

Assessors, School Support and Teaching Practice at the University of Nairobi Kenya: Addressing Teacher Professional Competence

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Abstract

Supporting and mentoring teacher trainee competence during teaching practice forms an indispensable part of professional and personal development. A positive interaction between university assessors, secondary school principals, collaborating teachers, and regular teachers plays a vital role in fostering professional competence among teacher trainees. Consistent with professional development is that knowledge and learning is entrenched in social contexts and experiences promoted through interaction with significant others. The nature of support provided during teaching practice enhances sustained class management, improved professional development, activity based learning and learner achievement. On the other hand, inadequate support may turn teaching practice into a stressful disempowering and unproductive exercise for teacher trainees. The purpose of this study is to examine university assessors and school support in teacher trainee development at University of Nairobi. The study adopted a descriptive survey design with a population of 68 student teachers on teaching practice randomly sampled from 17 Counties. Data was collected through questionnaires for teacher trainees. Data analysis involved application of descriptive and inferential statistics, and presented using tables and graphs. Analysis yielded three themes, unsupportive relations, moderately supportive, and very supportive. The results indicated considerable support during teaching practice where “very supportive” scored the highest percentages. The study recommends development of practical and consistent policies and infrastructure that provides coordinated support for teacher trainees.

Keywords

assessors, collaborating teachers, professional development, principals, regular teachers, teacher trainee, teaching practice

1. Introduction

Socializing teacher trainees into teaching profession requires support from faculty assessors, school principals, collaborating teachers and regular teachers in providing guidance within curricular development, interpretation, implementation and evaluation. Adequate support during teaching practice prepares teacher trainees to handle contemporary issues arising from instructional management (Levine, 2006). Teacher trainees may be faced with professional relations, isolation, unfriendly staff arrangements and conflicting philosophies if not adequately supported within and outside the school. To reverse this trend, teacher trainees require adequate support to improve on implementation of professional responsibilities, developing competence and skills in monitoring and evaluating practice, demonstrate confidence, and build in-depth knowledge of content and pedagogy for future teaching.

During teaching practice, cooperative and interactive guidance enables teacher trainees to acquire valuable skills, attitudes and knowledge required in identifying learning needs, setting appropriate goals along with assessing and providing feedback on professional development. However, Ong'ondo and Borg (2011) established that feedback from supervisors has not helped teacher trainees in developing pedagogical content knowledge as well as transforming from student status to teacher frame of mind resulting into nonchalant approach to teaching-learning process. Inadequate support may turn teaching practice into a stressful disempowering and unproductive exercise for teacher trainees. Furthermore, in some programmes of higher education in Africa, Mannathoko (2013) observed that the focus of supervision is assessment involving assigning of grades to the teacher trainee based on class observation. As a consequence, emphasis on assessment may reduce the extent of teacher learning during teaching practice missing out on key competencies in teaching-learning process. In instances where the assessors are less hands-on and minds-on in guiding teacher trainees, less professionalism is developed in the teacher training process. In this regard, promoting reflective practice and socializing teacher trainees into professional discourse is useful in building a firm base for teaching experience and inherent competencies. The study sought to establish support accorded to teacher trainees to gain professional competence in teaching by assessors, principals, collaborating and regular teachers

1.1 Faculty Assessors' Support and Teaching Practice

Effectiveness of teaching practice is dependent on roles played by university assessors in implementing supervisory approaches by virtue of expertise and experience in helping professional development among teacher trainees. In support of this argument, Wambugu, Barmao and Ng'eno (2013) asserted that assessors are critical in shaping teacher trainee as well as triggering change through raising awareness on appropriate teaching-learning practices. Based on this premise, successful assessment guides teacher trainees in connecting between theories studied and realities of the class teaching-learning practices. In addition, Ochanji (2015) affirmed that guidance from assessors help teacher trainees make connections between the materials in training courses and contexts faced in teacher-learning situations. In cases where teacher trainees are adequately supported by assessors, chances of improvement in quality of learning are high and lesson implementation is effective where

use of instructional resources is enhanced and learning activities are bolstered. On the other hand, support from assessors will enhance appropriateness of sourcing of information and referencing, boost instructional discipline and raise self-efficacy during the teaching-learning processes. However, in cases where assessors support is inadequate, Mukeredzi and Mandrona (2013) indicated that assessment of class work is low, instructional indiscipline is likely to occur and attainment of instructional objectives may be lost. In instances where such weaknesses exist, teacher professional competence is lowered resulting in teacher trainee inability to evaluate self, manage the teaching-learning process and eventually witnessing lower learning achievement.

