

Student Teachers' Experiences of Mentorship during Teaching Practice in Tanzania

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Abstract

This study explores student teachers' mentorship experiences during teaching practice in Tanzania. The study employed a case study design and collected data from 22 student teachers using focus group discussions. Data are analysed thematically. Results indicate that all sampled student teachers were attached to teacher-mentors, and the majority received support and mentorship. The mentorship received improved student teachers' tolerance, confidence, and flexibility in the actual teaching environment. Nevertheless, some student teachers received superficial or no mentorship because teacher-mentors were absent or uninterested in doing so. Few student teachers reported being overwhelmed by the teaching workload. These findings are discussed, and suggestions for improvement are offered.

Keywords: *Mentorship, student teachers, teacher-mentors, teaching practice, Tanzania*

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Introduction

Mentorship is recognised as a crucial aspect of teacher preparation. It is defined as “a process in which one person, usually of superior rank and outstanding achievement, guides the development of an entry-level individual” (Savage et al., 2004, p. 21). In addition, the mentor should be a person with relevant skills, competencies, and experiences in the field in which they provide mentorship. Through mentorship or induction programmes, student teachers are oriented in the actual teaching environment. As such, mentorship programmes help student teachers function success-

fully in the teaching profession. Studies have pointed out that mentorship programmes improve student teachers' motivation in the profession (Lin et al., 2019), improve student teachers' cooperation with others (Eisenschmidt & Oder, 2018), and strengthen student teachers' confidence and self-control (Vumilia & Semali, 2016). In addition, mentorship programmes bridge the transition from pre-service to in-service teaching (Hellsten et al., 2009). Generally, mentorship programmes have been instrumental in providing student teachers with functional skills for good practices and a sense of being integrated into the teaching profession (Savage et al., 2004). Thus, these point to the significance of mentorship programmes during the preparation of teachers for being quality teachers in the teaching profession.

Teachers Preparation and Teaching Practice in Tanzania

It has been pointed out that the development of any nation depends on the quality of its teachers (Mgaiwa, 2018), and the quality of these teachers depends much on how they are prepared. This means that teacher preparation is central to the quality of teachers and the teaching profession. The quality of teachers and the teaching profession have a crucial contribution to the quality of education. Notably, quality education is the pillar of the development of the nation in general (Sanga, 2016). Therefore, in order to get quality teachers, the preparation of teachers requires rigorous investment in both theoretical and practical training. In Tanzania, teacher preparation is done at Teacher Colleges for certificate and diploma-level teachers and at some universities for undergraduate and/or postgraduate-level teachers (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1995). Teacher preparation programmes in Tanzania, leading to either a certificate or diploma, span two years, while those pursuing undergraduate degree in teaching undergo a three-year programme. In all these levels of teacher preparation, there is an investment in theoretical and practical training. The theoretical training is done at the teacher training institution, where the student teacher is trained on the teaching subjects and pedagogical contents throughout the teacher preparation programme. In addition, the student teacher is introduced to other professional courses such as educational psychology, foundations of education, philosophy of education, and curriculum and teaching. On the other hand, practical training is done at teaching practice centres, mainly schools or colleges, where student teachers are placed for teaching practice to experience actual student teaching in the classrooms.

Teaching practice refers to a range of experiences to which student teachers are exposed when working in actual teaching environments (Marais & Meier, 2004). In Tanzania, teaching practice is one of the integral parts of teacher preparation programmes without which no student teacher at any level of teacher preparation can graduate with a teaching certificate, diploma, or degree. In other words, teaching

practice is a requirement in which a student-teacher spends several weeks at a teaching practice centre to practise teaching students in the classroom. However, the number of weeks that student teachers spend at teaching practice centres depends on the level of the teacher preparation programme (Komba & Kira, 2013) and the institution offering such a programme (Vumilia & Semali, 2016). As an illustrative example, at the University of Dar es Salaam, student teachers engage in eight weeks of teaching practice during their first and second years of study, typically scheduled during the extended vacation following the end of the second semester (University of Dar es Salaam, 2020). In contrast, at Mwenge Catholic University, teaching practice follows a block system lasting for five weeks and is undertaken three times (Okendo, 2018). Other higher learning institutions may have different arrangements for teaching practice to fit their contexts.

