

Dynamics of Teaching Practice in South Africa: A Nexus between Theory and Practice

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Abstract: Despite being exposed to teachers' training techniques and strategies, student teachers often struggle to apply their theoretical knowledge during teaching practice. This study aims to explore how teaching practice can better equip student teachers to meet the academic needs of learners and address the challenges they face. The research involved two universities, with a total of fourteen participants, including university supervisors and student teachers. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that the current teaching practice program is fragmented and ineffective in helping student teachers thrive in the school environment. This is evident from their inability to cope with teaching tasks. The study also identified conflicts between teachers and school managers, overcrowded classrooms, misbehaving learners, and a lack of resources as some of the challenges faced by student teachers during their practice. The study recommends restructuring

teaching practices to better prepare student teachers for the demands of teaching. It also emphasises the importance of a close relationship between teacher training institutions and schools, enabling students to better understand the complexities of teaching in real-world settings. This will facilitate the implementation of theoretical knowledge into a practical teaching experience.

Keywords: School-based integrated learning, teaching practice, teacher training institution, student teachers, university supervisors.

1. Introduction

Teaching Practice (TP) is a supervised and assessed educational program that allows student-teachers to apply theoretical learning to practical teaching, according to Wieman (2022). Bhebhe and Tshuma (2016) also define School-Based Work Integrated Learning (SBWIL) as a program that integrates academic learning with its practical application in the workplace, which is often referred to as TP. According to Bhebhe and Tshuma (2016), TP is a preparation method used by Teacher Training Institutions (TTI) to enhance the proficiency of student-teachers as they train to become teachers. During TP, student-teachers acquire the necessary skills, knowledge, and techniques for the teaching profession and put their learning into practice. Vanstelan et al. (2020) emphasise that SBWIL allows student-teachers to develop their abilities to teach in the classroom through a combination of academic and work-related activities. Therefore, organised SBWIL is essential for equipping student-teachers with the skills they need for practical teaching and addressing the diverse learning needs of their students (Ebrahim et al., 2022).

Abongdia et al. (2016) and Aldabbus (2020) argue that SBWIL provides student-teachers with an opportunity to apply what they have learned in Teacher Training Institutes (TTIs). It allows for the assessment of students' potential as teachers, enabling teachers to provide constructive feedback. Additionally, it offers student-teachers practical experience within a school environment, helping them overcome disciplinary challenges and allowing them to handle unfamiliar situations.

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Taole (2020) describes TP (Teaching Practice) as a training process for teachers, based on the principles of micro-teaching. TP simplifies the complexities of teaching by breaking it down into small aspects, allowing teachers to practice each aspect individually. Similarly, Reddy (2019) explains that micro-teaching provides a scaled-down, realistic classroom environment where teachers can improve their teaching skills and try out different strategies. This confined environment requires student-teachers to immerse themselves in the school culture and adopt its ethos.

During the TP period, as Mosas (2019) suggested, student-teachers are expected to demonstrate the skills they have acquired from theoretical courses and put them into practice. It is crucial for student-teachers to approach the teaching responsibility seriously, as the learners think that they are teachers and are not simply practising teaching, and learners are instead actively learning. Therefore, student-teachers must take their school-based experience seriously, and TTIs must strive to prepare teachers-in-training to fit into the education system adequately.

Furthermore, Elmabruk (2020) emphasises the importance of interconnectedness between higher education training institutions, the Department of Basic Education (DBE), and schools. This interconnectedness ensures that student-teachers are equipped with everything they need to successfully transition into the teaching profession. Following Aldabbus's (2020) ideas, it is observed that despite student-teachers engaging in teaching methods and micro-teaching courses, some demonstrate distress and reluctance when it comes to TP in real classroom settings. A study by Ebrahim et al. (2022) revealed that out of 260 randomly selected pre-service teachers, 198 were unclear about the teaching competency requirements during TP. Additionally, the pre-service teachers lacked knowledge of the laws and regulations related to teaching practice, and they found the training period inadequate in terms of lesson design and implementation. These results can be attributed to pre-service teachers not being equipped with the necessary educational competencies for real work environments. This could be due to traditional teaching methods that focus solely on memorisation without connecting the material taught to real work experiences.

