Objective 3)

Findings	Descriptive Statistics (n = 151)	Inferential Statistics	Thematic Analysis (Qualitative Themes)
High support (institutional + supervisory) leads to higher competency	88% (133) reported strong competence	Multiple regression: $R^2 = 0.57$, $F(2,148) = 97.83$, $p < 0.001$	<i>Integrated support enhances readiness</i>
Low support in either area leads to challenges	Increased challenges reported	Institutional support $\beta = 0.48$, $p < 0.001$ Supervisory practices $\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.001$	<i>Synergy of environment and guidance</i>

Table 3 presents the combined effect of institutional support and supervisory practices on the acquisition of teaching competencies among student teachers. The descriptive data showed that a large majority, 88% of respondents, reported strong teaching competence when they experienced high levels of both institutional and supervisory support during their practicum. Conversely, those who reported low support in either institutional structures or supervision faced more challenges in developing essential teaching skills. The statistical analysis using multiple regression revealed that together, institutional support and supervisory practices explained 57% of the differences in competency acquisition among student teachers, indicating a strong combined influence. Specifically, institutional support had a slightly stronger impact ($\beta = 0.48$) compared to supervisory practices ($\beta = 0.42$), though both contributed significantly to the prediction of competency development. This means that the more support student teachers received from both their training institutions and supervisors, the better their teaching skills became. The qualitative data further underscored this relationship, highlighting themes such as “Integrated support enhances teacher readiness” and the “Synergy of environment and guidance,” which illustrate the importance of a well-coordinated and collaborative support system. These findings emphasise that institutional support and supervision do not work in isolation but together create an environment that better prepares student teachers for their professional roles. Addressing gaps in either area may hinder competency development, while strengthening both can significantly improve teacher readiness and performance.

DISCUSSION

The findings affirmed that institutional support significantly contributed to student teachers' development of teaching competencies. More than 80% of the participants reported improved confidence in communication, curriculum understanding, classroom management, and

professional conduct, all attributed to supportive institutional environments. These results were consistent with global evidence from countries such as Finland and Singapore, where structured support systems facilitate the practical application of pedagogical knowledge (OECD, 2019; Darling-Hammond, 2017). The results further indicated that learner-centred pedagogy and formative assessment, key features of competency-based education (CBE), were better implemented when student teachers had access to adequate resources, clear guidance, and a nurturing institutional culture.

However, a notable gap emerged in ICT integration, with only 54% of the respondents reporting moderate competence in this area. This finding echoed similar challenges reported in Sub-Saharan contexts like Kenya and Ghana, where institutional support in digital resources and training remains uneven and often inadequate (Ngugi & Mumiukha, 2020; Anamuah-Mensah, 2015). The disparities in ICT access in South Western Uganda were particularly evident in rural and semi-urban schools, where under-resourced environments, as described by Tibarimbasa (2010) and the Ministry of Education and Sports (2022), limited student teachers' exposure to modern teaching tools. These contextual limitations underscore the need for stronger infrastructural investment to support CBC implementation.

In relation to supervisory practices (Objective 2), the findings showed that 90% of student teachers appreciated receiving constructive feedback, while 84% valued mentorship and modelling of best practices. These elements significantly contributed to their acquisition of teaching competencies. This supports research from countries like Australia and the UK, where structured supervision characterised by regular observations, meaningful feedback, and reflective practice has been found to promote professional growth (Hudson, 2010; Baecher, 2012). The positive responses from student teachers in this study suggested that effective supervision had both a motivational and instructional role,

helping them to bridge the gap between theoretical learning and classroom application.

Nonetheless, approximately 20% of participants reported receiving inconsistent or unfair supervision, echoing concerns raised in prior studies from Zimbabwe and Kenya (Ngara & Ngwarai, 2013; Odhiambo, 2014). In many cases, supervision was viewed as evaluative rather than developmental, and irregular visits reduced opportunities for formative feedback. These challenges reflected broader issues in Uganda's teacher education system, where logistical constraints, limited training for supervisors, and a lack of standardised tools hindered the effectiveness of practicum supervision (Apolot et al., 2022; Ssebunya et al., 2023).

