

Professional Scaffolding of Student-teachers during Practicum in Tanzania: Roles, Skills, and Challenges

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Author's contribution

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated on student teachers' professional experiences during teaching practicum in Tanzania. In precedence, three objectives were pursued to identify roles of school based teachers, the skills acquired by student teachers, and challenges encountered by student teachers during practicum. The study employed qualitative design integrating documentary review and interviews for data collection. The content analysis was used to analyze reflection reports and interviews from 35 student teachers and 12 school based teachers respectively. The study was conducted during teaching practice period session of the eight (8) weeks from July 13th to September 4th, 2015. The analysis showed that both school managers and mentor teachers played a critical role to engage student teachers in various essential roles that help them to acquire various skills that transform them into professional teachers including handling of learners' behavior in schools; leadership and supervision process; school-community partnership, strategizing the teaching and learning process; and on other school contexts. In addition, the study has identified several challenges including, accommodation; time wastage, large class size; inadequate infrastructures; contextual conflicts; declining student teachers activities; inadequate and late financial remittance; and inadequate and late classroom assessments and feedback. Notwithstanding, student teachers had benefited from the teaching practice which supports and confirms the usefulness of practicum in

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the preparation process of teachers, however, the latter will only be realized if all conditional factors are available. Moreover, the study provides recommendations and established several areas of further investigations.

Keywords: Assessor; mentor teacher; practicum; school manager; school based teacher.

DEFINITIONS

Assessor: *This term has been used to refer the faculty from university usually visiting schools to assess student teachers from their university colleges.*

Mentor teacher: *This term has been used to refer the school based teacher usually attached to student teacher or who delegates particular subject to student teacher to teach for the period of practicum.*

Practicum: *The term has been used in this paper to refer the undergraduate level practical teaching course designed to provide student teachers a supervised practical teaching in both primary and secondary schools.*

School manager: *This term has been used in this paper to refer to only teachers charged with administrative roles including head of schools (head master and head mistress), deputy head of schools, discipline master, academic master, and head of departments.*

School based teachers: *This term has been used in this paper to refer both teachers undertaking administrative roles and those only executing classroom teaching including head of schools, deputy head of schools, discipline master, academic master, head of departments, and ordinary classroom teachers.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Teachers are vital agents in the improvement of education to develop sustainable knowledge society [1]. The general quality of education depends on quality of the teachers prepared in universities and colleges [2,3,4]. It is well contented that any teacher development programme must ensure that the prospective teachers acquire skills and other professional competences to teach students in schools [5,6,7]. Usually, teacher education programmes comprise a periodical component of school teaching practice where student teachers are placed in schools to practice teaching. This period has been referred differently, as practice teaching, field experience, apprenticeship,

practical experience, teaching internship, and teaching *practicum* [3,8,9]. Apparently, practicum provides student teachers real classroom experience of teaching to acquire embedded philosophical knowledge and pedagogical skills in teaching profession [10,11,12]. Hence, practicum becomes a professional platform where student teachers can explore and develop pedagogic skills reflecting on the teaching theories taught in colleges [9,13,14]. In this regard, practicum becomes an experiential pathway to assimilate pedagogic skills and other professional etiquettes embedded in teaching profession inculcating composite teacher's self identity both inside and outside classroom [15,16,17]. Therefore, practicum is crucial process for student teachers to simulate various pedagogical skills and professional strategies on how to deal with various professional activities in actual school contexts [18,19,20,21]. In this way, practicum helps student teachers' to discover and comprehend realistic contexts of teaching and learning environment enabling student teachers to bridge theory-practice gap [2,7,22].

1.1 Practicum in Tanzanian Context

In Tanzania, teacher education programmes are usually offered in tertiary education institutions including Teacher Training colleges (TTCs) and Universities [7,23]. Typically, in university colleges, the programmes include a compulsory practicum component at end of second semester for the first year and second year student teachers in every three years cycle¹. Similar to many other countries, practicum in Tanzanian universities is intended to provide student teachers with opportunity to practice teaching and acquire requisite professional qualities that equip them to teach effectively in their prospective teaching in schools [9,13,24].