Faculty assessors provide teacher trainees with appropriate skills in lesson learning for effective teaching, which result in enhanced learner achievement. In doing so, the assessors assist teacher trainees in taking care of relevant content, appropriateness of instructional resources and activities which guide attainment of instructional objectives. To realize this regularly, Scherer (2012) opined that consultation with teachers, principal or subject heads assists teacher trainees to synchronize college plans with school plan for enhanced competencies in teacher professional development. On the same vein, the need for harmonized lessons assures logical flow of content and synthesized use of resources, which enhances collaborative management during interaction of teacher trainees through the individual school system. If appropriately adopted, team development of lesson plan, cooperative approach to teaching-learning, collective approach to addressing learner issues and building relationships across school system will be realized for higher learning achievement.

1.2 School Principals' Support and Teaching Practice

School principal's routine administrative task involves organizing induction for teacher trainees into the school as well as writing a report to the university on each trainee. The principals guides on the organizational structure and distribution of responsibilities for effective management of teaching learning process during teaching practice. The responsibilities include pedagogical and inductive support, appropriate assignments, providing sufficient supplies and equipment to support learning (Day & Leithwood, 2007). Besides, principals provide reasonable and consistent debriefs on policies and infrastructure by providing coordinated trainee support and services for mentoring and integration in the school system to achieve sustained professional development. Conversely, due to inadequate support, Misigo (2014) affirmed that teacher trainees are often confronted with fatigue, career demand and managing class issues, which the trainee may not have been previously exposed to during training at university. To address these issues, teacher trainees undergo consistent emotional mentoring and pedagogical support as well as counseling to cope with changing instructional environment for sustained professional teacher development. In instances where teacher trainees are adequately supported, professional development is faster, witnessing of increased competence in addressing teaching-learning related issues and resultant higher learning achievement.

1.3 Collaborating Teachers' Support and Teaching Practice

Planning and preparation on the part of the collaborating teacher assists in alleviating anxiety and ensures teacher trainee gets off to a smooth start in acquiring requisite skills for professional growth. The collaborating teacher assists teacher trainee to adjust by providing basic information such as school rules, policies, physical arrangement and class management tips since teacher trainees get anxious, overwhelmed and prone to self-doubt at the beginning of induction into the teaching profession (Otieno, 2014). In cases where teacher trainees are given appropriate support from collaborating teachers, confidence is raised in planning for, pedagogy and assessment of the learners during and after the teaching-learning process. However, Manyasi (2014) affirmed that inadequate support to teacher trainees results in inappropriate planning and evaluating learner experiences progress and development. Further, weak support results in low adoption of mobilization of appropriate resource materials, cooperative teaching strategies, weakness in addressing learner issues and inability to build interrelationship with staff and learners. Based on this realization, support by collaborating teacher at commencement of placement in individual school helps in integrating teacher trainee in activities which constitute teacher professional development. Furthermore, adequate support for teacher trainees enhances adoption of sound pedagogical approaches, choice and utilization of instructional resources, addressing learner based issues and participation in routine learner management activities, which assist in transiting successfully into a professional teacher.

1.4 Regular Teachers' Support and Teaching Practice

Regular teachers provide a climate for open and honest discussion by guiding activities of teacher trainees since transition to teacher professional development is an overwhelming task if support structures are weak. In such instances, professional competencies may not be acquired for effective management of teaching-learning process. If teacher trainees are provided with adequate support, teacher trainees are likely to exhibit professional competence, creativity, communication, teamwork and ethics in teaching-learning process. In support of this position, Ligadu (2012) observed that teacher trainees who received support from regular teachers were able to navigate the demands of teaching practice, especially in curriculum interpretation and review in class management, and in providing an environment for professional growth in learner and school management skills. However, Piper and Zuilkowski (2015) found inadequate emotional and physical support as an impediment in socializing teacher trainees into the teaching profession, introducing trainees to school community, helping trainees with information about school policies, regulations and resources. Such issues may discourage teacher trainees from gaining confidence and knowledge on using appropriate instructional strategies independently. Trainee teacher support improves understanding of operations of the school, class management, interrelationships and evaluation of varied school activities for sustained learning achievement.

2. Theoretical Framework

Teacher Development Theory by Fuller (1969), which focuses on the concerns of teachers in pre-service and continuing professional development, was used to anchor the study. The theory emphasizes on stages of professional development focusing on how much support teachers get from the school environment and inherent competencies acquired to practice teaching. Given that teachers get anxious about knowing the subject matter, anticipating problems and being evaluated, appropriate support is required to mitigate such challenges. In this regard, teacher trainees need support from faculty assessors, school principals, collaborating teachers and regular teachers in providing guidance within curricular development, interpretation, implementation and evaluation. The support may enable teacher trainees improve on performance of professional responsibilities, develop competence in delivery approaches and skills in monitoring and evaluating practice. In addition, such support helps the trainees to demonstrate confidence, class control and management, acquire in-depth knowledge of content and appropriate methods to perfect future practice. When accorded adequate support, teacher trainees move past subject-oriented needs to learners' needs to holistic development for sustained participation in real life situations. In addition, teacher trainees may be able to measure success by learners during and after instruction. Support across the board would enhance efficiency in the teaching-learning process for improved learning achievement.