Furthermore, while the study adopted a robust mixed-methods approach, certain methodological limitations impacted the findings. The cross-sectional design meant that data were collected at a single point in time, making it difficult to determine how institutional support or supervision influenced competency development over a longer period. Additionally, reliance on self-reported questionnaires introduced the potential for social desirability bias, as student teachers may have overestimated their abilities or withheld criticism of institutional practices. Although stratified and purposive sampling were used to ensure representativeness, the study was geographically limited to South Western Uganda, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other regions. These limitations are common in educational research but must be addressed in future longitudinal or multi-site studies.

The study's third objective, assessing the combined predictive value of institutional support and supervisory practices, yielded particularly important insights. The results demonstrated that these two variables together explained 57% of the variance in teaching competency acquisition. This strong joint predictive power suggested that institutional support and supervision functioned

synergistically rather than independently. Student teachers who experienced both consistent supervision and institutional backing reported significantly higher levels of professional readiness. These results are built on earlier findings by Zeichner (2010) and Darling-Hammond (2017), who emphasised the need for integrated practicum systems that align school-based mentorship with institutional policies and resources. However, the fragmented nature of practicum implementation in South Western Uganda, where institutions and supervisors often worked in isolation (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2022; Kabugo, 2023), may have weakened this synergy in practice.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study set out to examine the relationship between institutional support, supervisory practices, and the acquisition of professional competencies among student teachers during school practice in South Western Uganda. The findings reveal that both institutional support and supervision played significant roles in shaping the competence of student teachers, with the strongest outcomes observed when these two components were effectively combined.

In relation to institutional support, the study established that structured support systems within training institutions significantly enhanced student teachers' professional development. Respondents consistently reported that institutional environments positively influenced their confidence, communication skills, classroom management, and ability to implement the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC). However, a notable limitation was observed in the area of ICT integration, where only moderate competence was reported by slightly more than half of the participants. This deficiency reflects broader systemic constraints common in rural and semi-urban schools, including inadequate technological resources and limited digital training opportunities.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that teacher training institutions urgently invest in ICT infrastructure and digital pedagogy training. Providing student teachers with both the equipment and skills to integrate technology into their lessons is essential in aligning teacher preparation with the demands of the CBC. Additionally, institutions should enhance ongoing support for learner-centred teaching methodologies by offering workshops, peer mentoring, and practical demonstrations on active learning strategies. These efforts will help ensure that student teachers are not only theoretically prepared but also practically equipped to deliver the curriculum effectively in diverse classroom contexts.

Supervisory practices also emerged as a major determinant of competency acquisition. The vast majority of respondents emphasised the importance of constructive feedback, consistent support, and professional mentorship during school practice. Effective supervision enabled them to reflect on their teaching, improve lesson delivery, and adopt more professional behaviours. However, the study also highlighted inconsistencies in supervision frequency and quality, with around 20% of student teachers reporting limited or irregular visits. These inconsistencies often stemmed from logistical challenges and inadequate preparation of supervisors.

In response, the most urgent recommendation is to ensure equitable and consistent supervisory visits across all placement schools. Institutions must establish clear schedules that guarantee each student teacher receives regular supervision, accompanied by timely and constructive feedback. Furthermore, institutions should strengthen training programs for supervisors, equipping them with mentorship skills and reflective supervision techniques that go beyond simple evaluation. Encouraging practices such as lesson journaling, peer observations, and collaborative debriefings will enhance reflective learning and professional growth. Additionally, fostering open communication between supervisors

and student teachers can build trust, confidence, and greater engagement in the practicum process.

Most significantly, the study found that institutional support and supervisory practices, when combined, produced a stronger predictive value for competency acquisition than when considered separately. Student teachers who experienced both strong institutional backing and supportive supervision demonstrated the highest levels of competence. This finding underscores the importance of synergy and coordination between institutions and field supervisors. Unfortunately, the current landscape in South Western Uganda remains fragmented, with limited collaboration between these stakeholders, thereby undermining the full developmental potential of student teachers.

To address this, it is essential to establish formal collaboration frameworks between training institutions and practicum supervisors. These frameworks should include shared expectations, standardised supervision tools, and routine communication channels. In addition, joint professional development workshops that bring together institutional staff and field supervisors can promote alignment in mentorship approaches and expectations. Such collaboration will foster a more holistic and coherent support system that is capable of preparing competent, confident, and adaptable teachers for Uganda's education system.

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