Since teacher preparation has been recognised as a field-based phenomenon (Orland-Barak & Wang, 2021), teaching practice fulfils this by acquainting student teachers with the actual teaching environment (Kiggundu & Nayimuli, 2009; Namamba & Rao, 2017). During teaching practice, student teachers perform instructional skills such as lesson planning, student teaching, and clarity of instruction (Mok & Staub, 2021) through the support they receive from experienced teachers and supervisors (Vumilia & Semali, 2016). By the end of the teaching practice, all student teachers receive summative assessments from their supervisors. For instance, student teachers from the University of Dar es Salaam receive two kinds of assessments. First is the classroom assessment, which is a kind of summative assessment intended to assess the student teachers' ability to teach in the classroom. This is usually done by the teaching practice supervisors from the university. Second, institutional assessment, which is mostly done by the head of the teaching practice centres or any other designated staff at the teaching practice centres, is a kind of assessment that is intended to assess other traits of the student teacher apart from the classroom teaching, such as personality.

Explanations of Mentorship during Teaching Practice

In this study, we adopted 'Wenger's theory of Communities of Practice', which suggests that most of the learning for practitioners occurs in social relationships at the workplace rather than in a classroom setting, a concept known as 'situated learning' (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Developed as a learning theory, Communities of Practice promote self-empowerment and professional development (Li et al., 2009). The theory assumes that groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly and that engagement in social practice is the fundamental process by which they learn and so become who they are (Wenger, 1998). As such, throughout the teacher preparation history in Tanzania, student teachers have been placed in different teaching practice centres to interact with

experienced teachers and the actual teaching environment so that they can practise student teaching (Vumilia & Semali, 2016). According to Communities of Practice, the success of this process depends on whether the basic dimensions—the domain, the community, and the practice—are strong and well-emphasised (Snyder & Wenger, 2010) during the teaching practice placement.

Briefly, the *domain* refers to what the group specifically focuses on (e.g., the teaching), and that forms the identity of the group. Members of the group should have passion for such a domain. The *community* denotes the community itself and the quality of relationships that bind the group, while the *practice* includes the sharing and developing knowledge of practitioners in its domain (Snyder & Wenger, 2010). So, the teaching practice process should take into account these dimensions for its success. According to the Communities of Practice, the emphasis is placed on the informal interactions that exist when individuals (i.e., student teachers and teacher-mentors) are pursuing shared enterprises over time (Wenger, 1998) but do not intend to replace the formal structures rather than ensure learning and innovation activities occur in formal structural boundaries (Snyder & Wenger, 2010).

During teaching practice, student teachers are attached to experienced teachers as their teacher-mentors for support and mentorship. These student teachers learn by observing and modelling (Bandura, 1977; Li et al., 2009) the teacher-mentors to whom they are attached. Ideally, the teacher-mentors provide support to student teachers in the domain of practice—teaching especially the same subjects they teach (Hellsten et al., 2009). The mentorship should be task-oriented through which the teacher-mentors provide support and, at the same time, assess the performance of student teachers on behalf of the student teachers' university (Vumilia & Semali, 2016). Similarly, supervisors from the university where the student teacher is studying play another crucial mentorship role to student teachers during their teaching practice visits (Hardman et al., 2012). During their supervision visits, supervisors assess the student teachers' progress in teaching and provide them with feedback on how they progress in the teaching. These are formal arrangements and interactions that help student teachers accomplish the planned teaching practice exercise in a specified time.

Notably, the teaching practice centres have been central to the mentoring process for student teachers in Tanzania (Nzilano, 2013), as student teachers are attached to practising teachers for mentorship during teaching practice. This is intended to provide an avenue for student teachers to interact both formally and informally with experienced or practising teachers in the field. However, study findings have indicated that mentorship is not a popular practice in Tanzania (Namamba & Rao, 2017). This has been associated with a variety of factors such as: First, according to Hardman et al. (2012), teaching practice centres in Tanzania lack trained and school-based teacher-

mentors. As such, student teachers during teaching practice in Tanzania can be attached to any practising teacher who is teaching the same teaching subject as the student teacher. Second, Mgaiwa (2018) pointed out that teaching practice in Tanzania lacks a formal system for mentoring student teachers during teaching practice. This has resulted in unregulated, not coordinated, and unsystematically monitored mentorship during teaching practice.