3. Conceptual Framework

The framework was developed across four themes linked to specific support from university assessors, school principals, collaborating and regular teachers. This implies that professional development is dependent on interrelationships with significant others in the teacher training and development process. Effective professional development for teacher trainees is envisaged on the belief that knowledge and learning is embedded in social contexts promoted through active interaction for sustained learning through regularity of consultations and debriefings. As a consequence, supporting teacher training professional development and improving teachers' competence is likely to enhance sustained class management; activity based learning, discipline and resultant learner achievement across the school curriculum.

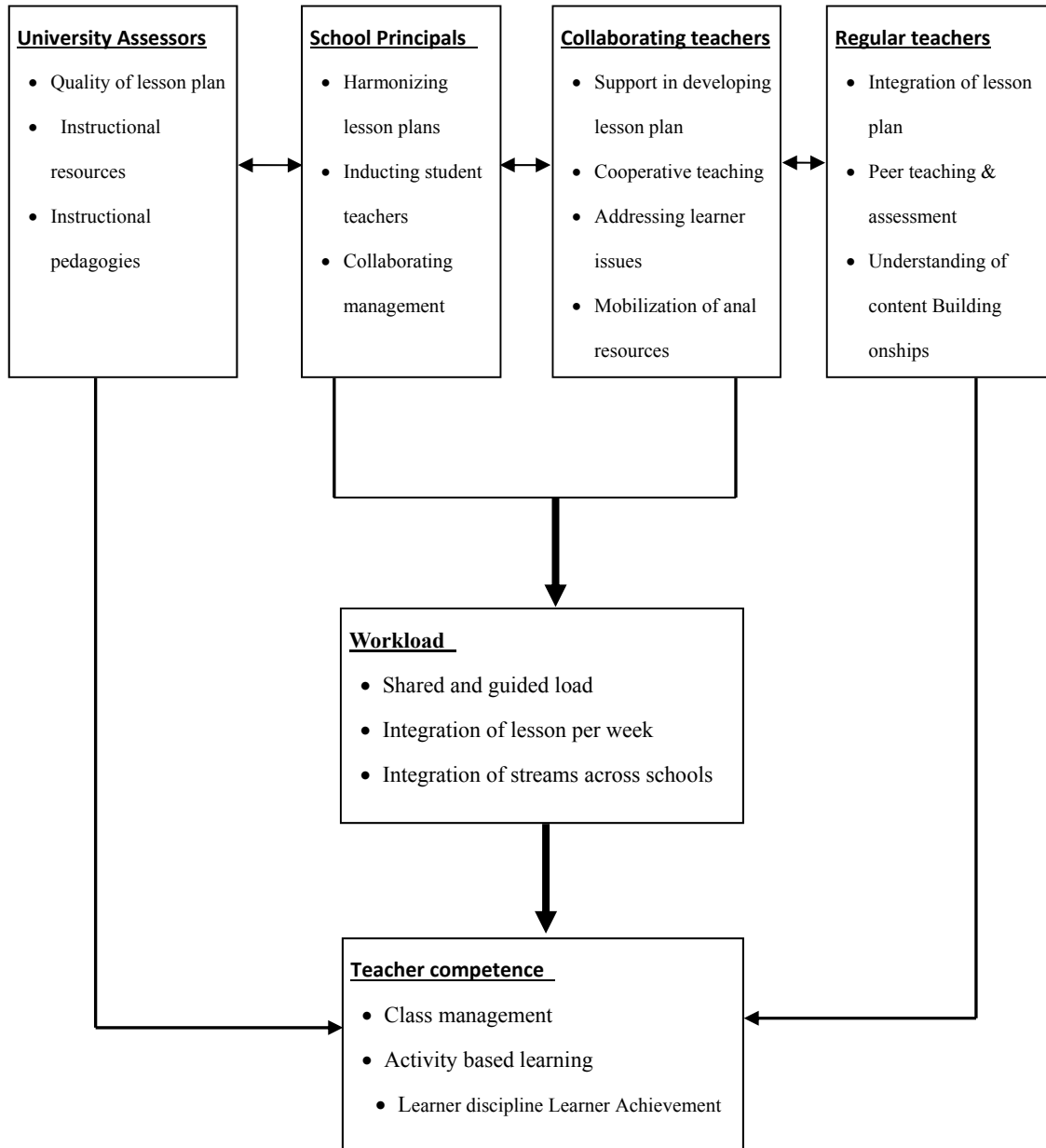


Figure 1. Perceived Framework for Support by Faculty Assessors, School Principals, Collaborating and Regular Teachers