Despite TP being a well-organised programme, we argue that student teachers encounter challenges during their school experience. Research on school experience has shown that student teachers struggle to apply their theoretical knowledge in a school context, creating a gap between theory and practice in teaching. Even with exposure to preparation courses, student teachers still face difficulties in putting theoretical knowledge into practice during TP (Rembe et al., 2017). Abongdia et al. (2016, p. 128) also found that student teachers experience challenges during TP, despite the preparation courses. Their study revealed that theoretical learning does not easily translate into actual teaching in the classroom. In some cases, in-service teachers even have to re-teach sections that student teachers taught. These findings highlight the gap between theory and practice in teaching. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by investigating how SBWIL is organised to equip student teachers with skills for handling learners with academic needs in schools. It will also explore the challenges encountered by student teachers during teaching practice from their perspective. Based on the findings, the study provides recommendations to address these challenges, improve the quality of student teachers, and enhance the school experience in TTIs.

1.2. Research questions

Based on the problems identified above, the following research questions were raised to guide the study:

- How is the SBWIL organised to equip student-teachers with skills for handling learners' academic needs in schools?
- What challenges do student-teachers encounter during teaching practice?

1.3. Theoretical framework

Underpinning the study is the Experience-based Learning Theory (ELT) proposed by Dewey (1938). Dewey's (1938) ELT holds that education involves theoretical and practical learning. Therefore, learning should be based on tangible or lived experiences of individuals, including having a purpose in life, experimenting, and collaborating (Dewey, 1938). Furthermore, the Department of Education (DoE) (2000, p. 13) explains that in the context of Teaching Practice (TP), the aim is to provide a realistic environment in which student teachers can experience the complexities and richness of being a teacher. This implies that when embarking on teaching practice, student teachers should integrate the theoretical knowledge acquired in Teacher Training Institutions (TTIs) with the practical and experiential learning gained in schools (Rembe et al., 2017). Essentially, this theory suggests that TP should expose student teachers to real-life teaching contexts and help them develop teaching, social, emotional, and intercultural competencies (Gujjar, 2009).

In line with Dewey's ideas, practical knowledge (learning by doing) is advocated, involving the resolution of problems that arise from one's pre-theoretical life or personal experiences (Williams, 2017). In essence, this theory suggests that during TP, student teachers should actively engage in the process of teaching, thus learning through practice. This approach helps them improve their teaching skills, with a specific focus on implementing, translating, and putting into practice the theoretical knowledge they have acquired from experts (lectures) through pre-service and professional development (micro-teaching). Consequently, they gain experiential knowledge that will contribute to their growth as future teachers (Moyo & Modiba, 2014). TP is based on the idea that knowledge is derived from reflection and inquiry in and on practice, allowing student teachers to value their ideas based on evidence collected within their school or classroom. This is why TP is an essential component of their training (Moyo & Modiba, 2014, p. 4).

Expanding on Dewey's ideas, the relevance of the Experience-based Learning Theory (ELT) to the study is evident in Gujjar's (2009) emphasis on Teaching Practice (TP). Gujjar stresses that TP is essential for student teachers to immerse themselves in the professional community of teaching fully. This immersive experience helps them understand the intricacies of the teaching culture and equips them with the necessary skills and insights to become proficient educators. By actively engaging in TP, student teachers gain valuable exposure to real-life teaching contexts, which aligns with Dewey's proposition that education should integrate theoretical and practical learning. The immersive nature of TP, as advocated by Gujjar, aligns with ELT's principles, emphasising the significance of tangible, lived experiences in the learning process. This approach enables student teachers to effectively implement their pedagogical knowledge, translating theoretical concepts into practical applications while honing their teaching skills. Essentially, incorporating Dewey's ELT within the context of TP not only aligns with the study's theoretical foundation but also highlights its practical significance in shaping the professional development of future educators.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Student-teacher skills for meeting learners' academic needs in schools

In the preparation of student teachers for teaching practice, the process is characterised by a three-dimensional framework. Firstly, students are exposed to and acquire pedagogical knowledge, encompassing both content and methodological aspects of the teaching profession. This initial stage involves a comprehensive understanding of the "what" and "how" of teaching, as emphasised by Manasseh and Serumun (2019). Secondly, student teachers engage in teaching observation, visiting schools and observing in-service teachers in action. This observational learning component offers valuable insights into effective teaching practices. Similarly, micro-teaching, as elucidated by Toale (2022) and Dlamini (2018), entails learning to teach through actual teaching experiences. Through

micro-teaching, student teachers are placed in a real classroom setting, which enables them to develop teaching skills and effectively master the art of teaching.