Further, the lack of interest of teacher-mentors to support or mentor student teachers during teaching practice has been a barrier to the mentoring process. Studies have noted that, in many teaching practice centres, student teachers are left alone, struggling to survive in the actual teaching environment (Hardman et al., 2012). The majority of practising teachers in Tanzania tend to leave the student teachers to enter classrooms alone to teach (Mtika, 2008). The teaching practice supervisors' visits tend to be "badly timed, rushed, irregular, and mostly orientated to the assessment of teaching using a summative numerical score", whereas the "formative feedback geared to the student's own development needs appeared to be absent" (Hardman et al., 2012, p. 832). These factors may indicate that student teachers in Tanzania do not receive the required mentorship during the teaching practice.

The Present Study

In this study, we explore the mentorship experiences of student teachers during teaching practice in Tanzania. We are cognisant that the roles and values of mentorship have been widely researched in different professions (Collins, 1994). However, in the Tanzanian context, student teachers' experience of mentorship during teaching practice is not regularly examined. As such, there is scantiness of information regarding student teachers' experiences of mentorship, especially during teaching practice. Therefore, in this present study, we addressed this informational gap with three research questions:

1. What were the supports available in teaching practice centres to assist student teachers in Tanzania during their teaching practice?
2. What mentorship challenges did student teachers in Tanzania face in teaching practice centres during their teaching practice?
3. What roles did mentorship play in improving teaching and integrating student teachers into the teaching profession in Tanzania?

Methods

Research design, sample and sampling procedures

This study was a qualitative case study of three teaching practice centres that involved a convenience sample (Wellington, 2015) of 22 (11 females and 11 males) undergraduate student teachers during teaching practice in 2020. Of these student-

teachers, 11 were doing teaching practice for the first time, and the other 11 student teachers were doing teaching practice for the second time. The inclusion of both student teachers who were doing teaching practice for the first and second time was to bring in a mix of experiences. This was thought valuable for understanding mentorship during teaching practice in Tanzania. We adopted a case study as an appropriate design for this study because we intended to provide detailed descriptions and accounts (Christensen et al., 2015) of mentorship experiences among student teachers during teaching practice. When we visited the teaching practice centres, we asked all student teachers present at the centres to participate in our study, and they all agreed.

Data collection

The data were collected using focus group discussions. As Christensen et al. (2015) stated, a focus group comprises a small and homogeneous group that focuses on the discussion of a research topic or issue. Thus, we formed five focus groups that comprised 3 to 7 participants each. Depending on the available student teachers at the teaching practice centres, in two schools, we had two focus groups each, while in one school, we had one focus group. We explored their experiences of mentorship through discussions, which were moderated by the researcher for each focus group. These discussions allowed these student teachers to compare their mentorship experiences among themselves. The exchange in the groups provided valuable insights and rich data to answer the research questions. The language for the discussions was Kiswahili. All the discussions were tape-recorded with the participants' consent. During data collection, we spent an average time of 54 minutes for each focus group.

Data analysis

The data were analysed following Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2013) proposals for thematic analysis. Thematic analysis takes the theme as its unit of analysis and looks across data from many different sources to identify themes (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Data analysis using thematic analysis involves familiarisation and data coding, identifying patterns across data, and analysing and interpreting patterns across data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2013). The researchers familiarised themselves with the data by studying the tape-recorded voices thoroughly, transcribing them in Kiswahili, and then translating the quoted voices verbatim into English. Subsequently, the researchers generated codes from the transcripts, identified common experiences, and clustered them into themes. The researchers then reviewed and defined the themes for the final presentation. In all the processes, the researchers refrained from personal biases and instead allowed the themes to emerge from the data (Saldaña, 2009) and then aligned them with the research questions. Finally, researchers organised the themes based on the research questions and all the quoted voices were validated for consistency and grammar by a language expert proficient in Kiswahili and English.