4. Statement of the Problem

Supporting teacher trainees during teaching practice has significant influence on professional development in teaching-learning process. Teacher trainees experience excitement of being part of real class setting, getting to know learners, planning and organizing class tasks which begin as the pillar for competencies required for teacher development (Maphosa, Shumba, & Shumba, 2007). In addition, teacher trainees may face professional ineptitude, isolation, unfriendly staffing environment and conflicting school philosophies. To overcome the issues, teacher trainees require support from faculty supervisors, school principals, collaborating teachers and regular teachers, which at times is not

forthcoming. In such instances, the teacher trainee remains inappropriately socialized to meet the demands of teaching-learning process. However, Karugu (2007) affirmed that teacher trainees in Kenya do not receive adequate support and guidance in respective placement schools occasioned by irregularity of support by university assessors who often report late and have less time to technically guide the trainees. As a consequence, inadequate support can turn teaching practice into a stressful disempowering and unproductive experience for teacher trainees who often leave training period ill-prepared for future roles. Adequate support is required to help teacher trainee appreciate holistic development of the learner now and in the future. The study sought to establish levels of support provided to teacher trainees in partnering schools.

5. Purpose and Objective

The purpose was to determine the nature of support teacher trainees receive during teaching practice. The objective is to establish the role of assessors, principals, collaborating teachers and regular teachers in supporting teacher trainees during teaching practice.

6. Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Descriptive survey design explains the position of affairs as it exists (Kombo & Tromp, 2006). Description is conducted to influence improvement of a situation. The target population of the study was 68 teacher trainees from University of Nairobi distributed in 17 Counties in Kenya. The sample of the study was 68 teacher trainees (44 males and 24 females) on teaching practice randomly selected from 17 Counties used by external moderators. The schools in which the teacher trainees were undertaking teaching practice were sampled from 17 Counties. A questionnaire was used to collect data on the level of support offered to the teacher trainees while on internship by collaborating partners. Ethical considerations regarding informed consent and confidentiality were upheld. Analysis of data involved the use of descriptive and inferential statistics. More specifically, graphs, frequencies and percentages were used in comparisons across categories. The Chi-square Statistic and Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient were used in making statistical inferences about relationships among variables.

7. Findings

7.1 Characteristics of the Respondents and Schools

There were a total of 68 respondents out of whom 44 (64.7%) were male and 24 (35.3%) were female drawn from 68 schools where the teacher trainees were undertaking practice and distributed in 17 Counties. The response rate was 100% with distribution of respondents based on concentration of trainee teachers during teaching practice and the expanse of the region. Nairobi County had the highest number of respondents followed by Mombasa and Homabay. Murang'a and Uasin had the lowest number of respondents given the fewer students who chose to practice teaching in the respective

Counties (See Figure 2).

