A CASE STUDY OF TEACHING PRACTICUM SUPERVISION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA

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Abstract
This qualitative case study on the University of Zambia's teaching practicum supervision reveals significant inconsistencies. Drawing from interviews with 8 university educators and 10 school supervisors, the research found a lack of consensus on areas for supervision. University educators (teacher educators) prioritized subject matter and methodology, while school supervisors (supervising teachers) focused on classroom management. University educators' observations were often brief and infrequent, described as "hit and run" visits, which limited the depth of feedback. A critical finding was the complete absence of professional training for school supervisors, who expressed a strong need for it. Moreover, formal collaboration and joint reviews between the university and schools were non-existent. These shortcomings contribute to a persistent theory-practice gap, hindering effective student teacher development. The study concludes that the current practicum implementation requires major strategic intervention to effectively produce competent educators including adopting digital platforms for remote observation and communication.

Keywords: Lesson observation, Pedagogical content knowledge, supervision, teacher education, teaching practicum, theory-practice gap

1. Introduction

Teaching practicum, commonly referred to as 'school field experience' (Luchembe, 2020) has widely been recognized as an important component of teacher preparation in university and college teacher education programmes (Darling-Hammond & Lieberman, 2013; Young & MacPhail, 2015; Zeichner, 2010). The teaching practicum holds indispensable value within teacher education programmes, serving as a capstone experience that integrates theoretical knowledge with practical application (Çelik & Topkaya, 2023; Kraft et al., 2018). Teaching practicum, within the scope of this paper, is defined as the culminating experiential phase of teacher education where student teachers, having first mastered their subject content, acquired diverse pedagogical methods, and developed proficient communication skills, engage in supervised practice within an actual classroom setting with pupils to apply and refine their teaching competencies.

Teaching practicum is a pedagogical approach that integrates theoretical learning with practical application, demanding that student teachers translate their acquired knowledge into tangible classroom teaching experiences (Kiggundu & Nayimuli, 2009; Cohen et al., 2013; Gray, Wright & Pascoe, 2017). Consequently, it is regarded as an indispensable component of teacher training. This

experiential learning opportunity provides student teachers with invaluable direct exposure to the teaching profession, allowing them to gain practical experience in instructional delivery and classroom management (Leshem & Bar-Hama, 2008). This necessitates diligent supervision provided by a seasoned educator to guide their entry into the teaching profession.

Supervision of student teachers during their teaching practicum is a critical and mandatory component of teacher education programmes. This process serves as the foundational basis for assessing a student teacher's readiness and suitability for the teaching profession (Collinson et al., 2009; Ezer, Gilat, & Sagee, 2010). The primary significance of effective supervision lies in its capacity to identify pedagogical deficiencies and, consequently, to enhance the overall quality of learning experiences within classrooms (Sumini et al., 2023). Given its critical role, effective supervision is paramount for cultivating reflective practice and developing practical teaching skills among student teachers. Therefore, providing comprehensive training for supervisors to effectively fulfil their mentoring responsibilities is essential (Li et al., 2023; Izadinia, 2017).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The teaching practicum is widely recognized as a cornerstone of initial teacher education (ITE), serving as the critical link between theoretical knowledge and practical application in developing competent educators (Smith & Lev-Ari, 2005; Endeley, 2014). Effective supervision is paramount to ensuring that student teachers not only acquire necessary teaching competencies but also receive the guidance and feedback essential for professional growth (Aspden, 2017; Nel & Marais, 2021; Gurkan, 2018). It has been argued that teacher educators are optimally positioned to facilitate the crucial link between university-based theoretical content and practical teaching knowledge (Cuenca et al., 2011).

The influence of supervisors' feedback on pre-service teachers' teaching practicum experiences, learning processes, and professional development has been well-established (Buhagiar, 2013; Clark & Byrnes, 2012; Hastings & Squires, 2002; Hudson, 2014; Kastberg et al., 2019). However, despite this acknowledged importance, a significant lacuna exists in the detailed empirical research on the implementation processes of teaching practicum supervision and evaluation (Sorensen, 2014, Nesje & Lejonberg, 2022).