In addition, a study conducted by Bhebe and Tshuma (2016) focusing on the preparation of student teachers for teaching practice in Zimbabwe revealed the significance of this preparation in fostering autonomy. This autonomy proves invaluable when student teachers encounter learners with diverse educational needs or when their mentor teachers possess limited content knowledge. The authors highlighted that universities organise school visits to familiarise student teachers with the school environment and the learners they will be working with. These visits provide an opportunity for student teachers to observe, learn, and grasp the school culture and the characteristics of the enrolled learners. Furthermore, student teachers gather information regarding the number of students in their assigned classrooms, as well as the available facilities and resources. As Abongdia et al. (2016) assert, this initial visit allows student teachers to establish an initial connection with their classes and mentor teachers, thereby facilitating the development of relationships and an understanding of the learners they will be engaging with during their training. According to Wieman (2022), SBWIL functions as the organising body for TP documentation for student teachers. This includes important documents such as the teaching practice guide, TP file, TP supervision record, and TP critique form. These documents, as stated by Taole (2022), provide student teachers with the fundamental competencies needed to comprehend the intricacies of being a teacher. They also equip them with the administrative skills required for both aspiring and qualified teachers. Work Integrated Learning (WIL) Policy (1997, p. 34-35) emphasises the significance of maintaining an "SBWIL File" for student teachers, which is presented to their Teaching Experience Supervisors (TES) and mentor teachers. This file allows for the tracking of students' professional growth and records during their teaching experience and encourages analytical reflection on their TP.

Furthermore, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) (2017) asserts that student teachers are expected to attend a minimum of 80% of school experience courses to align with the year's teaching experience. In preparation for the teaching experience, TESs diligently ensure that student teachers are actively engaged in TP by adhering to a code of professional ethics, adequately preparing students for the school experience, and addressing the diverse needs of learners in schools.

Dlamini (2017) asserts that TESs are responsible for preparing and teaching student teachers lesson planning. Similarly, Vanstelan et al. (2020) note that student teachers in the program attend teaching experience lectures to familiarise themselves with the expectations and logistics of the teaching experience period. This is where student teachers engage in lesson planning, creating lessons and preparing teaching and learning materials to cater to the needs of all learners. Dlamini's South African study highlights how teaching experience lecturers prioritise inclusive lesson planning, ensuring the involvement of all learners in the same classroom or school. This experience equips student teachers with the skills to plan for learners who require additional support and effectively manage barriers to learning, such as learning or physical disabilities, social disadvantages, cultural differences, and diverse learning styles. During the lesson planning stage, student teachers must be mindful and avoid creating rigid lessons that disadvantage learners in various ways.

The Inclusive Education Team (IET) (2021) posits that learners often possess diverse learning needs. Therefore, it is imperative for teachers to be aware of these distinct needs and provide appropriate learning materials to facilitate their learning. A viable approach to achieving this is through peer learning. Dlamini (2018) elucidates that peer learning is a valuable exercise as it allows student-teachers to gain exposure to real-life teaching scenarios. Consequently, a student-teacher teaches another student-teacher, enabling them to familiarise themselves with the intricacies of teaching while still undergoing training in preparation for TP (Teaching Practice) and prior to the school experience period.

2.2 Challenges faced by student-teachers during school experience

In every TTI, SBWIL provides student-teachers with skilled supervision and the opportunity to receive constructive feedback before and after their teaching practice. Research by Dlamini (2017), Elmabruk (2020), and Vanstelan et al. (2020) has shown that SBWIL is essential in equipping student-teachers with the necessary skills to meet the learning needs of all students. However, the literature also indicates that student-teachers face challenges during their teaching experience. For example, Aldabbus (2020) found that student-teachers struggle to apply theoretical knowledge in choosing appropriate teaching approaches and assessing whether their intended outcomes are met. Hlatshwayo and Chabedi (2021) reported that dealing with misbehaving learners is a prominent challenge during TP, further exacerbated by high student populations and unfavourable student-to-teacher ratios. Dlamini's (2017) study on preparing student teachers for teaching in rural schools using work-integrated learning revealed that student-teachers found it difficult to maintain classroom discipline due to the disconnect between classroom management theories learned in TTIs and the realities they faced in the actual classrooms. This suggests that student-teachers may struggle to bridge the gap between theory and practice, raising questions about their readiness and suitability as teachers in the eyes of their students. Furthermore, Elmabruk (2020) noted that discipline issues are not limited to student-teachers alone, as even qualified teachers may find it challenging to handle unruly learners.

