

Practicum in Initial Teacher Education

ABSTRACT

Student teachers experiences of teaching practicum are crucial in determining the competencies acquired and the level of their readiness to qualify as competent teachers. Practicum is multifaceted as its effectiveness is a determinant of several factors of which inclusive are norms and standards that governs an acceptable school-based mentorship, assessment and that student teachers be attached to teaching schools as prescribed under the teaching schools – Universities partnerships practicum model. Utilizing a phenomenological case study design targeting 10 student teachers who had completed their teaching schools-based practicum after a 4 year of B Ed Foundation Phase Programme study, this study explored student teachers experiences of school-based mentorship and assessment. Qualitative data was collected through the biographical forms, semi structured interviews and from the evaluation of the teaching practicum portfolio and teaching practicum manuals for session 1 and 2 as being implemented by the Cape Peninsula University of Technology to practicum mentorship and assessment to substantiate the findings. Content and thematic analysis were used to identify themes and analyze data. A series of common problems have been identified based on the empirical, theoretical and policy findings with the existing practicum approach/model, school-based mentorship model and the assessment models and its impact in determining student teacher’s level of their readiness to teach.

Keywords: Experiences, Student teachers, Practicum, School based mentors, Mentorship, Assessment, Teacher Educators, Teaching schools

1. Introduction

Initial teacher education programmes are designed to provide the prospective teachers with the professional knowledge and skills which are relevant in supporting their effective teaching and learning, thereby enhancing outcomes for the children that they will teach in schools(Grudnoff& Williams,2010) in Aspden (2014:26). These programmes prepares the student teacher to enter the teaching profession as capable and competent teachers (Kane,2005). Cameron (2011) stipulates that, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in most initial teacher training systems globally retain responsibility for the provision and delivery of teacher training programmes. This is evidenced by high performing education systems of Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, Australia and Finland,

which have their teacher training programmes embedded in HEIs, patterns of higher-education learning and a school-based placement(practicum)is informed by the curriculum of the HEI.

Similarly, Higher Education Institutions in South Africa are charged with the responsibility of implementing the Initial Teacher Education Programmes based on the qualifications structure for teacher education as subjected to the Ministers policy on qualification in terms of the Higher Education Act, 1997. With reference to The National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa, (2006:14), the policy as expressed in the Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF), provides the basis for integrating all higher education qualifications into the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). This policy also highlights the significance of school-based workplace learning for initial teacher education with the assumption that student teachers will be well-supervised. The South African teacher education is regulated by the “Policy on the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications” (Department of Higher Education Training 2015).

Haigh & Ell (2014), McGee, Ferrier-Kerr & Miller (2001), Roberts & Graham (2008), perceives practicum as a period in which student teacher are assigned to the teaching schools for the purpose of developing their skills as a teacher, applying the knowledge gained in their coursework to the everyday context of teaching and learning. The student teachers are supported, guided and advised by experienced teachers into the teaching profession during this period and assessed on the level of acquired competencies relevant and in requirement to qualify them to teach.

School based teaching practicum experiences are compulsory for all registered students with the Cape Peninsula University of Technology undergoing the Initial Teacher Education Programme, for student teachers to qualify for practicum, they have first to complete a course of Teaching Experience. The teacher educators and school-based mentors are entrusted with roles of supervisor and evaluator respectively. It is expected therefore that these take charge in supervising and assessing them on the preparation of lesson plans, their skills in researching for their topics to teach, classroom management, time management, ability to relate well with fellow staff members, school management and ability to being innovative enough to develop their own education projects(Teaching Practicum Manual Sessions 1 and 2,2019:3). School based mentors and teacher educators works hand in hand in developing knowledge and skills required for a competent teacher to teach foundation phase classrooms. During practicum student teachers develops a portfolio of

events which includes a table of submission details for all forms, content page for teaching portfolio, lesson collection form, attendance and evaluation form for session one and two, general lesson plan format for grade R – 4, additional duties and school involvement, weekly summary of lessons taught for session 1 and 2, weekly assessment of teaching, on site teaching portfolio rubric for session 1 and 2, summative assessment rubric for session 1 and 2, final joint assessment rubric for session 2 and attendance register for both sessions(Teaching Practicum Manual Sessions 1 and 2,2019:12).

Practicum experiences are necessary for the development of student teacher's professional knowledge (Eraut, 1988, cited in Yan & He, 2009). One major role of practicum is transitioning of the student teachers from theoretical knowledge to practical experiences through the application of what they learnt in college to practicing in the actual classroom context within the school settings (Smith and Lev-Ari,2005, 291). Through the school attachment the expectation is that the student teachers develop to acquire the knowledge necessary for qualified educators through mastery of content knowledge for professional teachers (Shulman,1987). Ramsden (1992:12) further indicates the roles the experiences play in imparting soft skills of independent problem solving, building professional work relationships with staff members, developing professional values and attitudes in the student teachers. Notable in studies is that, practicum enables student teachers to acquire beginning teaching competencies and is a core component of the Initial Teacher Preparation programme. The purpose of the practicum is to help prepare student teachers for the realities of student teaching by providing them with a clear understanding of the contexts for schooling.

School based teaching practice exposes student teachers to the integration of theoretical and practical knowledge whilst widening their practical experiences. The programmes are designed in such a manner that student teachers observe a teacher's real work in a classroom setting and applies a well refined knowledge and skills acquired through coursework in the actual classroom setting (Hobson et al, 2006:100). With reference to (Murtiana:2007 2), the benefits of school-based practicum have been noted by several scholars. Hobson et al (2006), for instance, points out that school-based practicum allows student teachers access to authentic classroom, and helps student teachers to learn how to respond to a wide variety of situations which occur. Further to this, the school placement of student teachers will also enable them to enact the concepts they have learners

through their engagement with specific strategies (Rosaen & Florio-Ruane, (2008) in Grossman, (2009). School based practicum exposes student teachers to the integration of theoretical and practical knowledge whilst widening their practical experiences. Practicum is designed in such a manner that student teachers observe a teacher's real work in a classroom setting and applies a well refined knowledge and skills acquired through coursework in the actual classroom setting (Hobson et al, 2006:100).