Studies frequently highlight general challenges within the practicum period but provide limited in-depth focus on the specific activities, tools, and dynamics of the supervision and evaluation process itself (Clarke et al., 2014). Furthermore, while the impact of supervision on student teacher learning is crucial, research specifically detailing how these processes are conducted and their perceived efficacy from the perspectives of key stakeholders remains under-examined (Sorensen, 2014; Orland-Barak & Wand, 2021). In Zambia, concerns have been raised regarding the performance of student teachers from the University of Zambia during their school teaching practicum. Masaiti and Manchishi (2011:319) reported that these student teachers lacked adequate "skills and knowledge in lesson delivery." Such observations about the capacity of initial teacher education programmes to produce effective teachers underscore the critical need for a deeper understanding of the supervision of teaching practicum. This paper, therefore, presents a case study examining the supervision of teaching practicum implemented by the University of Zambia.

1.2 Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine supervision of teaching practicum implemented in secondary schools by the University of Zambia. The objectives of the study are two-fold: to explore teaching practicum supervision practices and give recommendations for improvement.

1.3 Significance of the Study
The findings of this study have practical implications for improving the quality of supervision of student teachers on teaching practicum. Improvements in this area have a bearing on the quality of teacher programmes as well as enhancement of the learning experiences of student teachers. In addition, the findings of the study might also help teacher training institutions to realign their pedagogies with the Ministry of Education's new curriculum policy framework in order to enhance the quality of teachers for the nation. Similarly, the Curriculum Development Centre under the Ministry of Education may also align its syllabi to the new developments in the teaching practicum.

1.4 Theoretical Framework
Supervision of the teaching practicum requires collaboration between teacher educators, supervising teachers, and student teachers to develop essential teaching competencies. Each group plays a complementary role, guided by frameworks like mentorship and coaching. Given this collaborative nature, the practicum can be viewed as a joint activity between universities and schools (Luchembe, 2020). This aligns with the cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), which uses collaborative activity as its unit of analysis. Originating from Vygotsky, CHAT posits that cultural tools mediate an individual's interaction with the world. Activity theory is a proven "socio-cultural lens" for scrutinising human activity and is well-suited for educational research (Mudavanhu, 2014). Its "interventionist nature" is useful for identifying challenges in practicum implementation and bridging the theory-practice gap, making it the ideal framework for this study on supervision at a public university in Zambia.
Beyond activity theory, supervision is widely recognised as vital for student teachers' professional development, learning, and emotional balance (Caires et al., 2012). Supervisors are responsible for helping students connect university theory to classroom practice and confirming they possess essential teaching qualities. When effective, supervision enhances the quality of teacher training (Owusu & Brown, 2014). However, supervision often falls short of these ideals (Diamonti & Diamonti, 1975). It can create fear in student teachers due to uncertainty about supervisors' expectations, though this fear can also paradoxically encourage alertness (Ong'ondo & Borg, 2011). Given these complex dynamics, this study examines the specific supervisory practices implemented by the University of Zambia.

2. Literature Review
The teaching practicum is known by different terms that can be used interchangeably. Such terms include teaching practice, school experience, and school field experience. Teaching practicum represents a crucial nexus of theoretical learning and practical application, requiring student teachers to integrate pedagogical knowledge within authentic classroom settings (Gray, Wright & Pascoe, 2017). This experiential component is therefore considered indispensable to teacher training as it provides student teachers with direct exposure to instructional responsibilities and classroom management (Leshem & Bar-Hama, 2008). In the context of this study, the School of Education under the University of Zambia provides teacher education to both pre-service and in-service teachers, collectively referred to as student teachers. Both teacher educators (university lecturers) and supervising or cooperative teachers (school teachers) participate in supervising student teachers' teaching practicum is schools.

2.1 Defining supervision in teaching practicum
Supervision in the context of teaching practicum refers to the structured guidance and mentorship provided by both university-based teacher educators and school-based cooperating teachers to

student teachers. The primary objective of this supervision is to meticulously observe and assess the student teacher's pedagogical performance, identifying both their strengths and areas requiring development. Through this observational process and subsequent feedback, supervision acts as a crucial mentoring mechanism, aiming to bridge the theory-practice gap and cultivate the student teacher's instructional competencies to an acceptable professional standard.