Notwithstanding, massive literature and research studies have reported positive value of practicum, studies are yet to report on what roles

¹ All Teacher Education Degree Programmes in Tanzanian Universities take 3 years duration.

undertaken by school-based teachers, how these roles help student teacher acquire various teacher professional skills; and what challenges that may potentially impede full acquisition of the professional skills by student teachers during practicum [25,26]. Many studies on teacher development programs in Sub-Saharan Africa and Tanzania in particular point out a number of issues at technical and contextual levels [7,27]. Studies by [7] and [28] show that student teachers do not get adequate opportunities to develop competences for effective teaching in schools. While it remains emphasized there is a need to improve teacher education programmes in universities, the concerns on how to bridge theory and pedagogy in teaching has triggered debates on how practicum can better help to achieve this objective [3,7,29].

Therefore, there is an explicit need for more investigations to understand contextual experiences of student teachers in schools during practicum [30,31]. Undertaking such a study will help to further an understanding on improving the coordination, financing and budgets of practicum [13], students teachers' school placements [32], optimize school teachers' and assessors' roles [9,23], rationalize existent theory-practice cleft [1,15,29], enhancing teachers' competence in ethics and other

professional cadence; and improving school administration [33].

2. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study pursued to investigate on three objectives related to roles of school based teachers, acquired skills by student teachers; and challenges student teachers encountered during teaching practicum. Four respective questions were devised and deployed to gather data including, (i) what roles school-based teachers undertake to engage student-teachers in teaching practicum?, (ii) what kind of skills student teachers acquired during teaching practicum?, and (iii) what issues yet to be addressed to enhance teaching practicum outcomes?

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study employed a case study design where the researcher exclusively using qualitative approach where observation, documentary review of student teacher reflection reports and interviews with school based teachers were used to collect the data. Content analysis was used to analyse the data from reflection reports and interviews [34]. The data from a total of 35 student teachers from nine (9) teacher education programmes in one public university colleges who were participating

Table 1. Respondents' profile

Student teachers	Status	Amount
Gender	Male	26
	Female	9
Year of study	First year	20
	Second year	15
Program of study	Bachelor of Education in Arts	3
	Bachelor of Arts with Education	6
	BED guidance and counseling	2
	Bachelor Adult Education and community Development	5
	Bachelor Education in Science (ICT)	3
	Bachelor of Education Administration Management	4
	Bachelor of Education (Policy Planning Management)	6
	Bachelor of Education in Special Education	3
	Diploma in Primary Teaching Education (Science & Mathematics)	3
	Practicum school	Rural
Urban/Town		33
School-based teachers	School managers	6
	Mentor teachers	6

Source: Field data, 2015

in practicum. The researcher visited the student teachers for assessment in 6 schools including 5 secondary schools and 1 primary school distributed in three (3) separate districts in Mtwara region (Tanzania).

A total of 35 self-reflection reports from all 35 student teachers were collected after teaching practice session of the eight (8) weeks from July 13th to September 4th, 2015. Also, the researcher conducted interview of twelve (12) school based teachers involving six (6) school managers and six (6) mentor teachers. Both the data collected from 35 student teachers' reflections, and 12 school based teachers interviews were analyzed by content analysis and interpretation in respect to the three research objectives.

The findings are presented in accordance to roles of school based teachers, skills acquired by student teachers; and explored existing challenges. Conveniently, interview excerpts are augmented into the findings to enhance the argumentation and the discussions.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Roles

The study found that the school managers performed various roles as presented here under including. The content analysis from interviews and reflection reports show that school-based teacher helped student teachers to develop self esteem through engaging them to work closely working with other teaching staffs, mentor teachers and students they teach. This is evident since student teachers were engaged in various roles and school activities in school. This contention is supported by one school based teacher who said:

You find student teacher comes here and he had never even stand in front of students lacking the confidence, we help him and another time he became all familiar but then after teach well.

Also, content analysis made from both interviews with head of schools and student teachers reflection reports showed that upon arrival of student teachers in placement schools, school managers usually organized seminal meetings and discussions to orient student teachers on professional rules and regulations which regulate teaching profession. This was squarely deduced

from one of the school managers interviewed when asked about orientation given to student teachers upon arrival, she said:

First, our school is girls only, so before starting any activity, we give student-teachers guidelines as prospective public servants, and for example we give male teachers stern warning to avoid any intimate relationship with girls, but also sometimes we enter their classrooms look the way they teach.