During practicum student teachers are professionally judged on their current knowledge, skills, and practices by the school-based mentors and teacher educators offering them an opportunity for growth and development through the teaching practice in their journey entering the profession (Haigh& Ell,2014). With reference to Tillema, Smith & Lesham(2011), Considering the roles the school based mentors and teacher educators play in judging student teachers readiness to teach, discoverable is that assessment as employed in Initial teacher education programmes at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology has dual roles of formative and summative assessment. School based mentorship serves more on the role of formative assessment whilst summative assessment is left in the hands of the HEI's teacher educators who mostly joins the triad towards the end of the practicum for the final evaluation of the student teachers performance (Joughin,2009). The term assessment is contextual such that different scholars approaches and defines it differently. Joughin (2009:16) perceives assessment as a judgmental process of analyzing the student teachers' capabilities in a set of domains. These forms to assessment are differentiated by the intent and purposes they serve during practicum, usually considered as learning and judgement functions.

Roberts and Graham (2008) and Keesing-Styles (2003) acknowledges the role student teacher's involvement and participation in the early stages of practicum assessment process as it increases the preparedness for and ownership of the practicum experiences (Keesing-Styles,2003). Student teacher's involvement in generating the assessment criteria develops their competencies in identifying appropriate and relevant teaching practices and in making connections to their own professional practice. At the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, student teachers before they are deployed for their experiences, are advised through written communication on their roles during practicum of which one amongst is the development of the teaching portfolio which consists of their lessons and other relevant documents to assessment(Teaching Practicum Manual Sessions 1 and 2,2019:3-18). Furthermore, Lew, Alwis and Schmidt (2009:2), stipulates that, authentic

approaches typically call for greater participation of the student teacher in the assessment process. The expectation is that assessment criteria are more collaboratively determined, then student teachers will be more likely to engage in self-assessment in an ongoing, meaningful manner. The intent to authentic assessment is to encourage students to become involved more actively in monitoring and reviewing their own performance. Student teacher experiences of practicum assessment could not be concluded without their involvement, as these are the ones who possess a unique understanding of their own practice and has meaningful, contextually grounded and representative to the practice (Iverson, Lewis & Talbot,2008).

As stipulated in McLachlan, Flear & Edwards, (2013); Watson & Robbins (2008) formative assessment is enacted during mentorship as it is part of the student teachers' reflections processes through the guidance, support and advisory of the school-based mentors. This is an assessment for learning as it is usually applied when the student teachers are introduced to the teaching and learning processes within the classrooms setting. Contrary, summative assessment has a conclusive role of the triad evaluation relationship during practicum as it is usually enacted towards the end of the school experience also known as assessment of learning. A conclusive assessment is done through consensus of the whole 8-12 weeks school-based experiences formative assessment by school-based mentors' weekly evaluations of the student teachers' performance and the teacher educators' own assessment of the student performance.

Different institutions and programmes are reliable to the description of the practicum based on their choices on the models and approaches guiding the implementation of the component. Barrie (1999) states that the models and approaches to practicum are distinct based on the length and place overall in the programme. In some institutions and similarly with the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, the Practicum component to the Initial Teacher Education Programme is aligned with coursework in different ways, running parallel to teaching content, or as dedicated blocks of time. Whilst for some other programmes, practicum is the final component of a programme, such as an internship at the completion of a qualification. The NZTC (2013:13) states that, the expectation is that all practicum experiences are planned to the teacher education programmes taking into consideration their accreditation roles as Initial Teacher Education providers. Through practicum the student teachers gain insights through the guidance, support and advice of the school-based mentors on how to integrate theory and practice, plan, implement,

assess, evaluate and reflect on their teaching practices. They are positioned to analyze and interpret practices they observe in schools in relation to research, theories and other knowledge gained throughout the programme.

It is expected further that, student teachers reflect on their own learning and practice to develop personal and professional goals. Aspden(2014:42) indicates that, the intention to most teacher education providers is that the practicum be implemented through a partnership model where by the student teachers attachment to schools is supported by the school based mentors who are licensed for that role and the teacher educators who are charged with the role assessment as documented in the policy document for the programme. In respect to this, the Cape Peninsula University of Technology 4th year B Ed Foundation Phase student teachers were sent out to various teaching schools for their final practicum experiences under the Initial Teacher Education Programmes with the expectation that each one of them will be supported through school based mentorship and assessed by the teacher educators to determine their readiness to teach. In order to find out the student teachers experiences of school-based mentorship and assessment, the following aim and questions to the research study have been addressed.

Aim of the research study

The aim of the study was to explore student teachers' experiences of teaching practicum (TP) in an Initial Teacher Education programme through the following research questions.

- How do student teachers perceive the support provided by school-based mentors' during teaching practicum?
- How do student teachers perceive their teacher educators' assessment of their teaching practicum?

2. Research Methodology

Research Approach and Design

Creswell (2014:234) established that human and social problems are well defined and attached with meaning through a qualitative research. The study used constructivist approach to qualitative research. This is so because the researcher intended to find out fourth year student teachers experiences of teaching practicum in the B Ed Foundation Phase programme. The study targeted the subjective meanings which these student teachers made out of their experiences more

specifically in relationship to the support and guidance which they had received from mentorship and assessment from their teacher educators.