Mittha (2022) conducted a study on the challenges of teaching practice exercises among student teachers in Ogun State, Nigeria. The findings showed that student teachers struggled with lesson planning, which led to disciplinary issues and disengaged learners. De Souza (2017) also emphasises that poorly planned lessons and lack of preparation result in failed lessons, leading to a loss of self-esteem and trust in student teachers. This ultimately undermines the entire teaching process. De Souza (2017) advises student teachers to plan lessons that capture learners' interest and include an engaging introduction. Time management is another challenge student teachers face during teaching practice (TP) (Nasir & Zafar, 2018). Student teachers often struggled to allocate time appropriately, spending excessive time on checking homework and marking, which delayed the start of the new lesson. Similarly, Hlatshwayo and Chabedi (2021) indicate that student teachers had difficulty accessing learners' prior knowledge as a foundation for the new lesson, resulting in prolonged questioning before proceeding. These authors attribute the failure of many lessons to poor time management rather than a lack of information or pedagogy.

It is important to recognise that despite the challenges faced by student teachers during school experience, they are expected to teach and excel under these circumstances. Mosas (2019) suggests that student teachers learn while they practice teaching, emphasising the ongoing learning process. Therefore, all stakeholders, including teacher training institutions (TTIs), student teachers, schools, and the Department of Basic Education (DBE), must prioritise the well-being and learning of learners. School-based work-integrated learning (SBWIL) or school experience is essential in preparing prospective teachers to make significant contributions to the teaching profession. It allows them to apply their knowledge in diverse contexts and cater to the needs of a diverse student population (Chikezie, 2017).

3. Research Methods

The study adopted interpretive paradigm, deemed suitable for exploring participants' lived experiences regarding SBWIL issues (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). The study focused on understanding how SBWIL is structured to prepare student-teachers for TP, as well as the challenges they face in selected universities. In order to gain a deeper insight into the participants' experiences and to bridge the gap between theory and practice, a case study design using a qualitative research approach was employed. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews to address the research questions. The interviews were recorded, and participants were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality.

Semi-structured interviews allowed the researchers to obtain firsthand information (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) and engage with participants by asking open-ended and follow-up questions to comprehensively understand the phenomenon being studied. Importantly, this approach enabled the researchers to draw possible solutions from the participants' perspectives on how to rectify the identified problems.

The study targeted two universities: one in the Eastern Cape (EC) and another in KwaZulu Natal (KZN) provinces. Purposive sampling was used to select three university supervisors (lecturers) and four student-teachers from each university. In total, fourteen participants were interviewed. The student-teachers were in their third and fourth years of study, while the university supervisors were full-time lecturers with more than four years of experience in tutoring student-teachers.

3.1 Ethical consideration and trustworthiness

For ethical reasons, prior to conducting the study, we sought ethical clearance from the University of Fort Hare Research Ethics Committee (reference number ADU001-22). Pseudo-names were used for the sampled universities and participants, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. They were also informed that their participation was voluntary, and they had the right to withdraw at any time without repercussions or pressure to continue (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The collected data were stored and safely protected. To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, measures were taken to ensure credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. Participants were given opportunities to access the findings gathered by the researchers, and precautions were taken to ensure transparency in reporting the findings.

3.2 Data analysis

The data was analysed using thematic analysis, following the steps of familiarisation and immersion, coding into themes, inducing themes, and reviewing themes before the write-up process, as Cresswell and Cresswell (2018) suggested. Pseudonyms were used for the two selected universities, referred to as University A and University B (Caulfield, 2022). The lectures at each university were coded as follows: UL-A, UL-B, and UL-C for the three university lecturers, and ST-1, ST-2, ST-3, and ST-4 for the student teachers.

The data was coded and classified into themes, and the following themes emerged from the interviews. The following themes emerged from the data and are presented below: School-based work integrated curriculum as a well-organised program and challenges encountered by student-teachers during teaching practice.

4. Presentation of Results

The data below presents the participants' views on how the SBWIL is organised to equip student-teachers with skills for handling learners' needs in schools, as well as the challenges encountered by student-teachers. It is worth noting that some participants' comments were similar, and in order to avoid repetition and redundancy, these utterances were not included.