Effective practicum supervision necessitates a collaborative framework between university faculty and cooperating teachers, cultivating an environment conducive to student teacher reflection, the provision of constructive feedback, and sustained professional development (Akyeampong, 2017). Despite these established principles, the implementation of teaching practicum supervision frequently encounters substantial challenges, particularly within the Southern African context. These impediments include, but are not limited to, insufficient time allocated for observation and feedback, as well as inadequate infrastructural provisions within school settings, both of which can impede the efficacy of supervisory practices (Moosa & Bekker, 2021). For this reason, effective supervision is critically important for fostering student teachers' reflective practice and practical skills. As earlier alluded to, studies highlight the necessity of collaborative supervision models that engage both cooperating teachers and university educators, thereby creating a supportive network conducive to professional growth (Kraft et al., 2018; Nel & Marais, 2021; Bibi & Aziz, 2024).

2.2 Organisation of teaching practicum at the University of Zambia

The University of Zambia's (UNZA) School of Education structures its pre-service teacher training to prepare students for teaching in Zambian secondary schools. The curriculum integrates both content and methodology-based courses, with students specializing in one or two teaching subjects. Foundational education courses are compulsory in the initial years, progressing to advanced methods and practical skills development in the third and fourth years.

A key preparatory activity at UNZA is peer teaching (microteaching). While this method has faced criticism, it remains a graded and crucial component of teacher training, contributing to the final assessment for each teaching subject. This suggests an initial phase of evaluation focused on pedagogical application in a controlled environment. The culmination of this preparatory process is the school-based teaching practicum, which typically lasts approximately six weeks. This duration, however, falls short of the Zambia Education Curriculum Framework of 2012 (Ministry of Education, 2012), which stipulates a minimum of one full term (about 14 weeks) for teaching practicum.

Teaching practicum models provide a variety of ways to pre-service teacher preparation, each with unique strengths and shortcomings. Mattsson, Eilertsen, and Rorrison (2011) identify several prominent models that include the Master-Apprentice Model, Laboratory Model, Partnership Model, Community Development Model, Integrated Model, Case-Based Model, Platform Model, and Community of Practice Model. Each model defines different tasks and responsibilities for participants and is influenced by variables such as financial resources and desired goals.

While the University of Zambia's (UNZA) teaching practice model does not fully align with any single model outlined above, it exhibits two key features reminiscent of the Partnership Model. UNZA arranges for teaching practice to be conducted in schools, and both university teacher educators and cooperating (school) teachers participate in supervision. Despite the apparent similarities to the Partnership Model, caution is warranted in applying the term 'partnership' to UNZA's approach. The partnership in this context is relatively rudimentary, as the stakes for both UNZA and the participating schools are not equally balanced or firmly established. This is primarily because, under a traditional view of teaching practicum, schools are not fully integrated into the

organization of the practicum, with "most power [residing] with the training institution" (Zeichner, 2010). Robinson (2016) further notes that the university-school relationship in teaching practicum is often loosely defined, with supervising teachers in schools perceived more as "informal guides rather than equal partners."

The selection of a teaching practice model is influenced by several factors. For example, institutions with robust financial resources may opt for the Platform or Case-based models, given their inherent requirement for substantial and stable financial backing. Additionally, adequate time is necessary for teaching practicum and other activities such as research, as exemplified by the Case-based model. Ultimately, the choice of a teaching practice model is significantly influenced by the specific objectives a training institution aims to achieve through its teaching practicum programme. Therefore, an appropriate model for any given teacher training institution is chosen based on its capacity and desired outcomes.

Though teaching practicum supervision and evaluation have been in existence for many years, there has been no universal way in terms of implementation. For example, Heinz (2024) in the editorial for the *European Journal of teacher Education* acknowledges the fact that structures, processes and supervision arrangements for teaching practicums vary widely across international contexts. In light of this, the current practice is to have an ongoing evaluation of the teaching practicum while every effort is made to meet the needs of the student teachers and the training institutions involved in it.

