



The Role of School Managers and University Supervisors toward Pre-Service Teacher Training in Uganda

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Abstract: This paper presents the findings of a study that explored the collaborative roles of school managers and university supervisors in supporting student teachers during school practice. Using a single case study design and qualitative method, the study involved 25 participants, including school managers, SP supervisors and student teachers. Data was collected through interviews and focus group discussions and analyzed through the thematic approach. The findings show that school managers supported student teachers in various ways, such as placement support, orientation, distribution of loads, scholastic material provision, conducive school environment, supervision, mentorship as well as guidance and counseling. University SP supervisors, on the other hand, supported student teachers through school mapping, assessment, mentorship, professional growth and networking. The study suggests strengthening collaboration between universities and schools, recommending the formalization of partnerships and more active involvement of school managers in the school practice process. The study calls for improved communication, establishment of clear expectations and integration of technology to foster ongoing, dynamic collaboration that enhances the overall support system for student teachers.

Keywords: School practice; school managers; student teachers; collaborative role.

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Introduction

School practice (SP), often called teaching practice or internship, is a crucial component of pre-service teacher training and is essential for qualifying as a professional teacher (Mangope et al., 2018; Koross, 2016). SP involves student teachers (STs) in work-integrated learning within placement schools, where

they are guided by supervisors and school managers. This experience includes a range of activities beyond classroom instruction, such as administrative tasks, counseling and participation in extracurricular programs, reflecting the multifaceted roles of contemporary educators. In this context, collaboration refers to partnerships

formed between school managers and universities to establish objectives, monitor progress and provide essential support for STs. School managers including head teachers, deputy head teachers and experienced teachers, who play a vital role in bridging the gap between schools and universities.

The pivotal role of school managers in supporting teacher education during SP is a critical but often overlooked aspect in the pre-service teacher training. As the cornerstone of any education system, the quality of teachers directly impacts the effectiveness of curriculum implementation (Krasnoff, 2014). Thus, ensuring teachers are well-equipped with not only academic content but also pedagogical expertise gained through SP is imperative. Though theoretical knowledge is typically acquired through universities, SP serves as the bridge between theory and practice, allowing STs to apply their learning in real-world classroom situation (Benavides et al., 2018). Through SP, STs get engrossed in the actual teaching and learning (Adebola, 2022; Abongdia et al., 2015) as they instruct learners. However, SP effectiveness depends on the mentorship provided by school managers and university supervisors (Muzata, 2018; Aglazor, 2017) and is vital for STs' professional development (Yayli, 2018; Kagoda & Sentongo, 2015).

Existing literature highlights the significant roles of school managers and SP supervisors in supervising STs. School managers are expected to provide instructional leadership while supervision during SP can be internal or external, aiming to the enhance outcomes (Haile, 2016). However, some studies criticized school managers for neglecting their supervisory duties (Clarke et al., 2014), leading to persistent challenges such as overload for STs, inadequate support and inconsistent feedback (Muzata, 2018; Koross, 2016; Clarke et al., 2014).

While university supervisors evaluate and assess STs on SP to help them acquire teaching skills, ineffective supervision can hinder STs' development (Chimhenga, 2017; Komba & Kira, 2013). Assessment by both industry and academic institutions provides effective monitoring of interns (Akomaning et al., 2011). However, there is a gap in the responsibilities and management of STs in placement schools in Uganda, where supervision models emphasize observation, feedback and interactive conferences (Minnear-Peplinski, 2009). It is important to note that inconsistencies arise when

there are no given no specific guidelines. While university supervisors play the role of advising students during SP (Komba & Kira, 2013; Maphosa & Ndamba, 2012), some fail to provide adequate time and behave unprofessionally, impacting STs' morale (Gujjar et al., 2011).

The historical evolution of SP reflects an increasing acknowledgment of the essential role schools play in the pre-service preparation of teachers. Traditionally, universities delivered teacher education courses in isolation from schools (Teitel, 2008), resulting in limited collaboration between these two entities (Broadbent & Brady, 2013). In the United Kingdom, statutory requirements for university-school partnerships in teacher preparation were established in 1992 (Alexander et al., 1992), setting a precedent for similar initiatives in countries like the USA and Australia (Broadley et al., 2013; Perry et al., 1999). Historically, teacher training relied heavily on an apprenticeship model, emphasizing theoretical instruction without sufficient field experience. The traditional approach proved inadequate for equipping teachers with practical skills necessary for effective classroom management. In response, the master-apprenticeship model emerged, focusing on practical teaching under the guidance of experienced educators. While this model enhanced skill development, it had its drawbacks, such as confining student teachers (STs) to imitating modeled behaviors and limiting their exposure to diverse teaching strategies. Furthermore, the varying levels of expertise among mentor teachers led to inconsistencies in the quality of mentorship (Muzata, 2018; Koross, 2016).