Participants of the Study

Participants to the research study were sampled through purposive and random sampling. Purposive samples are non-randomly selected based on the objective of the study and through their characteristics (Crossman,2007:58). The choice of the sample was based on the judgment that they were subjective to the issue under investigation. According to Bryman (2008:171) the simple random sampling procedures are probability samples having an equal probability of inclusion in the sample for each unit of under study. The study purposively selected student teachers who had completed their teaching practicum and specialized in the B Ed Foundation Phase Programme and were in their final year of study (Year 4). Even though random sampling is mainly used in quantitative sampling procedures, it is acceptable minimally to be used in qualitative research because it reduces biasness (Miles 2014:32). Using a list of the 4th Year B Ed Foundation Phase student teachers from the selected Higher Education institution of learning enrolled in the final year of the programme and were deployed for their teaching practicum experiences in teaching schools between July – September,2019; the researcher randomly selected Ten (10) student teachers. Each student teacher falling on the 5th number in a roll was be picked up for the study until they had accumulated the number ten.

Data Collection Tools

The study employed the semi - structured in-depth interviews in obtaining data from the research participants. Through the semi - structured interviews, the researcher engaged intensively with the student teachers so that room was given for reflection on their experience of assessment, support and guidance during the practicum by sharing their strengths, areas for development, outcome of summative assessment and what qualified them to pass the practicum and graduate (Boyce 2006:3). These included the 10 selected Student Teachers' from the selected HIE who were studying for the B Ed Foundation Phase Programme and had completed their teaching practicum. They were interviewed on two research question on their perceptions of mentorship and assessment by school-based mentors and teacher educators during teaching practicum respectively.

Data Collection Procedures

The researcher circulated a data base form where student teachers had to fill out their details considering that there were sitting for their final examinations and had to leave the institution very shortly so in case of not getting in touch with them physically a telephone interview or skype interview could be arranged for the interviews. In the second phase the 10 simple randomly selected student teachers from a population of a class of 4th year B Ed Foundation Phase Programme had to fill out the bio data forms and finally had to partake into the actual oral interviews which was roughly scheduled for 60 minutes. After each interviews the student teachers would either leave their practicum file with the researcher or bring at their convenient date based on where their practicum was for evaluation to substantiate the interviews and biographical findings.

Data Analysis

The study used content and thematic analysis methods of analyzing data from the semi - structured in-depth interviews conducted from Student Teachers'. Content analysis studies lived experiences, attitudes focusing among other things who said what, to whom, how and why (Babbie, 2007). In this case data collected from the population of study was transcribed and patterns of teacher practice experiences about support provided by mentors and teacher educators assessment were identified and analyzed. Through coding themes for analysis were generated, the setting was described, and people involved in the study. For content analysis, first, data were coded by dividing the text into small units and unitized until themes and relationships were identified. Verbal codes reflecting or illustrating the main findings from the interview discussions were presented. The generated themes form headings in the findings section of studies and are substantiated with scholar literature and any other relevant documents to the study (Creswell, 2014:198).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical consideration is key aspects of both quantitative & qualitative study. With reference to Bryman (2008:112), the researcher sought ethical consideration from the Cape Peninsula University of Technology to collect data from the student teachers University of study. Anonymity was maintained throughout the study with no use of names for each participant. The information collected meant thoroughly for this study and was kept privately. Confidentiality was maintained throughout and no adjustments was made by the researcher to the information collected. To make

sure that there is true representation and avoidance of misinformation, the researcher used the tape recorder to collect qualitative data.

Limitation to the study

Qualitative semi structured interviews study are complete with observations which are supported with the interviews as interpretations to relate with, however, this study had no opportunity to have an observation of the student teachers being assessed and mentored in the assigned teaching schools or themselves practicing the teaching. Observations could have assisted the researcher at drawing meanings to the experiences of the student teachers during practicum.

Based on the South African Schools Act (1996), Act 84 of 1996: No 36837. Notice 932 on conduct of teaching practicum here in South Africa, student teachers are supposed to be assigned to the designated schools which were identified as teaching schools based on both the nature of human and material resources within the schools, unfortunately a very few Public State Owned ordinary schools here in Cape Town are teaching schools based on the policy. This factor might have been a contributing factor to some of the issues surrounding school-based mentorship and assessment. These meant teacher educators traveling longer distances to reach out to the assessed student teachers, at times shifting lesson observation and evaluation time and even getting to the next student teachers lesson whilst tired. The other issue surrounding the experiences is that the nature of the schools had an influence on the composition of the mentors and their readiness to support, guide and advise the student teachers. These affected the experiences of the student teachers positively or negatively depending on the experience of the mentors supporting them and phase of specialization. With reference to the findings, hence a suggestion is made that there might be a need to apply this study with student teachers assigned to only the designated teaching schools to either object or approve if the policy has an impact on the professional growth and development of the student teachers if implemented in accordance with what constitute an acceptable teaching schools based experiences by the Department of Basic Education.

Considering the nature of qualitative studies the research concentrated on one institution of higher learning which offers the apprenticeship for the whole four years of programme study by combing theory and practicum, the nature of the population under study was homogeneous and making the selected sample comprising of only female student teachers. However, it would be applicable if

the model under study was applied on a heterogeneous population so that the sample could have a representation of male student teachers as well and with other student teachers with the practicum experience only once at the end of their four years of study. Alternatively, the study would be diverse if it could be conducted within the same institution targeting a sample from all the years of programme study to see if the model and methodology used in this study could bring variations.

3. Findings and Discussions

In this section, we discuss the findings of the study in reference to the research questions.