Apart from that, analysis of interviews with school managers show that they assigned student teachers to particular subject under assistance of mentor teachers who assist them to organize classroom teaching and other curricular tasks such as design and supervision of learners' assessments including tests and midterm examinations. Also, mentor teachers were charged to provide guidance and support to student teachers in various teacher responsibilities including presentation skills, classroom management, filling the log books, preparation of scheme of work, lesson plan, teaching methods and approaches, teaching aids, lesson notes. Fig. 1 shows a teaching aid prepared by student teacher under guidance of the mentor teacher.

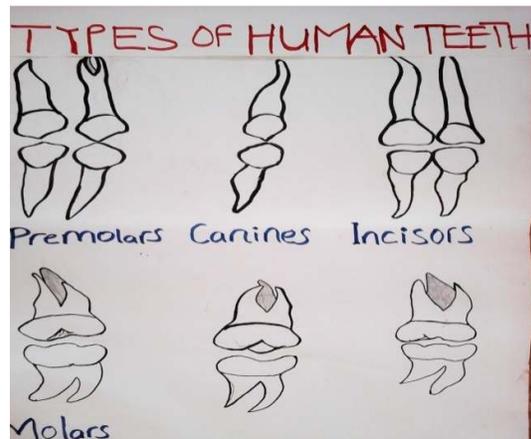


Fig. 1. Teaching aid prepared by student teacher under guidance of mentor teacher to be use in teaching types of human teeth

From interview with one of the school managers confirmed this when one was asked on how they support student teachers upon arrival, he said:

When student teachers come here, we give them periods to teach, usually we assign

them to experienced teachers who help student teachers in various responsibilities including teaching sessions, provisions of assignments, we also pass in classrooms ourselves to check that they teach, and remind them about class documents (lesson plan, scheme of work e.t.c), and class journals, when teacher enter class is signed, and fill how many students were there, and we tell mentor teacher to monitor student teacher.

Further, student teachers reflection reports show that school based teachers engaged student teachers with other teachers in various *extra-curricular activities* such as games and sports, self-reliance activities including farm activities, general school environment cleanness, gardening, counseling to learners, supervision of students' morning and evening parade, study tour to nearby schools, general school environment cleanness, religion, debate clubs, peer groups awareness clubs, and school-community meetings. This shows that student teachers were also actively engaged in other duties apart from teaching. This was reflected evidently as one school manager in one of the girls only secondary school describes:

We often engage student teachers in various other activities from teaching including games and sports, but also when we sometime have other cases relating to students, such as teacher on duty, sometimes we give them classes as classroom teachers, or when girls (students) are disturbed at night by demonic hysteria, I call student teachers to come, we help each other to control students from freaking out in their dormitories, until we ensure that they are relaxed.

Also, the school based teachers played a role to create and maintain a friendly disclosure for student teachers with students, mentor teachers and the community which is professionally rewarding. The interview session with one teacher revealed this as he said:

The school head is responsible to engage student teachers with us, and about the profession, but also we meet with them in our meetings of all staffs during tea break in the morning, head of the school often urges us to associate and involve them in everything because we believe they need to learn what we practice so that when they

finish college they will also deal with various issues about the school and teaching which we discuss during the meetings.

Moreover, school based teachers played a role in provisioning to student teachers with ensuring that materials and conducive environment is available to students teachers such as notes book, pen, and scheme of work, lesson plan, textbooks, reference books, magazine, manila cards and teacher guide books. For instance Fig. 2 show a picture of some of the teaching materials provided to student teachers during the practicum.