Theme 1: School-based work integrated learning curriculum as a well-organised programme

In line with research question one, participants were asked, "How is the SBWIL organised to equip student-teachers with skills for handling learners with diverse needs in schools?" In both case study universities, participants' responses indicated that the SBWIL is well-structured and effective in preparing student-teachers to cope with and cater to learners' learning needs in schools during the TP. However, some participants expressed concerns regarding the fact that the school is controlled by the Department of Basic Education (DBE). They believe that this hinders the universities' efforts to adequately prepare student-teachers for TP. As a result, student teachers sometimes struggle to fit

in and doubt the effectiveness of school experience courses. For example, at University B, one participant stated:

SBWIL is a structured program that ensures that student-teachers are taught and prepared to go and face the real world, in a sense that they [...] now they can put the theory into practice (in schools). We structure the SBWIL program such that it addresses and talks about current affairs [...], i.e. what students will be doing during the school experience. [...] We put our students in school and/or classroom before they can even go to actual practice teaching. Our students are exposed to microteaching, and during microteaching, students are taught versatile strategies and techniques on how to teach and structure lessons that will cater to learners' diverse academic and learning needs. We give our students lesson plan templates that they complete. The tutors and lecturers explain explicitly what is required in each step of the lesson plan template. These lesson plans are assessed and critiqued before microteaching and constructive feedback is given. As such, the constructive comments they receive from fellow students, tutors, and lecturers help them improve. (UL-A, University B).

Similarly, at University A, a participant commented thus:

In our teacher training courses, student-teachers are introduced to standard lesson plan templates. They focus on basic principles of lesson planning such as objectives, values, and presentation [...]. In addition, lectures from different subject areas and disciplines gather and design lesson plans in unison. Regarding content delivery, student-teachers are exposed to a combination of content delivery formulas and methods focused on interactive activities. And to cater to the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), we encourage them to integrate information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance their lessons and make their lessons more interesting and captivating for learners in schools. (UL-C, University A).

The comments from the two participants highlight that TP/SBWIL is a well-structured and supervised program that effectively prepares student-teachers for teaching in schools. The program incorporates microteaching and the use of ICT tools. However, it is important to note that while TP aims to prepare student-teachers for school experience, there are instances where the strict and distinct nature of schools makes SBWIL seem ineffective and disconnected. One participant from University A mentioned:

What happens to the school system that we find our students in, all the micro-managing, teaching, and lectures or the information on what an ideal teacher is and should be, is given to student-teachers, when one gets to the school system, yes to a large degree it did assist/help them [student-teachers] in terms of the knowledge and information and some of the skills. [...] however, in some cases, SBWIL appears to be like a futile and disjointed program because the school is controlled by the DBE [...], and each school is an entity on its own, and it has its unique ethos and culture. So as a result of that, when a new teacher goes into a new school [...] with the [i.e.theoretical knowledge acquired in the SBWIL], be it as a newly appointed qualified teacher or a student-teacher, the teacher has to go into that school culture and fit in at school ethos and adopt it. And there is so much that a teacher has to take in and learn and adapt very quickly in a short period. It can sometimes be overwhelming, and sometimes, more often than not, you will find that the information given in SBWIL does not prepare you adequately for the school system, and thus, you will find TP much more challenging and frustrating. (UL-B, University A)

The participant explained that in certain cases, the SBWIL can seem futile and fragmented. This is because the information acquired from the SBWIL is not always applicable, as student-teachers often fail to apply the skills learned. The reason for this is the lack of a link between Teacher Training Institutes (TTIs) and schools. The participant further clarified that schools have rigid cultures and

ethos, which makes it difficult for student teachers to adapt and leaves them feeling inadequately prepared.

Theme 2: Challenges encountered by student-teachers during teaching practice

In research question two, participants were asked, "What challenges do you encounter during teaching practice?" The participants' responses indicated that, although they are knowledgeable about inclusive education in real-life school settings during teaching practice, they find it challenging to address learners' needs and meet teaching-learning demands. They also reported feeling inadequately prepared, and the conflicting interests among school managers and teachers exacerbate the problem. The findings also revealed that the quality of learners' mental capacity remains challenging, especially when working with learners with learning difficulties. Student teachers indicated that they feel compelled to employ a variety of teaching techniques that can accommodate all types of learners, including low, middle, and high achievers. The participants also mentioned finding it challenging to manage misbehaving learners, as they often exhibit aggressive and impatient behaviour while the student-teacher is teaching. The findings further indicated that student-teachers sometimes feel unwelcome and like a nuisance to certain teacher mentors, making it difficult for them to fit into schools. The participants' comments also highlighted that the information and opportunities for student-teachers to deliver their lessons and put their learning into practice may not always be readily available. As a result, they feel frustrated and attribute this lack of connection or correlation between Teacher Training Institutions (TTIs) and schools.