To address these challenges, teacher aid programs were introduced, allowing STs to collaborate closely with experienced teachers and gain hands-on experience. Throughout the evolution of SP, its importance as a vital component of teacher preparation has remained clear. Various models of SP exist globally, ranging from weekly teaching sessions to intensive block placements, each with distinct features and challenges. Despite these variations, persistent difficulties in fostering strong institutional commitments between schools and universities continue to impede optimal support for STs.

In Uganda, SP is mandatory for all pre-service teachers seeking teacher professional qualification. According to the National Council for Higher

Education (2008), STs must undergo two SP block sessions that last between six to ten weeks to qualify as professional teachers (National Council for Higher Education, 2008). These sessions are integral to teacher training as they provide significant practical experiences. School managers play a crucial role in overseeing STs' engagement in teaching, administrative and extracurricular activities during SP (Jones, 1970; Haile, 2016). However, while the National Council for Higher Education offers guidelines on SP duration, collaboration between schools and universities remains unspecified. Examining university collaboration with schools becomes imperative, thus the need for a concerted approach to support STs effectively during SP.

Collaborative efforts are vital in STs' preparation, mainly during SP, where they acquire essential pedagogical skills (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2013). However, despite its importance, various challenges hinder the effectiveness of SP, including the absence of practicing teachers, qualified or experienced educators within school settings, who are expected to support, mentor and guide STs. These experienced teachers help STs to apply pedagogical theories in practical situations; they provide feedback and effective teaching strategies. The absence of practicing teachers in this context indicates limited number of experienced professionals to offer mentorship and guidance, which hinders the effectiveness of STs' development and ability to acquire essential teaching skills (Muzata, 2018; Tuyizere, 2017). Consequently, STs often receive negative feedback from school managers, which affects their professional growth. This gap may explain reports of secondary school teachers lacking effective teaching as highlighted by the Ministry of Education and Sports (2013) and the Uganda National Examination Board (2015). Despite existing literature focusing on different stakeholders' perceptions of SP, there is a lack of research findings on specific contributions of school managers and SP supervisors in supporting STs during SP. In response, this study focused on specific functions performed by school managers and university SP supervisors in overseeing SP supervision.

Methodology

Design

The study adopted a single-case qualitative design with an embedded approach, focusing on the

constructed meanings and perspectives of participants as per Yin (2014).

Population and Sampling

The study involved two secondary schools. Twenty five participants were involved, including eight school managers (four from each of the schools), five SP supervisors and twelve student teachers from the Uganda Christian University.

Instruments

Data collection methods comprised semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). The semi-structured interviews provided precise insights from school managers and SP supervisors while FGDs with STs facilitated a wider range of perspectives regarding the problem at stake.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure rigor, the study employed triangulation of data sources and participants, which enhanced the validity and reliability of findings as per Creswell (2013).

Data Analysis

Data analysis utilized an inductive thematic approach. Similar themes were organized according to participants' viewpoints and categorized based on their definitions, patterns and overarching themes. Findings were presented descriptively.

Ethical Considerations

Throughout the study, ethical considerations were prioritized, ensuring that participants provided the informed consent and their confidentiality was maintained. The study adhered to ethical guidelines to protect participants' rights and well-being during the data collection and reporting processes.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the results of the study. The study sought to establish the supervisory roles and contributions of school managers and university supervisors during school practice. The findings appear under the guiding themes as follows:

The Role of School Managers

There are various roles of school managers as outlined below:

Placement Support

School managers are pivotal in facilitating the placement of STs during SP. As noted by one of respondents, head teachers actively engage with STs upon arrival, setting the tone for placement by collaboratively discussing expectations. The

proactive approach not only clarifies roles but also fosters a sense of belonging and support for the STs. As corroborated by participants in FGD1, this welcoming atmosphere is crucial. One ST reflected, "When I went to school, the head teacher welcomed ... and told me, when the first term begins, come." This sentiment underscores the importance of initial interactions in shaping the overall experience for STs. This aligns with findings by Schmidt and McCaffrey (2018), emphasizing how welcoming environments enhance new teachers' retention and satisfaction.