Findings from the Biographical Data

The 10 student teachers were selected to participate into this research study out of a 4th Year B Ed Foundation Phase classroom which comprised of all female student teachers. The whole classroom had an age range of 21 – 52 and out of the selected 10 student teachers to represent in the study, their ages ranged from 22 – 40. These were assigned to the teaching schools for their practicum experiences for a period of 8 – 12 weeks which they had completed upon the bio data information collection.

There were variations in the races of student teachers whom the biographical data had been collected from, as they were mixed with some being white, others colored and none of the black student teachers took part in the study as some chose to withdraw in the course of the data collection. However, nothing is clear whether their race had an influence on the choices of the teaching schools or their preferences neither the information which they had provided.

There was illogical order in the presentation of the course components which the student teachers had studied prior to their assignment into the teaching schools for the teaching practicum experiences and some of the student teachers did not state any courses but just indicated not applicable. Most of the courses mentioned were Mathematics in Education, Language in Education, Professional Practice, Grade R, and Education with a few some mentioning Education Psychology and Philosophy.

All the student teachers indicated to have their teaching practicum file available with them with an overall reflection of the overall activities. With reference to the student teacher's information in provision, the Teaching Practicum files also comprised of the nature of the teaching schools they

went, mentorship support, guidance information, and the teacher educator's assessment information. (Teaching Practicum Manual for Session 1 and 2, 2019: Foundation Phase Programme).

South African schools are categorized in as Public and Independent schools and others are farm owned schools. It is a requirement that all Public and Independent schools be accredited and should be governed by the Department of Education teaching and learning Norms and Standards (South African Schools Act 84 of 1996, 30 - 47). The student teachers did not experience the teaching practicum in schools of the same nature, there were variations with some having been assigned to state owned ordinary public schools by the University of the Programme under study, others opted for private primary schools and other participants went to Catholic schools. Due to poor planning, those student teachers who were not allocated to any teaching schools are those who opted for the schools of their choice such as Private and Catholics schools. Clear to this, is that the schools are not resourced the same in terms of capacities and materials because they are differently accredited and managed.

There were disparities in characteristic in terms of qualifications (B Ed's, Diplomas and Certificates), years of service (Experience), nature of appointment, areas of specialization (Field of specialization- Foundation Phase, Intermediate Phase and FET Phase) of the school based mentors as assigned by the teaching schools to mentor, support, guide and advise the student teachers during their practicum experiences. This would determine the nature and level of formative assessment, level of reflection on the practice, nature of feedback provided to the student teachers and even the kind of support, guidance and advice the school based mentors would provide to the student teacher based on experience on similar assignments in the previous years.

The whole B Ed Foundation Phase 4th Year of study student teachers had indicated to be in hold of the Teaching Practicum File also known as a Portfolio which usually consists of four sections labelled as Section A: General Information, Section B: Lesson Plans for session 1(reflections follow LP), Section C: Lesson Plans for session 2 and Section D: Additional information. However, out of the 10 student teachers specifically interviewed for this study, mentioned these three main components issues to have been central as per the focus of this research study, Reflection of overall activities, Mentor support and Guidance Information and Teacher Educators Assessment Information.

Most of the student teachers whom biographical data was collected from mentioned lesson plans, research in the topics taught, and CAPs as the existing documents available in their teaching practicum files. Each of the information collected in this section was clear that the student teachers were ready for change and had implemented advice provided by the teacher educators. One student had indicated having these in her practicum file; reflections, research that she had done prior to planning lessons, class list, summary of the school policy, own personal biography, assessments, Critiques and evaluation marks and feedback from my teacher.

Findings from the semi structured interviews and Teaching Practicum File Evaluation

Student teachers' experiences of support by mentors and their schools during their teaching practicum

Description of School Based Mentorship

With reference to this research study, when student teachers were asked to give encounters of the nature of their mentorship experiences notable were shared commonalities on the nature of the support, guidance and advisory which the selected 10 student teachers had experienced at the teaching schools during the teaching practicum. Most student teachers classified the mentorship experiences as induction, supervisory, reflective, developing, assessing, provision for the Independent Practice and an opportunity for team teaching. School based mentors have been identified as a significant factor in the outcome of any teacher training provision (Hobson et al., 2009). With teacher training becoming increasingly focused in schools, the role of the mentor and the nature of the mentoring they provide becomes a central element of the teacher training experience. Studies by the House of Commons, (2010b:243), shows correlations between the quality of mentoring and the quality of the new teachers, as the student teachers competence depends very much on their experience in partnership schools even the best Higher Education Institutions providers could not compensate fully for weaker input from schools.

Role of School Based Mentorship in bringing theory-practice

There description of the transition ranged from methodological development support, resources support, Information sharing or and knowledge development, Initiation to the school culture and its school environment to Modelling of best practices. The role of the school-based mentors can sometimes be vague and therefore, difficult because they are required to assist the student teachers

to bridge the gap between the practical teaching in the real classroom and the theoretical knowledge which they learnt at the HEI. The school-based mentors' functions as both a guide as well as a model (Yayli:2018). With the intent of assisting the student teachers bridge the theoretical knowledge to practice it is argued that the school-based mentors and teacher educators with the assistance of the teaching schools and universities plan for the student teachers experiences with clear links to the rest of the programme. Practical teaching experiences must provide evidence that the student teacher has been actively supported to integrate theory and practice throughout the programme (Aspden, 2014:6 – 7).