Ethics and procedures

The University of Dar es Salaam approved the current study and introduced the researchers to regional, district, and college or school authorities for permit and authorisation of data collection. During data collection, all student teachers were orally informed of the study's purpose as well as the risks and benefits of their participation in the study. Lastly, they were requested for their consent to participate. All student teachers in the chosen teaching practice centres gave oral consent to participate in the study. We assured our participants of the priority we gave to confidentiality, non-traceability, and privacy of data to ensure that their rights and dignity are protected.

Results and Discussion

In this section, we described the mentorship experiences of student teachers during teaching practice. Based on the Communities of Practice approach, we explored the lessons learnt by student teachers in their interactions with experienced teachers in the teaching practice centres. Generally, the results showed that all student teachers in our sample were attached to at least one practising teacher as teacher-mentor at the teaching practice centre. The majority of student teachers were content with how they were received and welcomed at the teaching practice centres we visited for this study. We present the results of this study and integrate the discussion for each finding based on the research questions.

Support and Mentorship at the Teaching Practice Centres

The first research question inquired about the support that was available at the teaching practice centres to assist student teachers during teaching practice in Tanzania. Under this research question, we requested student teachers to share how they were received and supported at the teaching practice centres. In addition, we inquired whether these student teachers were attached to teacher-mentors or not and if the student teachers were attached to teacher-mentors, we asked for the kind of support the teacher-mentors offered to student teachers. Lastly, we asked student teachers to reflect on the support they received from their supervisors. The results for this section are presented and discussed as follows:

The reception at the teaching practice centres

Generally, responses for how student teachers were received at the teaching practice centres indicated that most student teachers were content with the reception as they were well received and warmly welcomed. The response, "*We were well received!*" was heard in all the focus groups. This implied contentment with the reception. In addition, student teachers commented that they were happy because their hosts were nice and guided them on what to do. Again, student teachers

expressed the feeling that the teaching practice would be a nice experience. In this context, teaching practice centres seemed welcoming to student teachers. According to Majani (2022), this would imply a polite and welcoming gesture for the student teachers in the field. Additionally, Meeuwisse et al. (2010) pointed out that friendly environments foster positive interactions, which consequently affect the learning outcomes, including the levels of engagement in the specific domain. As researchers, we perceived that student teachers had a positive first impression of the teaching practice centres that would likely enhance interactions and mentorship in the field.

The supports at the teaching practice centres

The finding uncovered how student teachers were guided to start their teaching practice smoothly. They were first helped to settle at the teaching practice centres before they started classroom teaching. For example, each student teacher was allocated a working space with a table and a chair in either the general staff room or the department's office in which the student teacher's teaching subjects are offered. This study noted that, at one of the teaching practice centres, student teachers were offered hostel accommodations for the whole period of their teaching practice. In general, the teaching practice centres were supportive to ensure student teachers felt comfortable doing their teaching practice.

Attachment to teacher-mentors at the teaching practice centres

The results showed that all student teachers in our sample were attached to at least one experienced or practising teacher for support and mentorship in their respective teaching subjects. According to Vumilia and Semali (2016), during teaching practice, student teachers receive various supports that may include guidance, counselling, monitoring, and supervising. Therefore, the attachment to teacher-mentors intended to achieve those aims in addition to helping student teachers get acquainted with the actual classroom teaching environment during teaching practice. Again, this bridged the transition of student teachers (Hellsten et al., 2009) from theoretical to practical teaching, which helped student teachers integrate smoothly into the actual teaching environment. Notably, all student teachers indicated that they were attached to either single teacher-mentor or multiple teacher-mentors. Consistent with previous studies in Tanzania, it has been noted that student teachers are attached to experienced or practising teachers in their respective teaching subjects for support during teaching practice (Hardman et al., 2012; Komba & Kira, 2013; Okendo, 2018).