The effective creation of a supportive atmosphere is attributed to the school profiling process, where school managers provide essential information about schools to university officials. This process aids logistical arrangements and ensures the needs of STs to align with resources available in schools. The collaborative nature of school profiling strengthens relationships between universities and schools, facilitating optimal settings for STs. As Darling-Hammond (2017) noted, collaboration between educational institutions significantly improves teacher preparation quality.

School Profiling

School profiling is a process used to gather detailed information about schools to inform student placement decisions in educational programs. School profiling is essential for effectively matching STs with suitable schools. The process begins before placements and relies on school managers, who provide crucial insights into resources, teaching staff qualifications and overall school readiness to host STs. An SP supervisor reported, "School managers provide information to the university through school profiling and that is when their roles start." This underscores the foundational role that school managers play in establishing supportive environments for STs. Moreover, school profiling aids in aligning STs' educational needs with school capacities. Another SP supervisor reported, "They are doing a good job, accepting students in schools; we need to appreciate the gesture." Such acknowledgment fosters goodwill and encourages ongoing collaboration, aligning with Cochran-Smith and Villegas (2015) about the benefits of recognizing school contributions to teacher education.

Despite the positives, challenges persist, such as school managers denying placements as one SP supervisor stated, "There are school managers who deny STs Placement, which is very unfortunate."

This resistance may arise from perceived unpreparedness or lack of commitment to collaborative training. One more SP supervisor highlighted the disconnection: "They behave as though they never went for SP, a sign of pride and evil acts." Addressing these challenges requires a deep understanding of the motivation and concerns of school managers, which involve open dialogue and targeted support that can mitigate feelings of inadequacy.

Initial Collaboration

Findings highlight the critical role of school managers in fostering collaboration with universities and facilitating STs' practical experiences. One respondent reported, "There is normally an informal understanding between the school and university to give them students for SP." These informal arrangements enable a seamless flow of students into schools, essential for professional development.

School managers also serve as intermediaries in advising STs on school selection and subject allocation. One of managers affirmed, "We are selective, first come, first serve. We first check subject combinations to see who can be accommodated." This proactive involvement promotes structured learning environments, in harmony with Wang et al. (2010) on the importance of strategic matching in teacher placements.

Orientation

The orientation support provided by school managers is crucial for integrating STs into the school community. A well-organized induction process equips STs with essential knowledge on school values and routines, reducing anxiety and fostering a sense of belonging. This aligns with existing literature that underscores the significance of robust support systems toward enhancing academic and professional success (Darling-Hammond, 2017).

While formal agreements between schools and universities are beneficial, the existing informal collaborations and orientation mechanisms are vital for ensuring that STs receive necessary guidance. Strengthening these support systems and fostering formal agreements could enhance educational outcomes and improve the relationship between universities and schools.

The study underscores pivotal roles that school managers and university SP supervisors play in

supporting STs during placements while identifying significant communication and collaboration gaps. Enhancing formal partnerships between universities and placement schools alongside addressing existing challenges is crucial. By improving these systems, educational institutions can better support STs' professional growth, ultimately improving quality of teacher education and outcomes for students

Load Distribution

School managers managed load distribution, including subject allocation and duty assignment in consultation with department heads. One SP supervisor, expressed, "The head teachers, deputy and DOS do a lot to make STs feel part of the community." STs were then referred to the heads of sections and heads of departments for further management, especially the allocation of teaching subjects. A school manager emphasized, "Basically when students come, they are introduced and handed over to the section heads, who allocate them load." STs were assigned teaching responsibilities and other duties. A school manager, mentioned, "The heads of department allocate them load, but it does not mean that the teacher from whom the load has been withdrawn keeps off, as they support, mentor and guide student teachers to manage teaching." This aligns with literature, which suggests that effective mentorship and clear communication among faculty members enhances professional development of novice teachers (Aglazor, 2017; Muzata, 2018).

However, challenges identified specifically unavailability of practicing teachers or experienced teachers in the school setting during SP reflect a significant gap in the support structure. A Student Teacher in the FGD1 reported, "The absence of experienced teachers limits valuable learning opportunities." This corresponds with research indicating that the lack of mentors hinders the development of teaching competencies in STs (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Mapolisa & Tshabalala 2014). Ensuring that practicing teachers are available to support STs during SP is essential for creating a learning environment conducive for mentorship and skill development.