At University A, one participant stated,

In microteaching and our respective subject specialisation, we have learned about teaching pedagogies and to include learners in the lesson as per their learning needs. However, when we embark on the teaching practice journey, it feels like the knowledge we have from universities is not enough for us to be able to handle teaching and classroom settings. [...] When you go into the actual teaching, it becomes clear that applying the knowledge you have into practice is something else. It becomes very hard to teach learners in a classroom, especially those learners with difficulties to learning or the so-called "slow learners". It's like you are milking a stone because learners today lack vigour toward learning. For example, a learner in grade 9, can thought to be doing grade 7 in terms of his/her knowledge and mental capacity. Thus, when teaching, you have to go back to grade 7 content knowledge [...] and find learners' existing knowledge. And also it compels you to go all out to ensure that you meet the learning demands of all learners. Exploring possible teaching strategies and/or techniques to put into action so that everyone will be accommodated is time-consuming. (ST-1, University A)

This participant emphasised that they feel unprepared to handle real teaching situations despite the theory they learned in universities. They also mentioned the difficulty in teaching learners with learning difficulties or those who are considered "slow learners." The response reveals that a significant amount of time is wasted in implementing various teaching strategies to ensure inclusion and understanding for all learners. Expanding on the challenges faced by student-teachers, one participant commented:

Behaviour is a very serious challenge in schools [...], in the school I am in, learners tend to exhibit challenging behaviours such as aggressiveness and impatience when the teacher is teaching. Concisely, they do not value your presence and so wish you could just leave or spend less time in the class. [...], I find it very hard to manage discipline and order, as a result even my teaching is disturbed as I am trying to discipline and instil order. At the same, I have to find positive ways or harm-free approaches to discipline. Taking learners to mentor teachers to discipline learners on my behalf, is frustrating because 'isdima' meaning dignity as a teacher is questioned or rather means I cannot stamp authority to my learners [...]. (ST-4, University B).

Behavioural issues appeared to be a problem for both selected universities. At University A, another participant echoed:

Dealing with matters of discipline before and after the lesson, [...] and during the lesson is very challenging. When the children (learners) do not respect during the lesson, he/she needs to be reprimanded and sometimes [...] continue to cause havoc and disturbance to me (student-teacher) and fellow learners. [...] Believe me, it is frustrating. Because you ask yourself, is there anything wrong with me or my teaching? As a result, you end up doubting yourself, and your self-esteem is daunted. If you lack self-esteem what good can you possibly do as a teacher? In some cases, [...], I end up questioning myself, am I a good candidate in the teaching profession? Will I make any meaningful contributions to the young nation? (ST-2, University A).

As noted in the participants' comments, disciplinary issues continue to pose a challenge for student teachers. These challenges can greatly impact their self-esteem, as well as their passion and commitment to the teaching profession. Expanding on the topic of discipline, another participant added:

It is very difficult and challenging to deal with struggling learners or learners with barriers to learning in the classroom because it limits you from teaching them. There will always be a need for relationships in the classroom. As the education pendulum flies back and forth, one thing that you can always count on still being at the forefront of making a difference in the classroom is the idea of relationships. If you don't have a relationship with your students, the work you do daily will be flat and not nearly as effective as what it could be", (ST-1, University B).

As indicated by this participant, establishing a strong relationship between student-teachers and learners and fostering good working relations is crucial in curbing learner misbehaviour and promoting understanding. The participants' comments revealed that the use of digital tools improves teaching and learning. However, the lack of resources presented challenges and hindered student teacher's ability to teach and learners' ability to learn. For instance, a student-teacher at University A mentioned:

In the school I am in, they lack ICT resources, and therefore, when you have planned a lesson it becomes a challenge. [...] Additionally, the issue of load-shedding is very disturbing and/or inconveniencing, because, [...] even with the least of the resources you outsourced, when you are about to start your lesson, the power just goes off, due to the load-shedding schedule. Thus, it becomes very hard to incorporate digital or visual aids to make the lesson engaging and interesting. Utilising ICT tools when teaching exposes visual learning such that when assessing learners already know and understand the concept taught resultantly, this will stimulate discussion about the main aspects of the learning topic. (ST-3, University A)