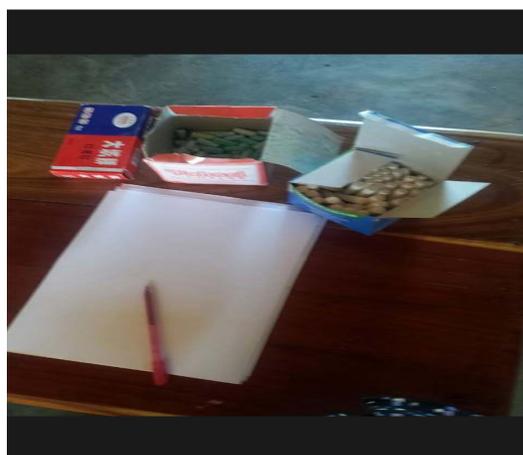


Fig. 2. Picture showing some of the teaching materials provided by School based teachers to student teachers during practicum

4.2 Knowledge and Skills

The results from second objective which attempted to find what skills have been learned by student teachers revealed various skills as narrated in reflection. Analysis has shown that student teachers reported that practicum had enabled them to learn various skills in guidance and counseling as they were repeatedly involved in various cases with students which helped them to easily identify and handle challenging students' behavior and misconduct such excessive alcoholism, drug use, and promiscuity among students.

Also, during teaching practicum, as student teachers were engaged in various academic and co-curricular activities, under close assistance of school managers and mentor teachers, they were able to know and apply various supervision and leadership experiential skills, for example, to

supervise test and extra-curricular activities in the school including sports and games, student peer clubs, self reliance projects such cattle rearing, vegetable gardening, fishery, and cashew nut harvesting.

In addition, students reported that practicum has been a convenient place for them to learn about history of the schools and the cultures surrounding communities. This helped the student teachers to experiment various strategies on how to engage members of the community without serious conflict. In this study, for instance, most of the communities around placement schools belong to *Makonde* tribe, which usually hold tribal initiation ceremonies including *Jando and Unyago*² for young people entering adolescence during cashew nut harvest around August to September every year. Student teachers reported that these events had somehow affected schooling process but they were able to deal with accordingly.

Apart from that, the content analysis from reflection reports show that student teachers were also able to learn on application of various strategies and tactics in preparation reflecting on learners' learning style to enhance students' interest in learning, for instance, integrating sports and games, songs which enhanced students' enthusiasm for learning. Observations made by the researcher witnessed student teachers integrating locally available materials in teaching process which were familiar to students to reinforce understanding in some topics in the class. Fig. 3 shows picture of a student teacher displaying *bow and arrow, and catapult* to learners as sample of local weapons used by traditional soldiers during *Majimaji*³ war uprising in 1905-1907 in Tanganyika (Now Tanzania) during History subject lesson about "*The Establishment of Colonialism in Africa*".

Moreover, student teachers, particularly the first year, reported that practicum has been an empirical experience of the realistic contexts where teaching and learning process takes place apart from simulated micro-teaching they conducted at college. They added that such experience has helped them to comprehend a general environment to emulate professional

decorum in actual schools, For instance, Fig. 4 shows student teacher preparing a Teaching Aid to be used for teaching in class.



Fig. 3. Student teacher showing his students a sample of local weapons during Majimaji war



Fig. 4. Student teacher preparing a teaching aid to be use for teaching in class

4.3 Practicum Challenges

Several challenges were found both from student teachers reflections and interviews conducted with school based teachers. Despite that in few schools, the school managers provided or organized accommodation for student teachers by renting houses either by fully incurring all costs school or as partial subsidizing some amount of the total cost, availability of accommodation (housing) was one of the serious

² Traditional ceremony in most southern regions of Tanzania when male and female children enter adolescence.

³ Literary "Water-Water War" deriving its name from local belief championed by traditional healer Kinjekitile Ngwale's magic water given to the traditional soldiers which had power to dissolve bullets shot by German Army into water.

and critical problem faced by student teachers during practicum, and student teachers had to organize and incur costs for accommodation by themselves. The analysis of student teachers' reflection reports and interview with some school based teachers had shown that accommodation problem was even worse for some of student teachers who were not familiar to the localities, though in urban areas they could not find accommodation easily; but even when they found one they could hardly afford the high costs for renting. The challenge of accommodation was evident from responses of one school teachers during the interview, who said:

The bigger problem here is accommodation, and often when student teachers arrive, it is very serious trouble, because in most cases the school has no extra house and to secure rooms for renting here in the city is very difficult, even when you find one, you know just in imagine we usually pay Tsh. 40,000-50,000 per month (about US\$ 21), now for student teachers expensive, and most of them cannot afford.