Provision of Scholastic Materials

The role of school managers in providing scholastic materials, including customized schemes of work and lesson plans, is a crucial aspect of support system for STs. This provision addresses inadequacies often reported in university offerings,

as an SP supervisor noted "We have to be grateful... certain schools provide teaching materials to the students." Literature suggests that access to high-quality instructional materials significantly affect the teaching effectiveness and student learning outcomes (Hattie, 2009). Moreover, the emphasis on collaborative feedback between university supervisors and school managers, as expressed by students, highlights the need for a cohesive support system that values input from STs.

Frustrations voiced by students regarding conflicting educational materials imposed by SP supervisors than those provided by the university, leading to discomfort among students underscore the importance of alignment between university and school resources. One student expressed frustration in FGD2: "No, no, you should talk to me politely because those materials are provided by the university... in my heart, I was tortured." Research shows that mismatched expectations and support can lead to increased anxiety and dissatisfaction among STs (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Thus, it is imperative that school managers and university supervisors collaborate to ensure materials and feedback mechanisms are consistent.

Conducive School Environment

The creation of a conducive school environment, prioritizing STs' welfare through provisions of accommodation, meals and instructional materials, has been recognized as essential for effective teacher training. Literature suggests that a supportive physical and emotional environment significantly influences STs' overall well-being and ability to perform (Hirsch, 2014). Focusing on holistic needs of STs, school managers not only enhance school experience but also appreciating the teaching profession.

Student Welfare

The provision of accommodation, meals and allowances for extra work underscores commitment to enhancing student welfare. As a SP supervisor stated, "They devise means of helping students reside nearby to avoid any challenges... and instill confidence in the STs." This aligns with previous studies that reported positive impact of such provisions on student morale and academic performance (e. g. Smith et al., 2018). There was availability of balanced meals as noted by a student teacher in FGD1, "We were well fed and could enjoy all variety of food; beans are brought as a side dish." This reflects a holistic approach to student welfare

that acknowledges the importance of nutrition in educational settings (Jones & Taylor, 2020). However, challenges, such as budget constraints affect meal provisions and indicate disparities in resource allocation. Previous research reported that inconsistent support leads to dissatisfaction and disengagement among STs (Brown & Green, 2019).

The differences in the provision of allowances for extra work still illustrate inequities across schools. While some STs received compensation for additional responsibilities, others did not, as indicated by FGD2 information: "For us, there is no motivation in terms of allowance, when one does extra work, even the practicing teachers were ever complaining." This mirrors findings from Johnson (2021), who reported that inconsistent financial incentives leads to demotivation and burnout among educators, underscoring the need for equitable support systems.

Supervision

School managers' role in supervising STs, including checking lesson notes and observing classroom practices, reflects a commitment to quality education. A respondent's statement, "My role as DOS is to supervise them in classes; I normally follow up with whoever is teaching Mathematics or C.R.E," indicates a proactive approach to instructional leadership. This aligns with literature, emphasizing the importance of supervision in enhancing teaching quality (Chimhenga, 2017). However, there was stress associated with supervisory activities, as a school manager mentioned, "Sometimes when I go to sit in a class ...there is that bit of tension." This highlights potential barrier to effective teaching and learning. Previous research reported that the presence of supervisors can create anxiety among STs, potentially inhibiting the performance (Miller & Rouse, 2017).

The need for constructive feedback is another critical aspect of the supervisory role. A school manager's emphasis on providing guidance, "Sometimes I go to see how they teach and monitor what they are doing, and advise them when I identify a weakness on how to improve," reflects best practices in educational supervision. However, challenges in communication and feedback mechanisms, as articulated by the school managers, echo concerns raised by Lewis (2020), who argued that effective feedback is often hampered by rigid evaluation structures.

The concept of co-teaching, reported by respondents, reinforces the collaborative nature of effective teaching practices. The benefits of such collaborations have been documented extensively that STs gain significant insights from experienced teachers (Bacharach et al., 2010). However, lack of engagement from some practicing teachers, as a respondent mentioned, signifies a gap in the intended collaborative learning experience, corroborating findings from previous research (O'Neill & Lamb, 2022).

Mentorship, Guidance and Counseling

The role of school managers as mentors is crucial in facilitating STs' transition from theory to practice. A school manager's assertion, "I try as much as possible to make them like the profession because they cannot do well...hate profession," emphasizes the importance of fostering enthusiasm for teaching. This is consistent with previous research findings that highlight the role of mentorship in promoting passion, commitment and critical for new teachers' ongoing professional development, (Lofthouse, 2018).