School Based Mentorship cultivated Competencies

The following came out of the student teachers as cultivated and focused competencies during school-based mentorship, Professionalism, lesson planning, positive attitude, takes initiative, work ethics, plans with understanding and focus, resources are developed, Active Learner Involvement, Class Management, Communications skills and administration and organization Skills. The responses given by the ten student teachers who were interviewed in this research, equates to the results of the research study which were conducted by Mapolisa (2013:128), on the school-based mentors understanding of their role areas. Their findings showed that school based mentors should develop student teachers to the abilities of maintaining order and discipline in class, time management, lesson planning and presentation, appropriate use of learning, teaching and Support Materials, understanding of curriculum policy documents, Classroom management, Curriculum planning and assessment, Instructional strategies, Understanding of cultural and racial differences of learners.

School Based Mentors – Student Teachers mentorship relationship

The relationship that existed between the student teachers and their mentors during teaching practicum comprised of feedback which was encompassed with critics and weekly evaluations evidenced from their responses during the interviews and an analysis of their teaching practicum files. Graham (2006) points out that there are two components, critical to the success of the teaching practice experience, namely: the mentor teachers who guide and support student teachers and the sites where the experiences occur (Maphalala,2013:123). The role of mentor teachers is crucial in the student teacher's growth and development. Mentor teachers as practicing professionals, are aware of current issues in education, and they are uniquely positioned to help student teachers navigate the demands of the practicum, particularly in matters of curriculum and

classroom management. Student teachers will look up to their mentors for support through a period that is frequently stressful both emotionally and physically (Handbook for PDPP 2010-2011).

School Based Mentorship Nature of Support and Guidance

Student teachers expressed satisfaction and dissatisfaction based on the kind of the support they had received from the school-based mentorship. The interactions which existed between the student teachers and their mentors were informing, academic and evaluative in nature. When asked the student teachers to describe the kind of the support, guidance and advisory which they had received during the teaching practicum, most student teachers mentioned that their interactions with mentors were based on professionalism, social and relational act, and moral grounds.

School Based Mentorship Challenges and Opportunities

Although on the onset of the interviews the responses were seemingly alluding to positive experiences of the practicum in the teaching schools, this section had revelations that most of the interviewed student teachers had problems with the mentorship aspect of the attachment and experiences. The responses expressed from the 10 student interviewed showed lack of expertise on the part of the mentors, inadequate experience to mentor the student teacher, lack of training on mentorship which according to information gathered was shown from the nature and manner in which the student teachers were handled during the experienced. Six student teachers' responses on their mentorship shows that they were mentored by different teaching phase tutors such as an intermediate phase teacher mentoring a foundation phase student teacher. Maphalala, (2013:127) argues that a mentor teacher must be a person who has accumulated a wealth of experience in the teaching profession. He should be knowledgeable and be specialist in their areas of specialization. They say that experience is the best teacher, but the second-best teacher is someone else's experience. The mentor therefore must be willing to share his or her experiences with the student teacher that he or she is mentoring" A good mentor is willing to teach what he/she knows and accept the mentee where they currently are in their professional development

The value of School Based Mentorship

When all the ten student teachers were asked to share the value of the school-based mentorship in the journey to become professionals most them mentioned these elements of improved classroom management skills, developed professionalism, planning skills, flexibility, instilling independent pupil learning. With reference to Cameron (2006:2) Studies of initial teacher training in England often show that mentoring is the most valuable element in the quality of teacher training

programmes (Hutchings et al., 2006a). A recent report into teacher training by the Select Committee of Children, Schools and Families made recommendations to address the ‘variable quality’ of mentoring: ‘There is a need to raise the status of school teachers who are involved in delivering initial teacher training in schools’ (House of Commons, 2010a:33). Recent Ofsted inspections of HEI teacher training providers, even those subsequently graded as ‘Outstanding’, nearly all observe that the mentoring, and the school-based elements of the programmes, could be improved, and generally that there is ‘more outstanding initial teacher education delivered by higher education-led partnerships than by school-centred initial teacher training partnerships and employment-based routes’(Ofsted, 2010).

Student teacher’s experiences of teacher educators’ assessment of their competences during teaching practicum

Teacher Educators – Student Teachers assistance in cultivating the assessed competencies

The student teachers had multiple and varying perceptions of the teacher educator’s assessment of their competencies during teaching practicum. The ten student teachers under this research study regarded the evaluators visits as room for reflection, grading, nurturing, support and an opportunity to critique their performance. Zeichner and Liston (1985), discovered that the need for student teacher’s reflection is recognized in the practicum component and other field-based activities of the Initial Teacher Education Programmes. Supervisors have expected standards and competences which the student teachers on practicum are supposed to meet when they visit them for assessment (Snow-Gerono,2008). They further do evaluate the student teacher’s performance in practice teaching situations and discusses their progress through provision of feedback to the institution of Higher Learning and to the student teachers themselves on their performance.

Mode of School Based Practicum Assessment

Most student teacher were assessed based on intervals as stipulated in the Teaching Practicum Manual for Session 1 and 2 (2019:1,9 17,18 and 19) although some of them also regarded the school-based mentorship evaluation as assessment(Formative Assessment) and would rate it as done on regular basis and others weekly basis. The student teacher were assessed based on the expected norms and standards as stipulated in the manual although not all educators had conformed to standards with some not abiding to the 48 hours rule notifications and some even observing the

student teachers lessons at the wrong time which affected the application of the practice skills to the classroom by the student teachers which are relevant and vital for evaluation.

School Based Practicum Assessment cultivated Competencies

These came out as the most areas of assessment by the teacher educators during the practicum assignment in the teaching schools, Preparation, time management, classroom management, dress code and Research on Topic of lesson. Different scholars have emphasized the role assessment plays in determining the student's teacher's readiness to teach and the achievement of the expected graduate standards. It is expected that practicum assessment therefore will possess elements of supportive guidance for the student teachers intertwined in judgements as to the achievement of the expected competencies (Aspden,2017:128).