2.3 Challenges in teaching practicum supervision

The task of preparing pre-service teachers for successful professional functioning presents a formidable challenge for teacher educators (Butler, 2001). This challenge is further compounded by external constraints impacting teacher education programs, including limited contact time with students, state-mandated requirements, and manpower limitations (Butler, 2001). Recognizing that the traditional supervision triad in student teaching often remains static, Rodgers and Keil (2007) advocate for the transformation of the student teaching experience, and specifically the supervision structure, to align with contemporary theoretical advancements in supervision.

Luchembe (2020, 2021) investigated the teaching practicum at the University of Zambia and established that the programme was largely ineffective. The key challenges included the short period for implementation, lack of clarity and consensus on the role of supervising teachers. This local context underscores the urgency of addressing systemic issues in practicum. In their comprehensive evaluation of practicum experience from the view of pre-service EFL teachers, Kosar and Bedir (2019) also revealed that while practicum is vital for professional learning and applying subject knowledge, university courses often fall short in preparing pre-service teachers for real classroom challenges. Their findings suggest the need for structured practicum programmes that allow for gradual development towards independent teaching and the effective integration of theoretical knowledge.

Similarly, in a recent study by Lindström, Löfström and Londén (2025), which focused on managing tensions during teaching practicum from the perspective of a supervising teacher, reveals that supervising teachers frequently experience professional identity tensions as a result of unclear expectations, superficial evaluations, and a lack of supervisory training. This shows a substantial concern with the consistency and quality of supervision, which affects the support student teachers receive. Furthermore, Shah et al. (2025), who investigated the practices and problems of school-based supervision, discovered that supervision frequently fails to improve the teaching-learning process due to poor working circumstances, role conflicts, and management issues. Supervisors acknowledged a lack of supervisory abilities, resources, and coordination, emphasizing the importance of professional development and explicit duties for supervisors.

These studies highlight recurring themes in teaching practicum supervision and evaluation, including a persistent theory-practice gap, the critical need for effective and well-trained supervisors, challenges in classroom management and lesson delivery for student teachers, and concerns about the objectivity, consistency, and adequacy of feedback and evaluation methods. These findings provide a solid platform for understanding the specific issues encountered in the Zambian setting and recommending targeted improvements to the supervision of teaching practicums.

As earlier noted, while numerous studies address general challenges within the practicum period, many offer limited insight into the specific activities involved in the supervision process itself (Clarke, Triggs, & Nielsen, 2014; Hoffman et al., 2015; Lu, 2010; Ong'ondo & Jwan, 2009). Similarly, other research provides scant detail regarding the challenges inherent in this process (Cohen et al., 2013; Ellis, Alonzo, & Nguyen, 2020; Lawson et al., 2015). This research gap is particularly pronounced in contexts like Zambia, where comprehensive, localized studies on secondary school teaching practicum, including its supervision and evaluation components, are notably limited. Without a clear understanding of the current supervision practices, challenges, and perceptions surrounding practicum supervision at university in Zambia, it becomes difficult to identify areas for improvement to enhance the quality of teacher preparation, and ultimately ensure that student teachers are adequately equipped for the teaching profession. In conclusion, the preceding discussion has underscored the significant value of supervision in the context of effective teaching practicum.

3. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative case study design within an interpretative paradigm to gain an in-depth understanding of teaching practicum supervision through the experiences of its key participants. The participants were purposively selected and consisted of two groups. The first group included eight teacher educators from the University of Zambia with at least two years of teaching experience. The second group comprised ten supervising teachers, also with a minimum of two years' experience, selected from nine secondary schools known for hosting student teachers.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teacher educators and supervising teachers. The interviews, lasting 40-60 minutes, were designed to gather detailed information on participants' views. These purposeful conversations, guided by an interview schedule, aimed to obtain in-depth information on participants' views regarding supervision of student teachers on teaching practicum. With informed consent, all sessions were audio-recorded. Confidentiality was maintained by assigning participants anonymous codes (e.g., 'TEA' for teacher educators and 'SupTA' for supervising teachers).

Data analysis was conducted thematically in an iterative process. This involved transcribing audio recordings into textual data, which was then organized and repeatedly reviewed. Through this process, emergent themes were identified, categorized, and merged. Finally, these themes were interpreted to provide comprehensive answers to the research questions, ensuring a robust investigation into the dynamics of teaching practicum supervision.