However, challenges posed by lack of practicing teachers to guide classroom activities, as STs in FGD2 expressed, point to significant gaps. The frustrations articulated by STs, such as "Practicing teachers went on holiday while STs are on SP," highlight the need for a more reliable and consistent support framework. This concern is echoed in the literature, which reports that inadequate mentorship and supervision lead to increased stress and a sense of isolation among STs (Kagoda & Ssentongo 2015).

Timetable Harmonization

The findings related to timetable harmonization reveal challenges in coordinating supervision and practice for STs. One respondent's statement about the inconsistencies in supervisor schedules "Timetabling is a challenge because a supervisor can have one student to see on Monday while, say, the next, they have like six students" indicates need for better organization. This is consistent with previous research that emphasized importance of flexible scheduling to facilitate effective supervision and mentoring (Miller, 2018).

One respondent's comment about the role of school managers in building relationships between schools and universities reflects crucial aspects of successful teacher preparation programs. Effective collaboration between school and university

personnel is associated with enhanced learning experiences for STs (Darling-Hammond, 2006). However, findings suggest that this collaboration often occurs at an individual level rather than being institutionalized, which limits its effectiveness. Previous studies highlighted that systemic approach to collaboration yields better outcomes for STs (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2015).

The Role of University Supervisors

This section present the role university supervisors performed to support STs during the SP. The role of university supervisors is essential in shaping the professional development and success of future educators. Acting as a bridge between universities and schools, supervisors undertake various responsibilities. Understanding these dynamics is essential for optimizing the support provided by university supervisors to STs during SP.

School Mapping

School mapping is vital for placing STs in environments that promote professional growth. One of respondents reported that “The mapping ideally assists the university in determining school standards, facilities available and capacities in assessing STs sent for placement.” This highlights the need for thorough pre-placement evaluations. This aligns with literature, indicating that effective school mapping enhances placement decisions and students’ experiences (Glickman et al., 2014). However, lack of mapping in recent years due to budget constraints has created significant challenges. One of respondents reported, “I can guarantee there has been no mapping... The answer was no,” revealing a gap in university planning and collaboration. Insufficient planning often leads to mismatches between STs and their school environments, negatively affecting their development (Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Another respondent reported, “There is room for collaboration that is not being explored,” pointing out the necessity for more proactive engagement between universities and schools. The absence of mapping not only hinders initial collaboration but also diminishes the overall quality of placements. Research shows that robust partnerships between universities and schools improve ST learning outcomes and teaching effectiveness (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2015).

Communication and Introductory Letters

Issues with introductory letters for school placements have been identified. One of the respondents suggested that these letters need more detail, as effective communication is essential for establishing clear expectations. Research indicates that comprehensive communication significantly enhances ST’s placement experiences (Hobson et al., 2009). The correspondent stressed the importance of including specific contact details and expectations; without this clarity, school managers may struggle to support STs adequately. The formalization of school consent through signed introductory letters represents a procedural step in the placement process. Literature supports that transparent communication and well-defined roles are crucial in fostering productive partnerships between universities and schools (Wang et al., 2010).

Assessing Student Teachers

Supervisors assessed STs during placements to determine acquisition of essential skills, abilities and competencies. One of the respondents reported, “There are various issues to be corrected based on what we have taught.” SP supervisors work closely with school managers as they perform their supervisory and evaluative roles. An SP supervisor explained, “When we enter a school, we always start with the head teacher's office...and we ask them to give us feedback on how students perform within the schools.” This collaborative feedback mechanism is vital in identifying areas of improvement and ensuring that STs receive constructive guidance.

Supervisors offer continuous support to STs, allowing them to address mistakes and weaknesses identified during the assessments. One of respondents reported, “That is why we go back the following week to give them a second and third chance to see whether they can improve and we award marks that correspond to their performance.” This iterative approach to supervision aligns with Darling-Hammond (2017), who advocates for ongoing assessment and feedback as crucial components of effective teacher education.

However, some supervisors faced challenges in providing the required minimum of six visits, with one of the respondents noting,

I can guarantee there were a lot of challenges. We were expected to

supervise six times. I went to Arua and supervised students twice, but realistically, I only visited the school one day, which does not give the student enough time to understand and synthesize comments.

This inconsistency leaves a gap in the support provided by university supervisors, which can adversely affect the development of STs.

Some school managers felt that the supervision of STs at the university was superior to that of other institutions. One of them reported, "You have SP supervisors, external supervisors and school managers. I'm convinced that the STs are adequately supervised. The challenge with some institutions is having a supervisor come just once; if the ST makes a mistake in that lesson, they are graded based on that first error." This underscores the importance of regular and supportive evaluations, as highlighted by Glickman et al. (2014) that consistent and formative assessment is crucial for the professional growth of STs.