Student Teachers – Teacher Educators Practicum Assessment relationship

As mentioned earlier, the effectiveness of practicum supervisors is classified into professional, personal, and procedural parameters, each of which focuses on several issues pertaining to the overall composition of that parameter. Different scholars have defined assessment in different ways, Joughin (2009:16) and Aspden (2014:40) referred to the process or the term assess as procedures of making judgement about the student teachers work through an analysis of what they are capable of in the assessed domain and thus what they know, value, or are capable of doing. Out of the ten student teachers interviewed for this research study described the relationship which they had with their school-based mentors as professional, assessing, mentoring, supporting relationships, resolving conflict, affirming practice and providing feedback to facilitate their professional growth.

Nature of Support and Guidance in School Based Practicum Assessment

Student teachers mentioned several areas as of focus by the teacher educator's assessment of their lesson performance during practicum. Student teachers when interviewed mentioned that planning skills, research skills and practice skills were the most developed competencies during assessment. From their practicum biographical data collected the most mentioned developed competencies were that of time management, classroom management, research on different content areas and learner involvement. Construction of portfolios have recently gained attention as a tool to promote reflection among student teachers (Borko, Michalec, Timmons & Siddle, 1997). Therefore, with all other classroom and outside classroom activities, emphasis on the students constructing an

educational portfolio (Thomas,2007a). Whilst from the evaluation of the teaching practicum, it was evidenced on the outline of the fore front page as it contained sections on lesson Plans for session 1 and 2, with general information on Weekly summary of lessons taught, Class timetable, Class list of learners, School policy, Form and notes from planning sessions, information on the lesson content which included subjects such as Home Language with the Situation analysis & Lesson plans, Mathematics and Life skills, information on Research into topics and CAPS Documentation.

School Based Practicum Assessment Challenges and Opportunities

Opportunities resulting from the assessment

When student teachers were asked to mention the opportunities which they had gained from the practicum assessment, they mentioned knowledge on how to Improve on lesson presentation delivery, classroom management. The student teachers considered the evaluation visits as opportunities for them to conversant with the teacher educators on substantial issues pertain to improvements in their levels of competencies. The student teachers considered the evaluation visits as opportunities for them to conversant with the teacher educators on substantial issues pertaining to the improvements of their practices and levels of competencies. With reference to Tisher in Atputhasamy (2005), practical experiences of expert teachers who observe student teachers' lessons, receiving feedback and practicing various teaching strategies during the school experience are the most important factors in student teacher's professional growth and development

Challenges encountered from the assessment

With reference to the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, student teachers mentioned the following as some of the challenges which had affected their performance, inadequate school evaluation visits and lesson observation, poor timing of teacher Educators evaluation of student teachers' lessons, inconsistency on how the student teachers are evaluated on their practicum, lack of uniformity in the assessment processes were amongst some of the factors which affected the student teachers evaluation of their practicum assessment by the teacher educators. Haigh & Ell (2014) in their study realizes the need for transparency and understanding in relation to the purpose and practice of practicum assessment, taking into consideration the problematic nature of practicum, unfairness and inappropriateness towards the student teachers. Evaluators had problems in meeting up to the expectations of the timing rules and regulations for visiting the classes of the

student teachers for assessment which affected the classroom management of the student teacher. Haigh (2001), Ortlipp, (2003;2006), and Hawe (2002) attributed the problems to the assessment of practice as related to bias, reliability and consistency. They further emphasizes on the need for Higher Education Institutions and Teaching Schools to addressed and resolved the problems if the integrity of the assessment system and the qualification awarded are to be protected, and if the public is to have confidence in teacher educators as the gatekeepers to an initial teaching position” (Hawe,2001:19).

The value of School Based Practicum Assessment

Student teachers viewed an assessment as an Opportunity to question Evaluators on Conflicting realities between Theoretical Training at Higher Education Institutions to Practical Knowledge in Teaching Schools and a reflection on Knowledge and Skills gained from 1st Year to 4th Year Practicum Experiences, develops Student Teachers as Future Teachers ready to handle difficult situations and informs you of loopholes in your own classroom and teaching practice. Clarke and Collins, (2007:171) contends that assessment is a core component of the school-based attachment used to determine the level of progress of the student teachers need for support, guidance and their readiness to qualify as competent teachers.

Findings from the Foundation Phase Teaching Practicum Handbook and Teaching Practicum Files

The document reviews were designed to identify the perceptions of student teachers on teacher educator’s assessment during teaching practicum, exploring how student teachers are supported by experienced school-based mentors and teaching schools during teaching practicum. The researcher targeted the Teaching Practicum Portfolios and Teaching Practicum Manual for Sessions 1 and 2. In summary there were correlation in how the student teachers portfolios were developed in relationships to the requirements of the Teaching Practicum Manuals for the Sessions 1 and 2 Foundation Phase Programme for the year 2019. The only problem is that some student teachers did not develop their portfolios with all the required documentation sections filled, whilst other school based mentors did not fill out all the required roles sections as desired and these might have had an impact on the way the teacher educators viewed and assessed the files to reach the student teachers final grade. The analysis of the existing data shows that trends are clear that

teacher education programmes that facilitate school based mentorship practicum model and assessment model with a rigorous teaching practicum component such as school based teaching practicum have played a significant role in enhancing student teachers' professional growth and development of teaching skills.

Implications to the study

With reference to the outcome of this research study, although there are variations in the feedback provided by the student teachers basing on their reflections on their experiences during teaching practicum, that of the teacher educators assessment and that of their school based mentors, support, guidance and advisory roles, there is likely hood that the student teachers might be positioned to the incorrect experiences with reference to the policies which governs the teaching practicum component of the initial teacher education.