The participant above emphasised that schools lack resources, such as ICT tools, making it difficult to integrate ICT into lesson planning. Additionally, load-shedding exacerbates the problem. Even if student-teachers have outsourced some of the ICT gadgets/resources, power outages create huge hassles due to lack of electricity. Another participant explained that working relations within the school, particularly conflicts between teachers and the school management team (SMT), hinder effective teaching and learning. For example:

Conflicts and bad working relations between teachers and management of the school prevail to profurously affect teaching and learning, [...] in our case, TP has a time frame and targets. Therefore, if there are squabbles within the school, the whole program will be disturbed. In my school, when we came, teachers were on strike and there was no teaching and learning taking place. [...] I felt that we were compromised such that we were told to phone our lectures not to come for assessment. Furthermore, there was nobody (mentor-teachers) to observe for the first week because they were not teaching. So role modelling was not there [...] and without having

someone to lean on or get assistance from made my TP period not enjoyable. Understandably so, when we were prepared for TP no scenario matched this circumstance, therefore, it was really hard to teach under such a situation. (ST-4, University B)

The participant highlighted that conflicting interests among school managers can be a hindrance during the TP period. They found the administrative work to be overwhelming and challenging. As a result, there were instances where they had to neglect their teaching responsibilities to attend to administrative tasks. For instance:

[...], it is overwhelming that most of the workdays are flooded with numerous forms of digital, verbal, and written communication. Phone rings, email notifications pile up, and meetings run back-to-back. That often leaves learners distracted and unfocused, as you have to attend and respond to emails etc. [...]. Like it or not, you will have to proceed as you have to the curriculum demands and ATP without learners' full comprehension of the concepts taught. (ST-2, University B)

The student-teachers mentioned above expressed feeling overwhelmed by their administrative tasks. As a result, when they have to respond to these forms of communication, they are unable to give their full attention to the learners. This lack of close and continuous attention can cause the learners to lose focus.

5. Discussion of Findings

The findings revealed that SBWIL is a well-structured program that prepares student-teachers to cope with and address learners' learning needs in schools. These findings were supported by Vanstelan et al. (2020), who reported that SBWIL is a teaching preparation method adopted by TTIs to improve the proficiency of student-teachers during their training to become teachers. The findings also showed that both university lecturers and student-teachers had teaching practice manuals from the teaching practice office. When assessing the student-teachers, the university lecturers did not rely on their own judgment but instead referred to the TP manual. Bhebhe and Tshuma (2016) support these views, asserting that student-teachers should have TP documentation, which includes a TP file, supervision record, and critique form, to prepare for the school experience. Wieman (2022) explains that these documents are crucial in helping student-teachers understand the essential aspects of being a teacher and develop the administrative skills required in the teaching profession.

The findings further demonstrated that SBWIL is relevant as it teaches and introduces student-teachers to standard lesson plan templates, focusing on basic principles such as lesson objectives, values, and presentation (i.e., introduction, development, and conclusion). In this way, student-teachers learn to plan lessons that accommodate the needs of all learners and ensure that subject areas and themes align. As Hlatshwayo and Chabedi (2021) argue, a good lesson plan allows all learners to engage comfortably in a familiar learning experience that is reinforced throughout the school curriculum. Thus, information is distributed in a synchronised and holistic manner, targeting the learner's zone of proximal development (IET, 2021) and allowing for the integration of information. According to Mittha (2022), a good student-teacher is able to blend theory and practice in a real-world work environment. Therefore, during TP, student-teachers have the opportunity to showcase their teaching abilities by deepening learners' knowledge and understanding and assisting those with learning difficulties in reaching their zone of proximal development. TTIs must ensure that work-integrated learning emerges as a pedagogical strategy in preparing student-teachers for the school experience, enabling them to enhance learning and development for learners in their respective schools.

On the contrary, the findings suggest that SBWIL, to a certain degree, is ineffective in assisting student-teachers in addressing learners' academic needs. This ineffectiveness arises from the lack of collaboration between schools and TTIs. The findings reveal that each school operates independently

and follows Departmental rules, resulting in unique ethos and cultures that student-teachers sometimes struggle to adapt to, despite their knowledge and skills from teacher preparation courses. As a result, student-teachers fail to adjust to the different working conditions in schools, which is seen as a failure of SBWIL.

