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Difficulties Faced by Student- Teachers During Teaching Practice

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Abstract
Teaching practice is the stage at which student-teachers move from theoretical learning to real classroom performance, and this transition is often accompanied by considerable difficulty. The present study examined the difficulties faced by student-teachers during teaching practice in the areas of lesson planning and preparation, classroom management, teaching techniques and strategies, and evaluation, assessment and feedback. A descriptive survey method was adopted, and data were collected from a sample of male and female student-teachers using a difficulty scale. Scores on each dimension and on the overall scale were classified into low, average and high levels. The association of these levels with gender, marital status and medium of instruction was tested using SPSS. The findings showed that most student-teachers experienced an average level of difficulty in every dimension and overall, while a noticeable group reported a high level of difficulty. The strength of these associations was small to moderate, which suggests that personal, institutional and supervisory factors also play a part. The study recommends that teacher-education institutions strengthen micro-teaching, classroom-management training, mentoring and feedback practices before and during the practicum, and give targeted support to the groups of student-teachers who are more likely to experience high difficulty.

Keywords: student-teachers, teaching practice, practicum difficulties, lesson planning, classroom management, teacher education

Introduction
Teacher education programmes prepare future teachers through theoretical courses and supervised practical experience. Teaching practice is regarded as the core of this preparation because it allows student teachers to apply pedagogical knowledge in real classrooms (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Kiggundu and Nayimuli (2009) described it as a "make or break" phase, since the experiences gained there can strengthen or weaken a trainee's commitment to the profession.

Despite its importance, student teachers frequently report problems such as classroom management, lesson planning, limited resources, lack of support from schools, and anxiety about evaluation (Marais & Meier, 2004; Veenman, 1984). Fuller (1969) explained that novice teachers move through stages of concern, beginning with concern for self and survival before turning to concern for tasks and pupils' learning. Understanding the specific difficulties encountered is therefore necessary for improving the quality of teacher preparation.

Significance of the Study
The findings of this study are expected to help in the following ways:

- Teacher educators can redesign the practicum so that it addresses the actual problems trainees face.
- Supervising teachers and heads of practice schools can offer more focused guidance and mentoring.
- Student teachers can become aware of common difficulties and prepare for them in advance.
- Curriculum planners can strengthen pre-practice orientation, microteaching and classroom management components.
- Future researchers get baseline data for comparing difficulties across teacher education programmes.

Objectives of the Study
1. To find the level of difficulties faced by student teachers during teaching practice.
2. To find the difficulties faced by student teachers in each dimension of the scale (DIM1, DIM2, DIM3 and DIM4).
3. To find whether the difficulties differ by gender, year of study, marital status and stream of study.

Methodology
Method. The normative survey method was adopted, as the study describes existing conditions among a group of student teachers.

Sample. The sample consisted of 150 student teachers who had undergone teaching practice.

Tool. A difficulty scale with four dimensions .

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Variables. The background variables were gender, year of study, marital status and stream of study (coded 1 and 2).

Statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, standard error of the mean) and independent samples t-tests were computed using SPSS, with a 95% confidence interval (Field, 2018).

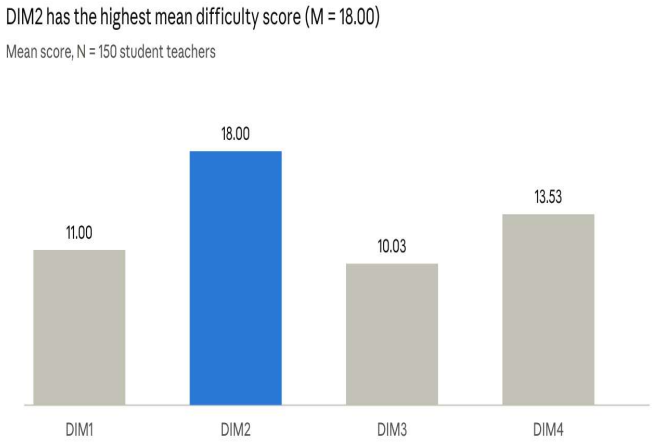
Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Difficulties Faced by Student Teachers (N = 150)

Dimension	Mean	SD	SE
DIM1	11.00	0.00	0.00
DIM2	18.00	0.00	0.00
DIM3	10.03	1.15	0.09
DIM4	13.53	1.62	0.13
Total	52.56	2.02	0.17

Table 1 shows the mean scores of student teachers on the four dimensions. DIM2 recorded the highest mean (18.00), followed by DIM4 (13.53), DIM1 (11.00) and DIM3 (10.03). DIM1 and DIM2 showed no variation (SD = 0.00), meaning all 150 respondents obtained identical scores on these dimensions.

Figure 1 Mean Scores of Student Teachers on Dimensions of Difficulty



SPSS group statistics output, N = 150

Table 2: Independent Samples t-test Results by Background Variables

Variable	Group 1 (n)	Group 2 (n)	Result
Gender	0	150	t not computed
Year of study	0	150	t not computed
Marital status	150	0	t not computed
Stream of study	0	150	t not computed

For each background variable, one group was empty, so SPSS could not produce the Independent Samples Test table. No comparison between groups can be reported from the present data file.

Findings

1. The mean total difficulty score of the 150 student teachers was 52.56 (SD = 2.02), with a low standard error (0.17), indicating that the sample mean is a stable estimate.
2. Among the dimensions, DIM2 had the highest mean (18.00) and DIM3 the lowest (10.03). Because dimensions may contain different numbers of items, these raw means should be read together with the maximum possible score of each dimension.
3. Scores on DIM1 and DIM2 did not vary (SD = 0.00), while DIM3 (SD = 1.15) and DIM4 (SD = 1.62) showed small variation, suggesting that student teachers experienced very similar levels of difficulty.
4. Differences by gender, year of study, marital status and stream of study could not be tested, because all respondents were recorded in a single category of each variable.

Educational Implications and Recommendations

- Orientation and microteaching should be strengthened before the practicum so that trainees feel prepared for the classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2006).
- Practice schools should assign mentor teachers who give regular, supportive feedback, since lack of school support is a recurring concern (Kiggundu & Nayimuli, 2009; Marais & Meier, 2004).
- Training in classroom management and lesson planning should be given priority, as these are common sources of difficulty for novices (Veenman, 1984).
- Supervisors should use reflective discussions to reduce anxiety about evaluation and to move trainees from self-concerns to concern for pupils' learning (Fuller, 1969).
- Future studies should use a larger and more varied sample so that gender, marital status, year of study and stream can be compared meaningfully.

Conclusion

The study found that student teachers experienced a fairly uniform level of difficulty during teaching practice (M = 52.56, SD = 2.02), with the highest mean on DIM2. Group comparisons were not possible because the

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respondents did not represent more than one category of each background variable. Even so, the results confirm that teaching practice needs better preparation and support from teacher education institutions and practice schools. Improving mentoring, orientation and classroom management training can make this phase a more positive and productive learning experience.

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