In terms of the National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa(2007)student teachers have to be placed in schools which have been identified as excellent places of teaching and learning, where student teachers will be able to complement their theoretical training experience, and gain valuable experience, of day-to-day operations within a school and an authentic teaching and learning situation. Students select three schools in which to do teaching practice as with reference to the University of South Africa, then it is the responsibility of the Initial Teacher Education provider to choose one school from the students' selection in which the student will be placed. Students are placed in appropriate schools, which offer subjects in their fields of study (Maphalala,2013:124). However, as evidenced under The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996: No 36837. Notice 932 of 2013, 12 September,2013 in Loock and Gravett (2014:119), the student teachers need to be deployed to teaching schools which are within the established radius of the University-Teaching Schools partnership and Department of Basic Education policy as regard to practicum which was also not the case with the Cape Peninsula University of Technology student teachers.

There are cases within the study sample where student teachers excelled well in their practicum experiences, yet their practicum file documentation lacked some relevant information from the school based mentors which is arguable as the possibility might be that the social and relational atmosphere which they had brought with the school based mentors built a string foundation for her assessment and further influenced the way the teacher educators had perceived her whole

performance. But with reference to documentation of teaching practicum worldwide and even here in South Africa, a student teacher is not allowed to specifically choose an exact school where to experience the practicum and this information is missing in the Teaching Practicum Manual for CPUT's Foundation Phase Programme. The policy that the choices of teaching for practicum be for the Initial Teacher Education providers is based on a number of factors such as to avoid bias issues as some might choose schools where they are likely to get favors which might affect their performance, issues of the experienced and specialist school based mentors identification also influences how the HEI's allocate the student to schools, inclusive being that not all Independent schools nor Ordinary State Owned Public Schools are Teaching Schools and might not harbor the relevant resources for the experiences and others might not be within reach.

Arguable further is that most of student teachers experiences might be subjected to the level of their own expectations and might be against the practicum policies or else in line with the policies based on how the school based mentors supported, guided and advised them as well as on how they were assessed by the educators. The student teachers were not concerned with the phase specialties of the mentors but were concerned with the actions of such mentor as they could not meet the needs to their expectation which shows lack of knowledge on the part of the student teachers of what a Foundation Phase School Based Mentors should possess, what is expected of the right schools for teaching practicum, right mentorship and right assessment but knowledgeable of what they are expected to learn as they enter into the experiences with preconceived ideas of which some might be true and others not true.

It is there justifiable to indicate that it is true to a certain extent that, although the higher education institutions seem to be doing well in theoretical training, they do not impart the same teaching skills which were there in the teacher colleges.

4. Conclusions and Implications

Based on the research findings is undeniable that the current teaching practicum model implemented by the selected higher education institution is faced with challenges in meeting the expected school-based support, guidance and advisory roles as well as in yielding quality assessment results and more importantly producing the expected quality competent teachers. The study has identified multiple problems associated with the way the existing practicum approach is being applied to the programme. Most of the student teachers interviewed and information sought

from the bio data forms discovered lack of time for mentor teachers to meet and work with the teacher educators which they felt had also an impact on their assessment and final teaching practicum grade although some expresses satisfaction having a holist mentorship support from their school based mentors with others indicating the struggles which they had in getting the right mentors and the mentorship support, guidance and advice. Notable further from the student teachers responses was a concern that the teacher educators did not supervise them adequately to make a well informed final decisions on their performance because they dedicated little time for practicum supervision based on the allocation by their school and the higher education institution as well. Some teacher educators had multiple numbers of student teachers to be supervised due to limited subject specialists available in the Higher Education Institution under study. As regard to mentorship most student teachers showed inadequate capacity on professional development issues as a result of insufficient modelling of quality teaching practices in the phase of specialization and introduction to the school culture as well. The results to this study has discovered gaps in knowledge of the school based mentors of what is expected of them per the responses from the student teachers which in a way impacted negatively the how they were clarified of the placement experiences in schools and how they were assisted in connecting their theoretical knowledge to practice in the classrooms. The major concerns from almost all the student teachers was in relationship to how they were assessed, most of them expressed dissatisfaction arguing that there inconsistencies in the nature the assigned assessors and school based mentors assessed them on their performance which relates in a way if indeed these had proper guidelines for the whole exercise.

Recommendations

Based on the results of this research study, the Cape Peninsula University of Technology - Initial Teacher Education Programmes requires to work on improving the way they are implementing the practicum model through an improved school-based mentorship program model and improved assessment model implementation. This research study would be further complete through collection of data from multiple sources involved in the practicum and use of improved multiple research methodologies. The HEI under study need to improve its partnerships with the Teaching Schools by ensuring that their relationships move from a simple school-based mentor – teacher educator relationship to working at macro level as institutions. The formative and summative

assessment relationships need to be reworked in order to improve the teaching practicum file mentorship and assessment reflection from the school-based mentors, teacher educators and student teachers (Triad Work Relationship) as a basis for authentic assessment processes.

Acknowledgements

This article was extracted from the Master's Degree Thesis supervised and developed with the assistance and support of Prof Yusuf Sayed and Dr Zahraa MacDonald.

REFERENCES

Ashby, P. Hobson, A. Tracey, L. Malderez, A. Tomlinson, P. Roper T. Chambers, G. and Healy, J 2008 *Beginner teacher's experiences of initial teacher preparation, induction and early professional development: A review of literature*. London: DCSF

Aspden, K.M. 2014. Illuminating the assessment of practicum in New Zealand early childhood initial teacher education (Unpublished doctoral thesis). Retrieved from <http://mro.massey.ac.nz/handle/10179/6473>.