Another challenge found among student teachers was a large class size, in most of schools had small sized classrooms which were found to be a serious problem by student teachers in teaching and facilitate students' learning effectively and efficiently. For instance, many student teachers reported to teach classes or more than 45 students (i.e. 1 teacher: 45 students) which is recommended standard in Tanzania. This difficulty was highly observed during supervision of classroom activities and assessment of learners particularly for student teachers teaching science subjects which had integrate practical and laboratory sessions, compared to those who taught arts subjects.

Also, student teachers reported inadequacy and in some cases lack of relevant teaching and learning resources including reference and text books, and other realia particularly in arts subjects where most of these materials were found to be inadequate in some schools. Also, for science subjects, laboratory, experiment specimen, equipments for conducting scientific experiments were reported lacking in some schools. Apart from that, some schools had inadequate classrooms, students' desks, teachers' offices- in one of the school the unfinished laboratory was changed to be staff office; and sports and games facilities were also either dilapidated or completely lacking, all of

which hampering not only student teachers to effectively and efficiently teach and develop meaningful learning of teaching practice. When researcher inquired about this issue from one mentor teacher had this to say:

It is true that government is struggling but we still have a problem with teaching and learning material, because for example there are many science books, although many of these science books are not relevant.

In addition, the study analysis found that student teachers had experiences challenges relating to conflicts between them and learners in some schools. These conflicts were by and large contributed by short duration spent by student teachers for practicum in placement schools which limited the time for student teachers to acquaint and accustom themselves to students' behaviors. In the same vein, the study established that, the conflicts may have emerged from learners' truancy, low learners' learning abilities, and learners' physiological and psychological factors such as maturity. Some student teachers reported that many of the learners' disruptive behaviors' emanated from the learners who perceived them as fellows due to learners' student teacher' perceived age differences, and student teachers' physique.

Moreover, the analysis showed that there were also conflicts between some student teachers and mentor teachers due to varying professional dispositions on decision of which are appropriate approaches and methods to be adopted in classroom for teaching and learning process. Some student teachers claimed that some mentor teachers had low experiences and were not competent, and failed to provide adequate consultation to them for various professional areas that challenged them during practicum. Similarly, in some schools, student teachers reported conflicts due to low communication with school based teachers. The analysis of reflection reports has shown that, in some schools student teachers conflicted with school managers because they were not satisfied or comfortable by the presence of student teachers in their schools claimed to be disruption of normal school timetable and hence affecting their student' performance. One of the school managers lamented that:

These student teachers come here and just play, they are given topics but you find at end of the practicum they have not at all

finished the part given, you know mentor teacher expects after that time he will not teach again that part, so if is not taught that means we have not finished the syllabus and examinations covers all these areas, so they disappoint us, we just receive them but we get a lot of trouble.

Moreover, the study also found that, some student teachers were largely inclined to please their supervisors and obtain a pass mark as reported by many school managers that soon after classroom assessments by university assessors were conducted student teachers would either ask for requests to leave from schools on basis of personal emergencies, or would not effectively conduct their roles including not teaching in class. During interview when one school manager was asked about student teachers' behavior after assessment, he said:

The biggest challenge that we have seen and is a chronic, when assessment is done, it often happens they (student teachers), these young people (insisting of novice level of student teachers), they think field (practicum) ends soon after being assessed by their assessors, they finished the job, they only teach as if they came to seek the grades, they only teach more as per my experience before the assessment ... and this is in all areas, teaching and values, after assessment you see they begin asking for permission to leave the school.

Lastly, the study also found that student teachers experienced acute difficulties to support their daily lives during practicum due to lack of finances, which were not only remitted on time but also most claimed were not adequate to keep abreast the sky-rocketing living costs particularly in urban areas. This affected how student teachers were able to sustain their daily lives which in tandem affected their concentration and focus on practicum training and learning to teach.

5. DISCUSSION

The first objective was aimed to establish the roles played by school based teachers engaging student teachers in practicum. In Tanzania, school head, deputy head and academic master are responsible persons for the execution of various roles in the management and administration of the school [17,35]. These roles include but not limited to day-to-day classroom instruction supervision, human and material

resources, and other support services such as financing, catering, and procurement of teaching and learning materials [35]. Such roles are critical to support professional development of student teachers during teaching practicum [13].