4. Results and Discussion

The researcher elicited perspectives from both teacher educators and supervising teachers regarding their approaches to supervising student teachers. An overarching theme that emerged from the findings was the perceived inefficiency and lack of coordination in the supervision. This broad theme encompassed four distinct sub-themes: divergent focus areas for lesson observation, infrequent and superficial lesson observations, absence of professional development for supervising

teachers, and lack of collaborative review of the teaching practicum programme. Details of these sub-themes are elaborated below.

4.1 Divergent focus areas for lesson observation

Understanding the specific areas examined during lesson observations is crucial for establishing the effectiveness of a programme such as teaching practicum. To conduct class observations for student teachers, teacher educators used a standardized lesson evaluation form, which delineated the criteria against which student teachers were assessed.

The findings revealed individual variations in focus areas among teacher educators, although some priorities were more prominent than others. A majority of teacher educators (six out of eight, specifically TEA, TEB, TEC, TED, TEF, & TEG) primarily focused on the student teacher's knowledge of subject matter during lesson observation. Teaching methodology was another highly prioritized area and was mentioned by six of the teacher educators (TEA, TEB, TEC, TED, TEE, & TEH). Other areas of focus included lesson introduction (TEA, TEE, & TEF) and student teacher-pupil interaction (TEA, TEC, & TEE). Furthermore, some teacher educators (TEB, TEE, & TEG) considered the student teacher's dress code as another area worth focusing on. Conversely, areas that received the least attention were lesson conclusion (TEA & TEB), lesson plan (TEA), clarity of speech (TEB), time management, and the use of visual aids (TEF).

These findings suggest that teacher educators primarily concentrated on the pedagogical content and instructional methods during the observation and subsequent evaluation of student teaching. A representative quote from one teacher educator illustrates these priorities:

> "We look at the introduction, lesson development, use of visual aids, objectives, the personality of the teacher, and pace of the lesson..." (TEF).

Conversely, the lesson plan appeared to receive little attention from teacher educators as evidenced by a comment:

> "The reality is that most of the time we don't even look at the lesson plan before they teach. We observe (lesson) first, then call them. The discussion lasts for five to ten minutes" (TEF).

Among supervising teachers, half (SupTA, SupTD, SupTF, SupTH, & SupTI) prioritized teaching methods, while an equal proportion (SupTA, SupTC, SupTH, SupTI, & SupTJ) highlighted subject content. One supervising teacher elaborated:

> "The area we focus on is lesson presentation. For example, how has the student delivered the material? Have they used the correct pedagogical skills?" (SupTD).

Other focus areas identified by supervising teachers included class management (SupTC, SupTD, SupTH, & SupTJ), classroom interaction (SupTB, SupTG, & SupTI), time management, and the extent to which pupils were following a lesson (SupTB & SupTH). A supervising teacher emphasized classroom management:

> "We observe if they are able to manage the pupils as they are teaching" (SupTH).

Overall, both teacher educators and supervising teachers predominantly focused on teaching methods and the appropriateness of subject content during lesson observations. However, significant divergence was observed in other focus areas. For instance, while supervising teachers frequently identified class management as a key area, it was notably absent from the concerns of

teacher educators. This discrepancy suggests that despite the supposed use of a common lesson evaluation form, there was a lack of consensus on the specific areas to prioritize during lesson observation. This divergence in focus areas may compromise assessment standards, potentially leading to inconsistencies in grading for the same student teacher observed by different evaluators.

4.2 Infrequent and superficial lesson observations

The second sub-theme explored the frequency and duration of lesson observations during teaching practicum. Findings revealed that teacher educators conducted only one lesson observation per student teacher during the practicum, and these observations were often superficial in that they were of limited duration. Teacher educators confirmed this infrequent observation:

> "There are too many students to see in a very short period of time. So, we see them once..." (TEA).

A supervising teacher similarly noted:

> "I will be very frank with you. Normally it is just once" (SupTI).

Regarding the time spent on observation, teacher educators described a "hit and run" approach:

> "I say hit and run because we go in a class and talk to them for 20 minutes and then leave" (TEH).