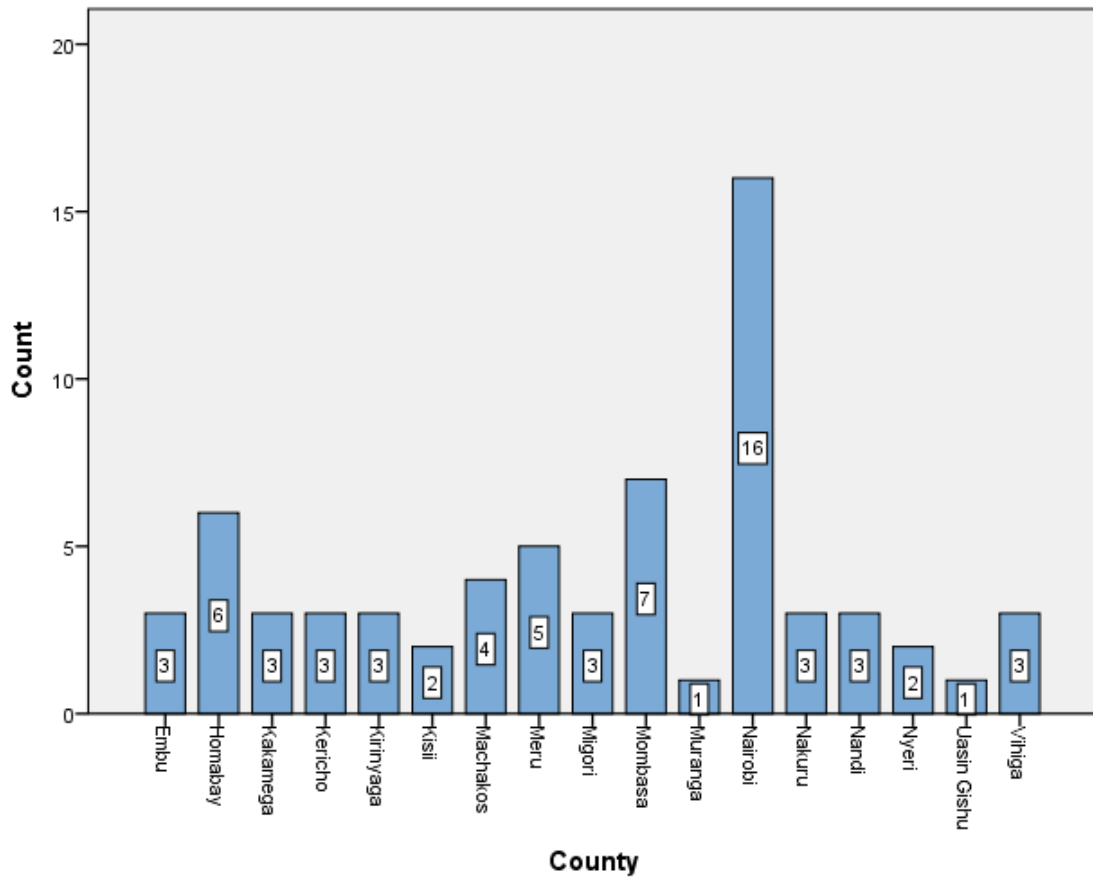


Figure 2. Counties Used in the Study

7.2 School Types

The schools used in the study were in 5 categories with 28 Boys Boarding (41.2%), 2 Girls Day (2.9%), 17 Girls Boarding (25.0%), 17 Mixed Day (25.0%) and 4 Mixed Boarding (5.9%). The highest proportion of teacher trainees was practicing in Boys Boarding Schools followed by Girls Boarding and Mixed Day respectively. The least represented school type was Girls Day viz.

Table 1. 5 Categories

School Type	Frequency	Percent
Boys boarding	28	41.2
Girls day	2	2.9
Girls boarding	17	25.0
Mixed day	17	25.0
Mixed boarding	4	5.9
Total	68	100.0

7.3 Number of Streams and Work Load

Work load per week for teacher trainees is 12 lessons (40 minutes each) which was considered adequate by the University of Nairobi as maximum teaching requirement for a trainee. As provided in Table 2, the schools used ranged from 1 to 6 streams while number of lessons per week ranged from 9 to 18 indicating that some trainee teachers were slightly under-loaded while others were over-loaded. However, further analysis revealed that overload arose from either extreme under staffing in the school and the trainee was requested to assist or were compensated for extra input. On the other hand, under load was attributed to over staffing in the respective schools or inadequate lessons due to size of school against trainee teachers.

Table 2. Streams across Schools and Lessons per Week

No of Streams	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Number of streams across schools	68	1	6	3.29	1.603
Number of lessons per week	68	9	18	13.50	1.732

Figure 2 is a population pyramid showing the total teaching load of 4 trainees across type of school distributed by gender. Across schools, male trainees had a bigger load than female trainees which was occasioned by willingness to do more teaching during practice period. However, bigger work load was more pronounced in Boys Boarding, Mixed Day and Mixed Boarding Schools. Again, there existed small differences in teaching load between males and females in Girls Day and Girls Boarding Schools ("Pure" Girls' Schools). Worth noting was that no female trainees were posted to Mixed Boarding Schools which was attributed to relative levels of indiscipline in such institutions and choice of school closer home to take care of diminished funding during teaching practice.