As established in this study school managers and mentor teachers in schools engaged with student teachers to execute various teacher roles that would prepare student teachers build a sense of self identity in teaching profession. This was useful to accommodate student teachers usually from various backgrounds, experience which influence and hence may aggravate their self perceptions and confidence. This approach was imperative since in most cases student teachers were new to the school contexts. Self identity relates to self esteem as one of the critical areas of competencies expected to be developed and assessed during practicum [12]. A study by [36] showed that confidence is significant for building a positive sense of self accomplishment and a professional growth during practicum. Hence, school-based teachers play an active role to support student teachers molding them on rules and regulations properly related to current practices and adapt to beliefs of their teaching contexts [37].

In similar case, school-based teachers play a role of clarifying to student teachers in order to comprehend various policy directives, rules and regulations which govern and dictate actual implementation of classroom instruction and responsibilities within general school context and beyond. It well contented that unless student teachers understand education professional code of conduct and ethics, they cannot be effective teachers [20,38,39]. Inevitably, student teachers must be braced to professional ethics and conduct to inculcate sense of readiness and maturity character [10]. In that regard, the school based teachers are at front line to initiate student teachers obedience to proper conduct as they observe, and learn the implemented core behavioral values [32,40,41].

Such experienced teachers' conduct and ethics help student teachers to conform to aspects of wearing style, teacher personality and general life style as stipulated in civil servant *Standing Order*⁴. Therefore, practicum becomes a convenient space for school based teachers to help student teachers align to ethical standards and conduct pre-empting teacher misconduct

⁴ Official document providing descriptions of conduct and ethics for all public servants in Tanzania.

such as promiscuity and corruption; and prevent transmission of such circadian values to learners [32,42]. Also, as found in this study that school based teachers played an important role to support student teachers to make reflection and adapt their knowledge about teaching and practice respectively [37]. Guidance and supervision became an important feature in tandem helped student teachers to develop holistically and improve their academic teaching competences and other professional obligations [11,13].

Moreover, as more student teachers are engaged into various teaching chores, the more they were able to develop familiarity and friendship with other teachers, students, and surrounding communities to the school. Such engagement into teaching administrative tasks such as determination of staff and material resources, preparation of teaching and examinations time table, provision guidance and counseling learners, solving various issues on school process, discipline cases of learners' misconducts, lesson planning, implementation skills, classroom management, are essential to nurture and improve professional and personal qualities of student teachers [12].

As [13] point out that professional development provides supportive contexts including school based teachers engaging student teachers in meetings with other teachers, students' parents, updating student teachers with information about traditions, customs and culture of the surrounding community. Such these encounters provide a curricular space student teachers learn to diagnose and deal with challenges which relate to academic learning and learners' general behavior. In broader sense, the meetings are significant to create and maintain school culture for which may facilitate or constrict student teachers engagement in all administrative and organizational operations [10].

The second objective of this study was on what skills acquired by student teachers during practicum. The analysis made on institutional assessment forms and scores in particular aspects rated on student teachers by school managers show that student teachers had succeeded to learn various knowledge and skills such as ethical behaviors, for example, student teachers' obedience to the school managers and mentor teachers, patience while dealing with challenges in the placement schools such as absence of catering services, water supply, contextual conflicts, accountability to assigned

responsibilities, and good behavior to their students. Also, as per researcher's observational analysis of the study, student teachers were punctual and conscious to time management of various teaching activities. This finding underscores the fact that teaching and learning is a complex social process, and at times too emotionally challenging for teachers because teachers have to deal with various challenges emanating schooling process [36].

A study by [43] posits that practicum is of the essence for student teachers to develop and employ various coping strategies to deal with contextual challenges. Hence, in retrospect are able to acquire such skills which they can use to resolve those challenges. Also, the acquisition of professional codes of conduct and ethical skills by student teachers during teaching practicum is evidenced by their manifested behavior. This is further exemplified by the extent student teachers are able to adhere to ethical codes and develop a greater sensitivity to moral concerns, hence vie away from such misconduct as such dishonest, immoral conduct, absenteeism, deceitful interactions, corruption, private tuition, unethical dressing, examination fraud, and sexual misconduct [32]. In this way, practicum enables student teachers acquire skills to monitor learners' behavior and maintaining good discipline in the classroom and dealing successfully with learners' misbehavior [23,26].