These findings align with Ong'ondo and Borg's (2011) study, which attributed the compromised effectiveness of teaching practicum to hurried supervision due to a high student-to-supervisor ratio. One teacher educator (TEH) explicitly characterized UNZA's current teaching practicum supervision as a "hit and run" affair, suggesting it contributed to indiscipline among student teachers. A significant number of teacher educators (five out of eight: TEA, TEE, TEF, TEG, & TEH) confirmed that some student teachers tended to relax or even abandon teaching practicum once their single observation was completed. This was vividly illustrated by a remark:

> "In one school we actually found students had gone away because they had been observed in one subject" (TEE).

Supervising teachers also varied in their frequency of student observations. Four supervising teachers (SupTB, SupTD, SupTG, & SupTI) reported observing student teachers only once, while three (SupTE, SupTF, & SupTH) conducted two observations. Only two (SupTJ & SupTA) reported higher frequencies. This suggests that a majority of supervising teachers, like their university counterparts, also observed and evaluated student teachers only once. Some supervising teachers (SupTF & SupTI) attributed this limited frequency to the short duration of the teaching practicum period. Other scholars such as Butler (2001), Moosa and Bekker (2021) and Luchembe (2020, 2021) have also reported that teaching practicum observation and feedback were being allocated inadequate time.

4.3 Absence of professional development for supervising teachers

A critical finding was the absence of professional development or training for supervising teachers on how to effectively supervise student teachers during practicum. All interviewed teacher educators confirmed that such training was not provided, a fact corroborated by supervising teachers. A teacher educator's comment highlighted this lack of interaction:

> "No, that does not happen. I have been in school supervising many times and I don't even meet the teacher" (TEH).

Supervising teachers explicitly expressed a desire for such guidance:

> "They do not give us guidance as to what they expect us to do. ... It is better they come to train us or tell us what they want us to achieve with the student teachers" (SupTC).

This finding aligns with earlier research by Robinson (2016), which indicated inadequate efforts to enhance supervising teachers' proficiency in supervisory work. This likely explains why supervising teachers, such as SupTG, articulated a need for training or advice to effectively contribute to teaching practicum implementation. The present results corroborate Lindström et al.'s (2025) observations that supervising teachers commonly encounter professional identity tensions, stemming from factors such as unclear expectations, superficial evaluations, and insufficient supervisory training.

Furthermore, findings suggest a lack of readily available guidelines on the specific roles and responsibilities of supervising teachers in the teaching practicum. None of the participants, in their interviews, referred to or alluded to being guided by formal directives on their supervisory roles. To address this difficulty, Li et al. (2023) and Izadinia (2017) underline the need of offering comprehensive training for supervisors in order for them to effectively carry out their mentoring obligations. As previously said, the primary importance of effective supervision is its ability to recognize pedagogical inadequacies and so improve the overall quality of learning experiences in classrooms (Sumini et al., 2023).

The researcher also explored the nature of assistance rendered by teacher educators and supervising teachers to student teachers during practicum. While teacher educators did provide some assistance, it was generally perceived as unclear and insufficient. Only three out of eight teacher educators provided specific and clear accounts of the help they offered, which related to subject matter, methodology, and assessment (TEB), lesson presentation (TEC), and teaching aids (TED). The inadequacy of help from teacher educators was largely attributed to the limited time allocated to the teaching practice program:

> "Unfortunately, very little help is given because we have no time to sit with a student" (TEE).

Conversely, supervising teachers provided a more comprehensive account of the assistance they offered. This included securing teaching materials (SupTB, SupTC, & SupTF), providing guidance on effective lesson planning (SupTD, SupTE, & SupTI), and identifying teaching weaknesses while offering solutions (SupTG, SupTJ, & SupTI). Illustrative comments include:

> "Sometimes we help in arranging teaching materials for the student teachers" (SupTB2018), and "We observe student teachers' lessons and advise them in areas where they appear to be weak" (SupTG).

The disparity in the quantity and perceived utility of help received suggests that student teachers gained more practical support from supervising teachers than from teacher educators, likely due to the limited time teacher educators spent at schools. This failure of teacher educators to provide adequate help to student teachers during practicum contradicts the widely held view that teacher educators are optimally positioned to facilitate the crucial link between university-based theoretical content and practical teaching knowledge (Cuenca et al., 2011).