Aspden, K. M. 2017. The Complexity of Practicum Assessment in Teacher Education: An Examination of Four New Zealand Case Studies. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 42(12). <http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2017v42n12.8>

Atputhasamy, L. 2005. Cooperating Teachers as School Based Teacher Educators: Student Teachers' Expectations. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 30(2). <http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2005v30n2.1>

Babbie, E 2003, *The Practice of social Research*. (10th Edition): Wadsworth Pub Co.

Beck, C. and Kosnik, C., 2000. Associate teachers in pre-service education: clarifying and enhancing their role. *Journal of education for teaching: international research and pedagogy*, 26 (3), 207–224.

Boyce, C 2006, *Conducting In-depth interviews: A Guide for Designing and Conducting In-Depth Interviews for Evaluation Input*: Pathfinder International.

Bryman, A. 2008 *Social Research Methods*. (3rd Edition) Oxford University Press

Cohen, E, Hozb, R and Kaplana, H 2012 *The practicum in preservice teacher education: a review of empirical studies*. Department of Special Education, Kaye College, Beer-Sheva, Israel; Department of Education, Ben-Gurion University, Beer-Sheva, Israel.

Craig, C. 2016. “The Structure of Teacher Education.” In *International Handbook of Teacher Education*, edited by J. Loughran and M. L. Hamilton Dordrecht: Springer Press

Creswell J.W 2014 *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and mixed Methods Approaches*. (4th Ed) UK, CPI Group

Crossman, A. 2017. *Understanding Purposive Sampling*. [Online] Thought Co. Available at: <https://www.thoughtco.com/purposive-sampling-3026727> [Accessed 30 Jun. 2017].

Council on Higher Education 2010 *National Review of Teacher Education Qualifications*. Pretoria: Higher Education Quality Committee.

Department of Education 2000a *Norms and Standards for Educators*. February. Pretoria: Department of Education.

Department of Education 2000b *Criteria for the Recognition and Evaluation of Qualifications for Employment in Education, based on the Norms and Standards for Educators*. September. Pretoria: Department of Education.

Department of Education 2007a *The Higher Education Qualifications Framework*. October. Pretoria: Department of Education.

Department of Higher Education and Training 2012 *The Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework*, as revised, Government Gazette No 36003

Department of Education 2007b *National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development*. April. Pretoria: Department of Education.

Department of Basic education and Higher and Training. 2011. *Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and development in South Africa, 2011-2015*. DBE/DHET: Pretoria.

Department of Higher Education and Training.2015a *Relationship between Teacher Supply and Demand and the size, shape, and substance of teacher education in South Africa*. Internal Report.

Department of Basic education and Higher and Training. 2011. *Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and development in South Africa, 2011-2015*. DBE/DHET: Pretoria.

Department of Higher education and Training.2015a *Relationship between Teacher Supply and Demand and the size, shape, and substance of teacher education in South Africa*. Internal Report.

Department of Higher Education and Training. 2015b. *Revised Policy on the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education qualifications*. Government Gazette, 596(38487), 19 February 2015. Pretoria. Government Printers.

Goodnough, K., Osmond, P., Dibbon, D., Glassman, M., & Stevens, K. 2009. Exploring a triad model of student teaching: Pre-service teacher and cooperating teacher perceptions. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 25(2), 285-296. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2008.10.003>

Grudnoff, L., & Williams, R. 2010. Pushing boundaries: *Reworking university-school practicum relationships*. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, 45(2), 3345.

Haigh, M. 2001. Coherence and congruence of perceived roles within practicum partnerships - a case study. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the New Zealand Association of Research in Education, Christchurch, New Zealand

Haigh, M., & Ell, F. 2014. Consensus and dissensus in mentor teachers' judgments of readiness to teach. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 40, 10-21. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2014.01.001>

Haigh, M., & Ward, G. 2004. Problematizing practicum relationships: Questioning the 'taken for granted'. *Australian Journal of Education*, 48(2), 134-148. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000494410404800204>

Hawe, E. (2002). Assessment in a pre-service teacher education programme: The rhetoric and the practice of standards-based assessment. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 30, 93-106. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13598660120115002>

Loock, C. & Gravett, S. 2014) Towards a governance and management model for teaching schools in South Africa. University of Johannesburg. *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 4(3) 174-191 ISSN: 2223-7674 |© UJ

Miles M.B. Huberman A.M, Saldana J 2014 *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*. (3rd Ed) SAGE Publications, Inc. 2455 teller Road. Thousand Oaks, California 91320

Murtiana, R 2013 *Optimizing teaching practicum as a means for student teachers to become reflective practitioners and decision makers*. The 60th TEFLIN International Conference Proceedings 2(3) 374-382.

Ortlipp, M. (2003). Assessment of the early childhood practicum: what can we learn from tertiary supervisors' silences? *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 28(4), 29-33.

Pajak, E., 2001. Clinical supervision in a standards-based environment: opportunities and challenges. *Journal of teacher education*, 52 (3), 233–243.

Roberts, J., & Graham, S. 2008. Agency and conformity in school-based teacher training. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 24(6), 1401-1412. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2008.01.003>

Author

Fanny Nombulelo Agnes Malikebu is currently a research student with the Centre for International Teacher Education, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, South Africa under the Initial Teacher Education Programme Project. Her research interests are Geography, Social and Development Studies, Home economics, Initial Teacher Education, Equality, Social Justice & Inclusion, Education Planning, Education Policy, Education Economics, Education Leadership, Education Programme Design and Management, Education Monitoring and Evaluation, Early Childhood Education, Gender & HIV/AIDS, Globalization and Migration and Micro Finance.