Furthermore, conflicts and strained relationships between teachers and school management have a detrimental impact on TP. Disagreements within the school disrupt the entire TP program. The findings also highlight the challenges and time-consuming nature of meeting learners' needs. Student-teachers must employ various teaching strategies to ensure all learners' needs are met. Additionally, dealing with misbehaving learners presents a significant challenge, as they exhibit disrespect, aggression, and impatience towards student-teachers. This behavior leads to self-doubt among student-teachers and a loss of passion for the teaching profession.

These findings align with the research of Aldabbus (2020), who emphasises the lack of confidence among student-teachers in carrying out TP, leading to disciplinary issues. Mittha (2022) stresses the importance of finding amicable ways to address misbehaviour while minimising disruptions to teaching and learning. Sending a learner out of the classroom should not be the sole solution, as it raises concerns about the right to education. Taole (2022) advises that addressing discipline issues should involve identifying the root cause and referring the learner to relevant support systems.

Overall, the research highlights the ineffective nature of SBWIL due to the lack of collaboration between schools and TTIs. It also emphasises the challenges associated with meeting learners' needs, handling misbehaving learners, and maintaining confidence and passion among student-teachers. The researchers argue for the need to address these issues and find appropriate strategies to support student-teachers during their teaching practice. The findings revealed that in some instances, student-teachers felt unwelcomed and were seen as a nuisance by some mentor teachers. Consequently, the student-teachers struggled to fit in and adapt. One participant mentioned that mentor teachers feared that the student-teachers would not be able to keep up the momentum or teach in their style. As a result, when the student-teachers left the school, the teachers were often behind in covering the syllabus. This meant that the teachers could not complete the ATP and the curriculum tracking did not align with the ATP. This demonstrates the need for mentor teachers to work closely with their student-teachers to avoid any gaps because both parties are working simultaneously (Abongdia et al., 2016). Where the student-teacher falls short, the mentor teacher should step in to fill that gap. Nasir and Zafar (2018) affirm that mentor teachers need to remember that they were once students themselves, going through the same Teaching Practice (TP). They should reflect on their own experiences as eager, excited, and nervous fledglings. Therefore, they should assist student-teachers in completing their degree by providing good mentoring.

Furthermore, the findings revealed that there is no connection between Teacher Training Institutes (TTIs) and schools. It has been discovered that the platform for delivering the information student-teachers are eager to share may not exist in schools. Schools have their own separate policies and are not aligned with the TTIs. This presents a challenge as students have specific theories to implement, only to find that the TP is a different situation. As a result, there is no correlation between theory and practice. The findings also showed that schools lack resources, especially ICT resources, which participants found would simplify the teaching task. Additionally, power outages due to load shedding further complicate teaching, even if student-teachers have tried to use ICT tools/gadgets.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study's findings indicated that SBWIL is a holistic program that prepares student-teachers to cope with and deal with learners' needs in schools, as well as TP demands during the school experience. However, the findings indicated a gap between theory and practice, which reportedly affects student-teachers in a way that anguishes their academic, personal, and professional

development. The gap reported by the findings was evident in student teachers' failure to cope with TP demands and their inability to resolve classroom conflicts that arise during the teaching-learning process. The study showed that conflicts and poor working relationships between teachers and the SMT negatively impact the TP process. Learner indiscipline, lack of resources, and excessive administrative work on student teachers were found to exacerbate the challenges faced during TP. Additionally, meeting learners' academic needs, especially in overcrowded classrooms, was reported as time-consuming. Notably, it emerged that before student teachers begin TP, they feel that the theory they have learned is enough for them to handle classrooms. However, once they enter the classroom, they realise that actual teaching is the result of experience, not theory. Therefore, we conclude that theoretical knowledge does not complement practice, and the findings show that there is no integration between theory and practice. Thus, there should be a close relationship between TTIs and schools so that when students leave universities, there is no gap between the theory learned and the real complexities of teaching in schools. This will bring about integration between theory and practice.

Based on the findings, the study offers possible solutions to curb the challenges student-teachers face in schools during TP:

- University tutors and mentor teachers should emphasise that lesson planning is key. They should always highlight that planning is crucial to the success of the lesson. If a lesson is poorly planned, learners will be bored and have more time to act mischievously because they are not engaged.
- There must be a harmonious working relationship/partnership between schools and TTIs.
- Student-teachers must ensure that they can handle misbehaving learners' in-class and out-of-class behaviour accordingly and seek help from mentor teachers where necessary.
- There should be advocacy and meetings for university supervisors, cooperating teachers, and student teachers to discuss and arrange their specific roles and expectations.

7. Declarations

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