4.4   Lack of joint reviews of the teaching practicum programme

A significant finding was the absence of joint reviews of the teaching practice programme between the University of Zambia and the participating schools. Almost all teacher educators (with the exception of TEH) confirmed that UNZA did not conduct joint reviews of its teaching practicum programme with schools. Teacher educator TEB attributed this to the geographical dispersion of schools, stating:

>"It was quite difficult to do that because the schools are in far-flung areas of the
>country."

Supervising teachers similarly confirmed the lack of joint program reviews:

>"No, we don't hold any review of teaching practice with schools" (TEG), and
>"No, they do not do that (review)" (SupTC).

The absence of formal joint reviews has led to fragmented review initiatives. For instance, two departments at UNZA and some schools have independently undertaken reviews of the teaching practicum. This was evidenced by statements such as:

>"No, we do not do it (review) with the schools but within the department and
>with the students when they report back for their fourth year" (TEG), and "We
>don't (review jointly). We have never done that but as a school, we do it" (SupTJ).

The consensus is that UNZA and schools do not engage in joint reviews of teaching practice. Furthermore, teacher educators (TEC, TED, TEF, & TEG) explicitly stated a lack of formal collaboration between UNZA and schools. This finding is particularly concerning given that teaching practicum is inherently an interactive activity where participants collaborate towards a common goal. The current study, however, suggests that teaching practicum is not as interactive as it is expected to be. This finding is consistent with Zeichner's (2010) study, which found that schools were not fully incorporated into the organisation of teaching practicums, with "most power (residing) with the training institution" such as a university. In short, the stakes for both the training institution and the participating schools are not equally distributed. Such individual, uncoordinated initiatives for reviewing teaching practicum are unlikely to yield the comprehensive and desired improvements for the programme's overall implementation.

5. Conclusion

This case study explored teaching practicum supervision at the University of Zambia (UNZA), aiming to identify areas for improvement in initial teacher education. Anchored on the activity theory, the study was able to scrutinize teaching practicum as a human activity (Mudavanhu, 2014). Employing a qualitative approach with insights from university educators and supervising teachers, the research revealed significant complexities and inconsistencies in practicum supervision within the Zambian context, in particular the University of Zambia.

Findings indicate that while UNZA has established policies, their execution is often inconsistent and influenced by contextual factors, leading to perceived inefficiency and a lack of coordination. Specifically, there is a lack of consensus on which areas to supervise, infrequent and brief lesson observations by university educators, and no formal training for supervising teachers. Additionally, the study found a significant lack of joint reviews between UNZA and participating schools.
Overall, this study corroborates the persistent theory-practice gap in teacher education and underscores the urgent need for well-trained supervisors, improved communication, and robust

supervisory practices. The findings align with studies highlighting challenges in supervisor roles and the negative impact of inadequate feedback. The unique contribution of this research lies in its empirical detailing of these challenges within the Zambian context, providing specific insights into how the UNZA practicum's duration, organizational elements, and supervisory modalities inadvertently hinder effective student teacher development. While the value of practicum is undeniable, its current implementation at UNZA requires significant strategic intervention to fully realize its potential in preparing competent educators.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS
Based on this study's findings, the following recommendations aim to improve teaching practicum supervision at the University of Zambia (UNZA) and similar institutions:

     6.1 UNZA should increase the frequency and duration of university lecturers' observations. In addition, mandatory recurring professional development programmes for university lecturers and school-based supervising teachers in teaching practicum supervision must be introduced.

     6.2 UNZA must hold official, collaborative programme review sessions with participating institutions for the purpose of improving the teaching practicum programme.

     6.3 UNZA should reconsider its six-week teaching practicum period, in line with the Zambia Education Curriculum Framework's guideline of at least one full term (about 14 weeks).

     6.4 The use of digital platforms for remote observations, and streamlined communication to improve supervision efficiency and consistency could be considered as well.

The foregoing recommendations are critical to the improvement of UNZA's teaching practicum, as they can significantly enhance student teacher learning experiences and producing highly competent educators for Zambia.

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