The support from teacher-mentors at the teaching practice centres

Further, this study inquired into what support and mentorship were received from the teacher-mentors. The results revealed that 17 student teachers received some support from the teacher-mentors. The results revealed that 17 student teachers received some

support and mentorship that included the preparation or approval of teaching documents such as schemes of work and lesson plans and the orientation of student teachers in the actual classroom teaching.

Preparation or approval of teaching documents

The teaching documents included schemes of work and lesson plans. It was revealed that some teacher-mentors helped guide/mentor student teachers to prepare the schemes of work and lesson plans during teaching practice. The teacher-mentor assisted the student teachers in the preparation of the documents—scheme of work, and lesson plan as one student teacher voiced out, “*My mentor helped me to prepare the scheme of work and lesson plan*”. Likewise, it was learnt that, in some contexts, some teacher-mentors observed and approved the schemes of work and lesson plans prepared by the student teachers. In this case, the student teachers prepared their schemes of work or lesson plans, and then the teacher-mentors observed the documents to approve if they were prepared correctly as one participant aired out, “*I prepared the lesson plan; then my mentor observed it and told me to go ahead*”.

Orientation in the actual classroom teaching

The findings revealed that teacher-mentors used different approaches to orient student teachers into actual classroom teaching. This study identified four approaches: observation and modelling, practice and feedback; co-teaching; and scaffolding. In the first approach, some teacher-mentors invited student teachers into the classroom to observe how teaching is done. The teacher-mentors taught while the student teachers observed how their teacher-mentors were teaching in the classrooms. In this context, student teachers learn by *observing and modelling* (Bandura, 1977; Li et al., 2009) their teacher-mentors. According to the practice dimension of the theory of Communities of Practice, the student teachers and teacher-mentors shared and developed knowledge in practice, i.e., teaching (Snyder & Wenger, 2010).

In the second approach—*practice and feedback*, four student teachers expressed that they were given chances to first teach in the classrooms, and then their teacher-mentors visited the classes to observe how the teaching was going. For instance, a student teacher in one of the focus groups stated, “*On my first time in the class, we went together with my mentor who asked me to teach what I prepared so that she can observe how I teach*”. In this approach, after the classroom observation, the teacher-mentors offered feedback to student teachers for improvement based on what was observed in the classroom as another student teacher narrated in a focus group, “*I taught, and she observed me for about 15 minutes. After the lesson, we sat together in the office, and she gave me some feedbacks on how I was teaching*”.

This is how the practice and feedback approach operated. Feedback, especially formative feedback, provides an avenue to help student teachers towards self-correction and self-assessment of their performance, strategy, and self-regulation (Jons, 2019; Lin et al., 2019). Again, the practice and feedback provide an opportunity for interaction, which has a high likelihood of benefiting student-teachers and teacher-mentors (Vumilia & Semali, 2016). In this sense, student teachers benefit by learning from their teacher-mentor's feedback, while teacher-mentors benefit by continuing learning through their self-reflections.

Thirdly, this study discovered that seven student teachers experienced *co-teaching* in which they teamed up with their teacher-mentors to teach in the classroom. In this approach, a student teacher and a teacher-mentor collaborated from the preparation of the lesson to teaching in the classroom. Student teachers said they liked co-teaching and found it interesting during classroom teaching. The researchers noted the expressions from student teachers such that, "*We teamed up and taught together*" and "*It was interesting!*" These voices translate that student teachers worked together with their mentors, and they liked and enjoyed working with their mentors in the classrooms. Additionally, the present study observed that co-teaching seemed crucial, especially in connecting student teachers with learners in the classrooms and orienting student teachers on how to interact with learners and collaborate with experienced teachers. Similarly, previous studies have pointed out that co-teaching is of paramount importance for student teachers. For instance, Goodnough et al. (2009) stated that co-teaching improves student teachers' confidence, and Majani (2022) added that co-teaching helps student teachers cope with classroom challenges.