Apart from that, student teachers benefit from practicum by learning critical intra and interpersonal leadership skills as product of observation and modeling, practice, and association to prior experiences in different activities of daily school life [36,44]. Moreover, it is worth noting that student teachers had benefited from practicum getting opportunity to acquire skills on how to integrate with community members, and school based teachers and learners who in most cases were parents and candidates in various cultural and traditional ceremonies. Arguably, practicum remains embedded to socio-cultural and political context interferences, which are essential to support holistic culture and ethos of social context in which all schools operate [10,26].

Hence, teaching practicum provide student teachers with opportunity to learn about school-community co-existence and strategies employed by which teachers can use to accommodate diverse traditions as teaching process occur *in situ*. Equally important, the

culture and traditions are critical factors determining suitability and acceptance of conceptualized operation of schooling processes [10]. In the same vein, [18] add that teaching practicum provides student teacher's not only rather direct experience of classrooms but of whole school diversity. The diversity is critical for student teachers to develop understanding of the why, what, and how of teaching and learning process [40]. The resultant understanding to such questions is likely to situate realistic contextual beliefs and attitudes of student teachers which potentially lead to changes in classroom practices and behaviors [45].

Also, [30] assert that every school experience has the potential for teaching those lessons about what school is, what teachers do, and how people learn. Therefore, the student teachers ability to use various partnership skills becomes a core function of their understanding of a culture of the surrounding community [11,14,46]. Apart from that, fundamental to practicum is its ability to enable student teachers to acquire various teaching and pedagogical skills. A study by [8] revealed that teaching practicum helps student teachers to enhance lesson-planning skills, gain skills in selecting, adapting, and developing teaching and learning materials. Consistent to findings of this study, the study of [47] demonstrates that teaching practicum significantly enables student teachers to not only increase awareness of teaching and learning skills, but also develop pedagogical reasoning skills as student teachers are able to interact with actual learners.

As hinted earlier in this paper that practicum does not proceed without interferences from various contextual factors which present setbacks for which impede realization of positive outcome of practicum experiences. Such interferences include ineffective reconnaissance conducted by the colleges and universities which do not explore the placement schools surroundings intensively to account the student teachers' financial capacity, as most of them depend on miniscule loan allocations, which most of the time are remitted late. This finding is supported by a study of [3] noted that teaching practices in Tanzania are usually poorly budgeted, and as result they do not adequately provide support and motivation for student teachers to learn.

In that regard, effective survey could have solved, as found in this study, a problem of

accommodation, and placement schools for which most school based teachers and student teachers had pointed as problematic. In same argument, effective survey could have solved inconveniences emanating from long distances some student teachers had to commute to practice schools, as founded in the study student teachers wasted a great deal of time to walk out of schools in search for catering services, as only some schools provided student teachers breakfast and lunch and on working days only. Such time wastage for such daily necessities significantly implicate valuable time needed for the student teachers to effectively achieve mission of teaching their students in classrooms, their efficacy in learning to teach, and execute other general school responsibilities they are assigned during practicum [20]. Consistently, unless relatively enough time is available for student teachers, they are likely to experience difficult to realize meaningful experience of practicum [9,23].

Also, large classes reported by student teachers augment to the fact that overcrowded classes remain a critical contextual challenge experienced for teachers in Tanzania [13,20]. A study by [36] revealed that large classes contribute to apparent teachers' tiredness and exhaustion were due to huge workload that is inconsistent with time they need to plan and prepare, develop curriculum materials, become knowledgeable in subject matter, and conduct assessment of learners' progress, including marking their assignments. In this way, the heavy workload contributes amongst others, to student teachers' failure to amalgamate theory-practice gap, and inefficiency in teaching and learn to teach [13,23,29]. Again, school infrastructures constitute one of the critical teacher working condition which determine teacher effectiveness which depends on teaching and learning resources, whose absence or inadequacy has significant [10,13].