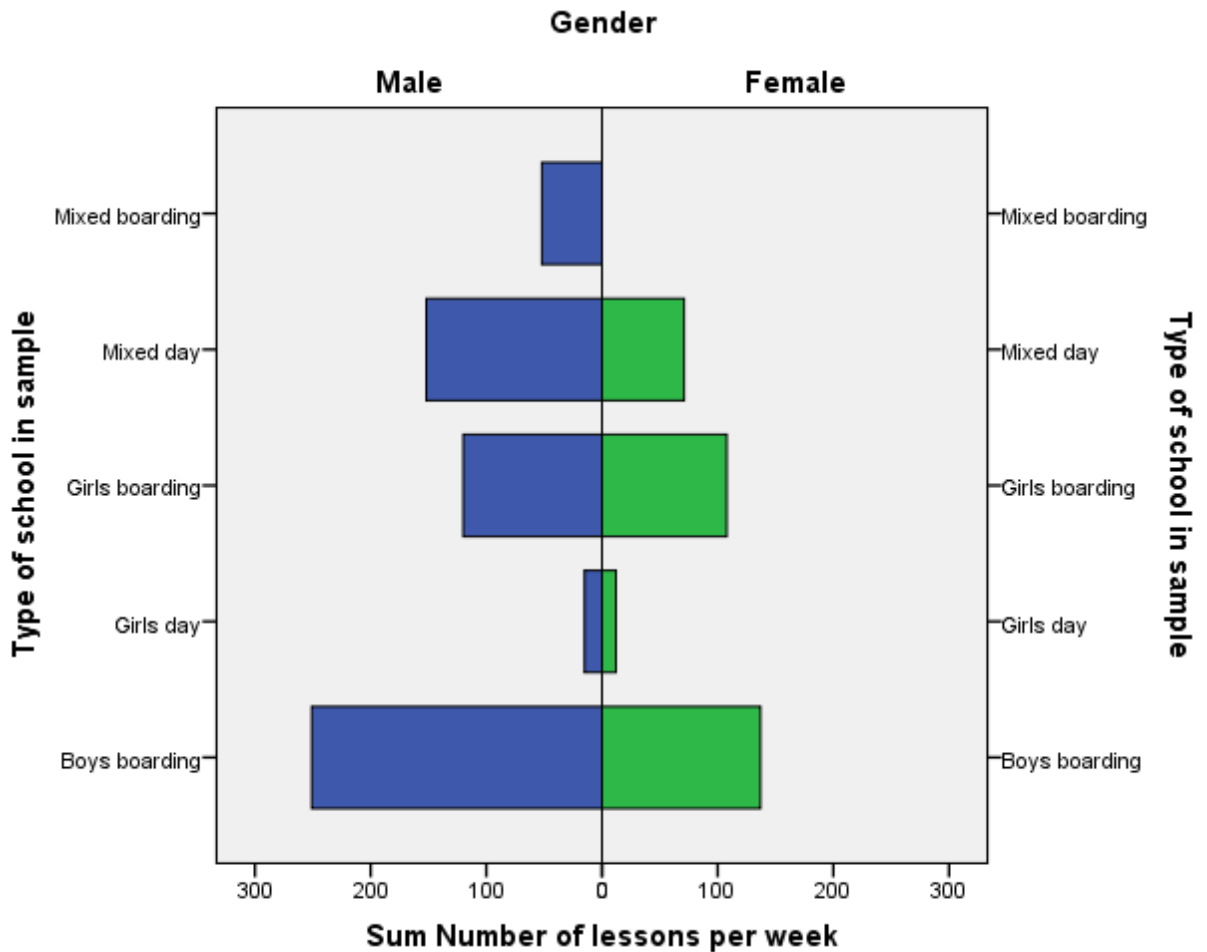


Figure 3. Type of School

7.4 Subject Combination

Figure 3 is showing teacher trainees by subject combinations and distribution by gender in the categories of schools used. The predominant subject combination was History/Kiswahili followed by English/Literature and Kiswahili/CRE, which was a reflection of the demand for teachers in the subject specialization by the Teaching Service Commission today. Further analysis showed that students prefer subject combinations, which are easily employable upon graduation. On the same vein, the least common subject combinations were Geography/Business Studies, Mathematics/Physical Education and Geography/Kiswahili, which are flooded at the moment and are not easily employable following diminished demand.