Lastly, two student teachers mentioned that their mentors used *scaffolding* to provide support in classroom teaching. Through this approach, during classroom teaching, the teacher-mentors assisted student teachers in clarifying some complex concepts to students in the classroom. One participant in a focus group aired out, "*When my mentor visited my classes, he helped me to clarify some concepts to students*". The scaffolding from an experienced or practising teacher is very crucial in helping student teachers master complex levels of teaching.

The support from teaching practice supervisors

Apart from teacher-mentors, student teachers have their teaching practice supervisors from the university. These supervisors visit teaching practice centres to assess student teachers' teaching progress. The supervisors have the role of providing support and mentorship to student teachers. Student teachers expressed being content with their supervisors' guidance and support. According to student teachers, the supervisors provided student teachers with pedagogical guidance that was instrumental in building the teaching capacity in the field among student teachers. Student teachers had the opinion that "*teaching practice assessment is not only about the supervisor writing a report*". This means supervisors have other roles to play during their visits to teaching

practice centres, which include supporting student teachers to grow in the teaching profession. So, student teachers expressed that their supervisors did beyond writing assessment reports. To substantiate this, the following statement was extracted from one of the focus groups:

Our supervisor was different; he gave us time for feedback and provided us with what was required in the scheme of work and lesson plan, as well as what to do when in the classroom with students.

This extract indicates that the supervisor referred here went through the schemes of work and lesson plans, observed the student teachers' teaching in the classrooms, and then gave his student teachers time for feedback on what he observed in the classroom and the documents prepared by the student teachers. This context indicates that, although supervisors had limited time in the field, this specific supervisor performed his roles in the field. Consistent with previous studies, Majani (2022) concluded that teaching practice should not be regarded as a moment to assign grades to student teachers. Supervisors should help student teachers adjust and accommodate the differences between theoretical and practical skills. The interaction between student teachers and their supervisors is a very crucial aspect of strengthening the pedagogical capability of student teachers.

Similarly, in another focus group, student teachers indicated their appreciation of the supervisors' roles in providing feedback for improving the preparation of lessons and classroom teaching. In this focus group, the researcher extracted the following narration:

The supervisor was spending all the time in the class, which is good. After the lesson, he could give you time for discussion and feedback. He would advise you on what to change based on what he observed in the classroom.

Based on this narration, the supervisor spent time with the student teachers in the classroom, and then provided advice to student teachers on areas that needed improvement. This is something to be appraised because previous studies have claimed that some teaching practice supervisors in Tanzania provide rushed supervision mainly intended for summative assessments of teaching (Hardman et al., 2012). This means that if supervisors are in a rush, they are unlikely to provide constructive feedback to student teachers. In this aspect, our findings indicated that most student teachers were content with the guidance and support they received from their teaching practice supervisors. This finding is consistent with other study findings that some teaching practice supervisors observe and share feedback with

student teachers (Rabin, 2020). Nonetheless, based on our findings, it should be noted that this study visited only three teaching practice centres. So, there might be biases in student teachers' evaluations of their teaching practice supervisors. However, teaching practice supervisors are compulsory assessors of student teachers during teaching practice who should explicitly be involved in observing classroom teaching and sharing feedback with student teachers during their visits to the teaching practice centres.

Mentorship Challenges During Teaching Practice

The second research question explored the mentorship challenges student teachers encountered during teaching practice in Tanzania. Student teachers were asked to state the mentorship challenges they faced during teaching practice. The results revealed two challenges related to mentorship and one challenge surrounding workload.

Mentorship challenges

Superficial mentorship: The findings indicated that 13 student teachers received support only during the first week of the teaching practice. After the first week, the teacher-mentors relaxed and left student teachers to continue teaching alone without follow-ups. So, this was termed superficial mentorship because it lacked continuity and formative feedback. In addition, six student teachers expressed that their mentors did not go with them in the classes; some of these teacher-mentors occasionally asked how the student teachers were progressing with the teaching. So, this indicates that some teacher-mentors were not regularly observing student teachers in the classrooms for formative feedback. This is another example of superficial mentorship, which cannot guarantee quality mentorship. Unless teacher-mentors constantly observed student teachers in the classroom, they could not offer constructive feedback. Consistent with previous findings in Tanzania, missing feedback from teacher-mentors has been a recurring phenomenon during teaching practice (Komba & Kira, 2013; Vumilia & Semali, 2016). According to Hardman et al. (2012), this may be associated with a lack of trained and school-based mentors.