Mentorship and Professional Growth

University SP supervisors played a crucial role in nurturing the professional growth of STs through mentorship, guidance and counseling. They clarified expectations for SP and offered professional advice, particularly in lesson preparation, content delivery and understanding the secondary curriculum. One of respondents reported, "You start communicating with students before visiting them, creating rapport so that STs see you not as a threat but as a mentor who guides them to become better teachers." This approach resonates with findings from Darling-Hammond (2006) on the importance of building supportive relationships to enhance teacher development.

Another respondent added, "You interact with them, listen to their teaching, observe class management and content delivery, and identify areas for improvement... then you give them another chance." This iterative feedback mechanism aligns with research suggesting that continuous and constructive feedback is essential in improving the teaching practices (Wang et al., 2010). Student teachers reported, "Such guidance improves the quality of teaching. One ST reported, "We cannot do without them. After observing the lesson, she told me I was on the right path and shared expectations for further engagement. This encouragement made me happy."

However, tensions emerged when supervisors insisted on adherence to the old curriculum, conflicting with school expectations. One ST shared, "The supervisor insisted I follow the old curriculum. I could not openly disagree because I am a student and wanted to pass." This situation reflects a common issue identified in the literature, where conflicting expectations between university supervisors and school practices create confusion to STs (Muzata, 2018; Kagoda & Itaaga, 2013). Surprisingly, some SP supervisors directly approached classrooms without prior interaction with school managers. A school manager explained, "When SP supervisors come here, they arrive just in time for the lesson, and the ST goes with the supervisor to class." This lack of initial communication undermines collaborative relationships and leads to misunderstandings regarding expectations."

Supervisors also guide STs on using instructional materials effectively. One ST reported, "I was advised never to use my fingers to point at learners because that instills fear; instead, I should use a stick made of paper." This practical advice is essential in developing effective teaching strategies, reinforcing findings by Glickman et al. (2014), which advocates for hands-on mentoring that address practical teaching techniques.

Networking and Collaboration

Supervisors work closely with school managers to monitor and manage STs' progress, enhancing their professional and pedagogical development. One of the respondents reported, "There has to be a network between the university and the schools. Students must be sent to practicing schools and consistently supported throughout the practicum period." This aligns with the literature, suggesting that strong networks between universities and schools can significantly improve the outcomes of teacher training programs (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2015).

However, some supervisors fail to establish necessary connections prior to school visits, which can hinder the collaborative spirit essential for effective placements. Consistent with earlier research (Muzata, 2018; Kagoda & Itaaga, 2013), school managers supported STs in isolation from SP supervisors. While initial support is provided, school managers may withdraw as placements progress, leaving STs feeling isolated. This phenomenon reflects a disparity between theoretical support

frameworks and actual experiences of STs in the classroom (Abdullah & Fithriani, 2023). Moreover, the withdrawal of support aligns with findings by Muzata (2018) and Tuyizere (2017), which reported that practicing teachers often go on holiday during ST placements, further exacerbating STs' challenges. This absence significantly affects the STs' ability to navigate their teaching responsibilities, echoing concerns raised by Mapolisa and Tshabalala (2014) about the need for consistent support.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

The study concludes that school managers play a crucial role in ensuring a conducive learning environment and facilitating various logistical and emotional supports for student teachers. Their involvement, including placement support, mentorship and resources provision, is essential for student teachers to gain required experience. However, their engagement can be limited. University supervisors, on the other hand, are critical in guiding student teachers' professional growth through mentorship and assessment. While the university facilitates collaboration, this process often depends on personal characteristics of individual supervisors.

Recommendations

The study recommends that school managers should be involved in the grading process to formally recognize their contributions and increase their motivation. Additionally, fostering open dialogue between school managers and universities is essential in addressing placement concerns while providing ongoing professional development to better equip school managers to support STs. For university supervisors, formalizing partnerships with placement schools and establishing clear guidelines for their involvement in school practices will ensure sustainable collaboration. Supervisors should receive training to strengthen their mentorship so as to provide more structured support to student teachers.

Universities should establish a collaboration framework through regular meetings between school managers and university supervisors to improve communication, align expectations and streamline coordination. Involving school managers in the evaluation process of STs will provide a more comprehensive view of their development, enhancing motivation for further involvement. Furthermore, universities should revise introductory

letters to clarify expectations and responsibilities, alongside implementing strong feedback channels that address the concerns of STs.

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