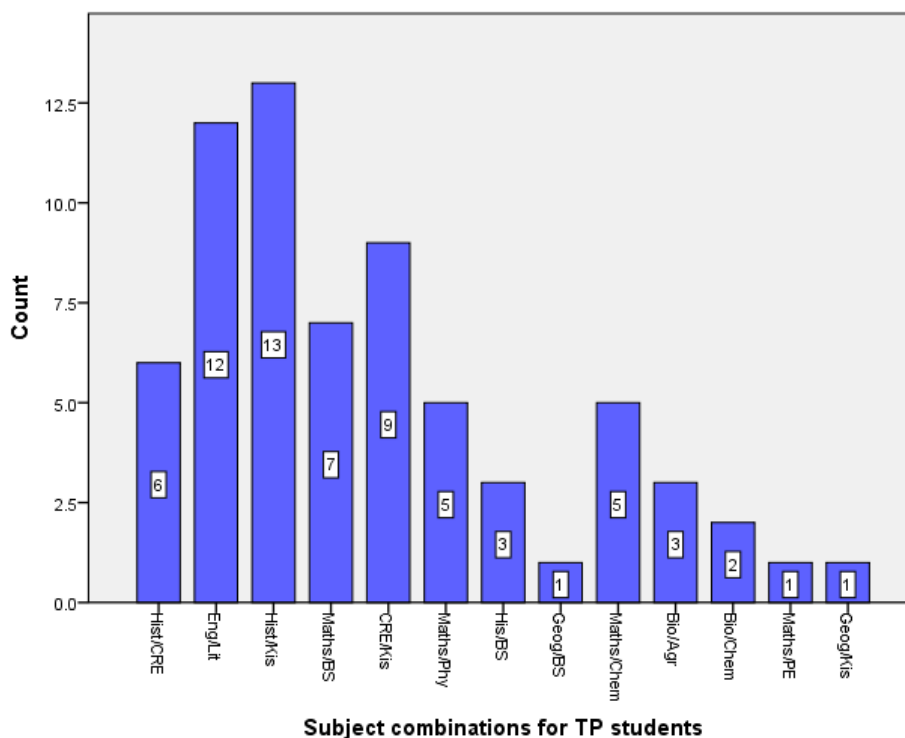


Figure 4. Subject Combinations

7.5 Support from Faculty Assessors

Supervisors' role during teaching practice is intended to assist student teachers build connections between training courses at university and contexts faced in practice at school and handling issues arising from teaching learning process. Assessors are expected to check on linkage from syllabus, schemes of work, lesson plan, activities, resources, references and implementation for learning achievement. Additional findings showed that teacher trainees received guidance on instructional management, monitoring and evaluation of learning activities and creating productive instructional environment. Further, assessors offered assistance on management of relationships such as teacher-teacher, teacher-student, teacher-administration and teacher-parent to raise quality of interactions in school for improved learning achievement.

Table 3. Support from Assessors from University

	Frequency	Percent
Unsupportive	3	4.4
Moderately supportive	5	7.4
Very supportive	57	83.8
Sub-Total	65	95.6
Missing	3	4.4
Grand Total	68	100.0

The findings in Table 3 established that 3 (4.4%) out of 68 respondents reflected that assessors were unsupportive by having less time to share teacher trainee experiences who are often left alone to grapple with challenges while 5 (7.4%) received moderate support from assessors by not helping the trainees fully address issues confronting teaching-learning in schools. More still, 57 (83.8%) indicated that assessors were very supportive particularly settling in schools, addressing case scenarios and professional conduct for effective integration. The findings confirm the works of (Zemelman et al., 2012) who view supervisors as associate teachers engaging with trainee teachers for improved expertise and experience in professional development, which aid in forming correct mental dispositions and readiness in improving teaching learning processes.

7.6 Support from the School Principal

The school principals are continuously enhancing effective collaboration between trainee teachers and school family for sustained learning achievement. In addition, school principals guide on implementation of curriculum, harmonization of schemes of work and lesson plan, staff and student discipline. Table 4 shows the findings indicative of level of support offered by principals to teacher-trainees.

Table 4. Support from the School Principal

Level of Support	Frequency	Percent
Unsupportive	7	10.3
Moderately supportive	14	20.6
Very supportive	44	64.7
Sub-Total	65	95.6
Missing	3	4.4
Grand Total	68	100.0

Out of 68 respondents 7 (10.3%) had principals who were unsupportive of teacher trainees who argued heads were not available for consultation neither were they debriefed on the administrative structure, policies and processes of the school. On the other hand, 14 (20.6%) received moderate support which included short debriefs on operations of the school and resultant expectations from the trainees. Again, 44 (64.7%) had very supportive principals who debriefed trainees regularly on functions of the school and inherent issues which smoothened the curriculum implementation during practice. The support enabled trainee teachers to gain confidence and expertise in professional development as confirmed by Earley and Weindling (2007).

7.7 Support from the Collaborating Teachers

Collaborating teachers provide support in class routines, expectations, and creating climate for sustained professional development. In addition, collaborating teacher assist trainees in contextualizing

school curriculum for smooth implementation and evaluation of learning outcomes. Besides, collaborating teacher unpacks school policies, rules and regulation for integration and efficient management of school programs. The results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Support from the Collaborating Teachers

Level of Support	Frequency	Percent
Unsupportive	5	7.4
Moderately supportive	8	11.8
Very supportive	52	76.5
Sub-Total	65	95.6
Missing	3	4.4
Grand Total	68	100.0

Analysis further revealed that out of 68 respondents 5 (7.4%) had unsupportive teachers who were unwilling to share experiences and expertise to hasten professional development of the trainees. Again, 8 (11.8%) received moderate support from collaborating teachers slowing the pace of integration into school system while 52 (76.5%) had very supportive collaborating teachers who guided training in every aspect of the school management. The findings confirm the position of Ingersoll and Strong (2011) indicating that effective collaboration aids in efficient planning, choice of pedagogical approaches and assessment of learning outcomes for improved professional of the trainee development.

7.8 Support from the Regular Teachers

Regular teachers assist trainee teachers navigate the demands of teaching practice, especially in curriculum interpretation scheming, lesson planning, implementation and management. In addition, inappropriate support leaves the trainee hanging, confused and often unable to effectively and efficiently guide teaching learning process. Again with increasing levels of anxiety the trainee may haphazardly prepare for teaching and more likely face rejection for ineptitude. Table 6 shows the findings.