Missing mentorship: Although all student teachers were attached to teacher-mentors, further analysis revealed that five student teachers did not receive support and mentorship from their mentors. This was termed '*missing mentorship*' because student teachers perceived that their mentors did not offer the required support and mentorship. For instance, one participant narrated her situation in a focus group, "*When we arrived at the teaching practice centre, we were given mentors. But, when my mentor introduced me in the class and left, from that day, I did not see her coming to school anymore, and nobody asked me anything about how I was progressing with teaching*". In this case, the student teacher was left alone, struggling with how to manage the classes without a teacher-mentor's support. This situation is in line with Hardman et al. (2012), who pointed out that, in Tanzania, leaving student teachers alone and

struggling to survive in the actual teaching environment has been common practice.

Other studies in Tanzania have noted similar scenarios in that the majority of practising teachers have tendencies to leave student teachers to enter classrooms to teach alone (Mtika, 2008). According to Nzilano (2013), there is research evidence that practising teachers are reluctant to accompany and support student teachers in classrooms for teaching. This can be associated with various reasons. The present study attributed this missing mentorship to *teacher-mentors' absenteeism* and *uninterested teacher-mentor*.

Teacher-mentors' absenteeism: Student teachers who missed mentorship reported that their mentors took informal leaves when student teachers arrived at the teaching practice centres for teaching practice. In another context, some of the practising teachers were coming to school in the morning and leaving early. This finding mirrors what other researchers such as Komba and Kira (2013, Mtika (2008), and Nzilano (2013) have noted in their studies. Then, the reflection remains, *'If teacher-mentors are absent, who will help the novice teachers in the field?'* This remains a gap to be bridged in the preparation of teachers in Tanzania.

Uninterested teacher-mentor: Moreover, about eight student teachers reported openly that their teacher-mentors were not interested in mentoring them. For example, one of the participants reported that her teacher-mentor pretended to be busy with other activities. So, he could not provide the student teacher with the required support and mentorship. In addition, student teachers stated categorically that there was no mentorship because some of the experienced or practising teachers were not interested in supporting student teachers. According to Hellsten et al. (2009), uninterested teacher-mentors are unlikely to provide effective mentorship that can guide student teachers in the teaching profession. The consequences of a situation like this may cause student teachers to dislike teaching and the teaching profession in general.

Workload challenges

Furthermore, the results indicated that two students experienced challenges surrounding the teaching workload. These student teachers disclosed that they were overwhelmed with the school activities, especially the teaching workload. One student teacher reported that *"the situation in secondary schools is worse! The classes are overcrowded, and they have streams like A, B, C, or more"*. This means that student teachers who were given to teach all the streams in such classes shouldered an overwhelming task of teaching many classes and handling large and overcrowded classes. Although a few student teachers complained that their workloads were too much for them, statements such as, 'student teachers were given many classes to teach, present an indication that some student teachers were overwhelmed by the workload.

There might be various reasons for student teachers to shoulder extra burdens during teaching practice. In some contexts, when student teachers were alone in their teaching subjects, they were given to handle the whole class with all streams alone. However, being alone for a specific teaching subject at the teaching practice centre is not bad. We further noted that, due to teacher-mentors' absenteeism, the student teachers had to shoulder extra teaching workloads, which might have inconvenienced their teaching practice experiences in those teaching practice centres. This finding correlates with the previous argument that beginning teachers feel overwhelmed by workload when they are isolated from their mentors (Hellsten et al., 2009). Arguably, when teacher-mentors are not readily available, the student teachers feel overwhelmed by the situation, work, and demands of the teaching environment.

During teaching practice, all student teachers should have a realistic workload. However, another reason for some student teachers to shoulder an overwhelming teaching workload during teaching practice could be attributed to their fear and capacity to negotiate with the teaching practice centres on the ideal teaching workload for student teachers during teaching practice. Some student teachers think it is unacceptable to arrange for a perfect and realistic teaching workload that is not beyond their capacity during teaching practice.