As noted in the findings of this study which also underscores the study of [13] revealed that many schools in Tanzania lack sufficient books, furniture and teaching aids, which affect student teachers to conduct teaching and effective management of classroom discipline management. Moreover, conflicts in practicum characterize to existent differences between teachers including those emanating from professional dispositions are much influenced by ego-centric personal beliefs, which are sometimes conservative, and at times mentor

teachers insisting on rule-of-thumb teaching and learning procedures deprive student teachers a chance to try out their own theories in classroom instruction, are potential develop mismatch in between teachers' expectations and teaching realities [11,22,48,47].

A study by [36] showed that some student teachers often would experience difficulty to obtain sufficient information from mentor teachers; yet the latter are critical to support student teachers' self reflection and development teaching of teaching competencies during teaching practice [10,43,49,50]. Similarly, studies show that mentor-student teacher social interrelationships as potential source of conflict and misconduct; and therefore may lead to lack of good communication and dialogue between student teachers and mentor teachers [11,20,23,47]. This situation is well evidenced among teachers in many schools in Tanzania whom had often experienced disappointments which in most cases had been cited as reason for their lower commitment and morale to teaching and learning [13,33].

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is apposition of this paper that some few suggestions are recommended in attempt to improve practicum in Tanzania and elsewhere. It is imperative that teaching practice surveys should involve school based teachers of placement schools in order to get comprehensive information that can help student teachers participate in practicum comfortably. Both universities and schools need to have close communication during preparation of practicum to make arrangements to provide effective support to student teachers placements Also, there is need for government and schools' authority to rethink about the size of classes in our schools to ensure effective teaching and learning. Equally important relevant teaching and learning should be made available even by making use of locally available resources and not depending on industrial made teaching materials often scarcely supplied in our schools or even expensive such government, local authorities and schools hardly are able to supply adequately. Fig. 5 is sample teaching aid used by one of the student teacher made from locally available disposed synthetic flour packing bag used to make a teaching aid showing a map of Majimaji uprisings (1905-07) in Tanganyika.

Moreover, both university coordinators and school based teachers should convene regular

dialogues prior, during and after practicum on how they can better make school based teachers-student teachers interactions beneficial. For instance to reduce conflicts, universities to introduce full course on professional ethics and conduct, and also university to ensure adequate and on time financial incentives for both assessors and students; and universities and schools need to ensure on time and adequate assessments and feedback to student teachers are implemented. Lastly, it is recommended that further research studies will focus on such areas on how to resolve the identified as challenges in this study.

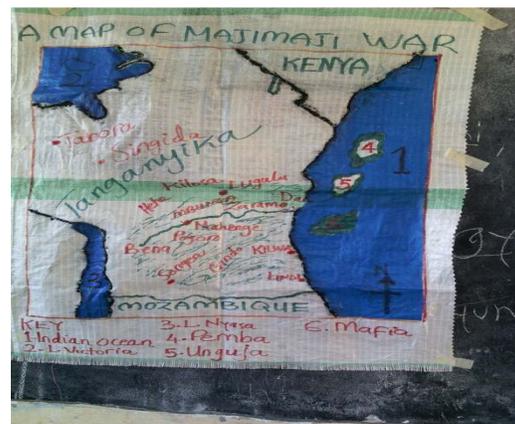


Fig. 5. Teaching aid that was made from locally available materials

7. CONCLUSION

Practicum is regarded an essential component of any teacher development programme which provides an opportunity for aspirant teachers to acquire knowledge and master pedagogic skills in teaching profession. Central to the critics and recommendations of different educators and researchers in Tanzania has been on the state of quality of education of which teacher quality holds critical priority which in turn resonate on how teachers are prepared in universities and teachers colleges. Practicum in this case becomes one of the crucial focal points to improve preparation process for teachers.

The study has evidently established the significance of the school based teachers in teaching practicum, particularly on the roles executed hand-in-hand with student teachers. In this regard, both school managers and mentor teachers had played critical part in providing and scaffold for acquisition and mastery of professional knowledge and pedagogical skills.

However, several enduring challenges have been identified as critical issues that interfere with smooth professional transformation of student teachers in practicum, and hence crippling the teacher education profession in general. The study also proposes several recommendations which are essential to enlighten the future of teacher education, and practicum in Tanzania and that further understanding and effectiveness of teaching practicum in Tanzania and elsewhere.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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