Table 6. Support from Regular Teachers

Level of Support	Frequency	Percent
Unsupportive	4	5.9
Moderately supportive	12	17.6
Very supportive	49	72.1
Sub-Total	65	95.6
Missing	3	4.4
Grand Total	68	100.0

Additional analysis showed that out of 68 respondents, 4 (5.9%) had unsupportive regular teachers who were hardly available for consultation on curriculum interpretation or administration functions which are routinely used to coordinate programs. Again, 12 (17.6%) received moderate support where minimal guidance was offered on integrative approaches on school administration, curriculum implementation and evaluation, while 49 (72.1%) had very supportive regular teachers who provided assistance in areas such as school policies, mentorship and relationships for improved learning achievements. In this context, the trainee teachers had very supportive regular teachers who hastened acquisition of professional teaching skills. This is consistent with (Biesta, 2011) who affirmed that supporting trainee teachers in addressing learners' needs help gain insight from experience which are linked to content acquired at university.

7.9 Relationship between Type of School and Number of Streams

Table 8 is a cross-tabulation for Type of School by Number of Streams which showed that Boys Boarding had the highest level of representation with the least being Girls Day Schools. The most frequently occurring number of streams was 2 followed by 5 streams, 3 streams and 1 stream, respectively. Only 6 schools had 6 streams which were predominantly Boys Boarding Schools. In addition, almost half of the Boys Boarding Schools had 5 streams. Teacher trainees in larger schools were more exposed to varied experiences given the distributions of learners, teachers and curriculum offered. This increased levels of support in terms of school environment, implementation of policies, teaching-learning strategies and conflict resolution. The trainees indicated that wide exposure built confidence and effectiveness in instructional delivery and management.

Table 8. Type of School by Number of Streams Cross-Tabulation

	Number of streams						Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Boys Boarding	1	1	6	2	13	5	28
Girls Day	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
Girls Boarding	1	9	2	3	1	1	17
Mixed Day	7	3	5	1	1	0	17
Mixed Boarding	1	3	0	0	0	0	4
Total	10	16	13	8	15	6	68

In order to determine if the number of streams was contingent upon Type of School or not, the data were analyzed using Chi-square statistic at an alpha level of .05. Table 9 shows the results of the analysis indicating that there is a statistically significant relationship between Number of Streams and Type of School ($\chi^2=63.701$, $df=20$, $p=.000$). However, this finding needs to be interpreted with caution since 27 cells (90.0%) out of 30 in the cross-tabulation had expected count less than 5.

Table 9. Relationship between Number of Streams and Type of School

	Value	Df	Asymptotic. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	63.701 ^a	20	.000
Likelihood Ratio	58.515	20	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	27.557	1	.000
No. of Valid Cases	68		

a. 27 cells (90.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .18.

7.10 Relationship between Teaching Load and School Size

Table 10 is a correlation matrix showing the relationship between number of lessons per week (teaching load) and number of streams (school size) using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. The correlation between the two variables was .226 ($p=.064$). This finding implies that the relationship between the two variables was not statistically significant at the 95% confidence interval. Put differently, the data indicate that there is no relationship between teaching load and the size of school.

Table 10. Relationship between Teaching Load and School Size

		Number of lessons per week	Number of streams
	Pearson Correlation	1	.226
Number of lessons per week	Sig. (2-tailed)		.064
	N	68	68
	Pearson Correlation	.226	1
Number of streams	Sig. (2-tailed)	.064	
	N	68	68

8. Conclusion

Teaching practice is appropriately conducted at the University of Nairobi where assessors adequately support teacher trainees to acquire competencies in managing learning processes. Teacher trainees were adequately supported by school principals who guided on how administration handles teaching-learning issues, instructional management, and institutional relationship for creating favorable school climate to raise sustained learner achievement. In addition, collaborating teachers provide daily debriefs and

guidance on creating positive school and class consultation on curriculum interpretation and implementation for improved trainee competence on adoption of instructional methodologies for enhanced learning attainment. On the other hand, consultation strengthened trainee teachers' ability to manage learning activities, choose appropriate resources and evaluate effectiveness for higher learner achievement. Further, regularity of consultations with regular teachers raised competencies in school management and building relationships for sustained learning achievement. In total, support for teacher trainees by players in the school created cohesiveness in addressing learner difficulties, enhanced competencies in building warm learning climate and unified approach to teaching-learning process through improved professional development.

9. Recommendations

The study made the following recommendations:

- 1) The university should encourage school principals to adhere to teaching guidelines for teacher trainees.
- 2) The university should build strong collaboration with schools in supporting teacher trainees by principals, collaborating and regular teachers.
- 3) Assessors should be facilitated to regularly support teacher trainees acquire competencies in teacher professional development.
- 4) The university should institute measures to uphold minimum supervisions per subject upheld across all counties.

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