Roles that Mentorship Played During Teaching Practice

The third research question inquired about the roles that mentorship played in improving teaching and integrating student teachers into the teaching profession. The results indicated that the opportunity to interact with veteran teachers and engage in the day-to-day activities at the teaching practice centres had tremendous impacts on student teachers' understanding of teaching and the teaching profession. First, student teachers expressed that their engagements with experienced or practising teachers and their interaction with the actual teaching environment in the teaching practice centres helped to build their confidence, sometimes even without themselves recognising. In one focus group, it was narrated that *"we were worried, especially some of us who are doing the teaching practice for the first time. We didn't know what classroom teaching was all about, especially teaching adults. But our mentors helped us to understand the real teaching contexts such as being confident when teaching"*.

Additionally, student teachers reported that their experience taught them about flexibility, tolerance, and accepting responsibilities in different situations. When student teachers face challenges, they learn that they are all part of the process and that they are all part of becoming competent teachers. With the support from experienced or practising teachers, student teachers learnt how to adjust in challenging situations.

Generally, the opportunity to interact with the actual teaching environment and the teacher-mentors during teaching practice has been instrumental in developing student

teachers' tolerance, confidence, and flexibility in the actual teaching environment. Student teachers, through observational learning (Bandura, 1977; Li, et al., 2009), learnt different skills that helped them grow in the teaching profession. According to the Communities of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Snyder & Wenger, 2010), student teachers have achieved their goals during teaching practice through interactions with teacher-mentors and the environment at the teaching practice centres. For instance, through such interactions, some student teachers had opportunities to co-teach with the teacher-mentors. Co-teaching in mentoring student teachers increases classroom faith (Goodnough et al., 2009); helps student teachers cope with the teaching environment (Majani, 2022), and facilitates care ethics in which reciprocity and mutuality, recognising power dynamics, and sharing teaching powers are realised (Rabin, 2020).

Conclusion and Implication

The study's participants agreed that mentorship during teaching practice is vital to the growth of student teachers in the teaching profession. Student teachers expressed their positive achievements from the teaching practice contexts, especially with their interactions with teacher-mentors and learners in the actual teaching environments. For instance, the experiential competence and confidence of teachers in the actual teaching environments make them grow in the teaching profession. The challenges of mentoring student teachers emanate from teacher-mentor's absenteeism and lack of interest in the process. When this happens, not all student teachers can receive the required mentorship from practising teachers during teaching practice. Also, unstructured or a lack of formative feedback from the teacher-mentors hindered the quality of mentorship. Eventually, this study suggests collaborative efforts between the university and the teaching practice centres to enhance teacher-mentors so that they can give much time and attention to mentoring student teachers during teaching practice.

Further, training of practising teachers on mentoring student teachers should be initiated in schools or teaching practice centres to help them acquire basic mentorship skills so that student teachers can fully benefit from mentorship during teaching practice. Unless skilled and school-based mentors are made available in each teaching practice centre in Tanzania, teaching practice will continue to suffer from the lack of quality mentorship. Therefore, universities and colleges that prepare teachers should strive to make sure that, during teaching practice, mentorship programmes are designed and implemented by skilled teacher-mentors. In that regard, universities should work with teaching practice centres to create meaningful social communication, interactions, and practice for the best of student teachers. For example, universities can improvise mentorship through a professional learning community model in which student teachers learn in the community with others how to achieve higher student learning outcomes. Lastly, since not all student teachers received mentorship during

teaching practice, this study suggests a compulsory induction programme for beginning teachers during their first appointment in the teaching career in Tanzania.

Limitation of the Study

The study's findings are based on data collected from 22 student teachers who were doing teaching practice at three teaching practice centres in Tanzania. This was a case study based on the qualitative approach whose findings may not apply to all contexts in the teaching profession. However, these findings provide useful insights for improving student teachers' support and mentorship in the education sector and, generally, the teaching profession in Tanzania. Future studies may investigate the mentoring process of student teachers from different perspectives and using representative samples.

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