

# Student Teachers' Experiences in the Student Teacher Mentoring Programme (STMP) in Zimbabwe—A Case for Masvingo Province

**Edson Zikhali**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5838-5172>  
Great Zimbabwe University  
Zikhaliedson46@gmail.com

**Richard Makoni**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5143-5432>  
Africa University, Zimbabwe  
makonir@africau.edu

**Joyce Zikhali**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3936-9652>  
Independent Researcher, Zimbabwe  
zikhalijoyce@gmail.com

## Abstract

This multiple case study reports on an investigation into student teachers' teaching practice experiences in the 2.5.2 programme in Masvingo Province, Zimbabwe. A qualitative research design was adopted to investigate this phenomenon through focus group interviews and questionnaires with a purposeful sample of 20 student teachers who had just completed their teaching practice. The interviews were recorded using a digital recorder and transcribed verbatim by the researchers. The data were manually coded to find the themes; these are presented using direct quotations and were analysed using content analysis. The findings revealed that mentors play a critical role in the training of teachers in Zimbabwe and that some student teachers had problems with stating aims in their schemes of work and objectives in lesson plans. They also experienced difficulties with lesson planning and had challenges in lesson delivery. Class control was difficult for many student teachers and lesson evaluation proved tough for them. These insights suggest that host teachers' colleges should devote more time to professional studies where student teachers practice planning lessons and evaluating them, making schemes of work and engaging in microteaching. These could be followed with reflection and discussions that facilitate better performance in teaching. Considering the critical

role that mentors play during teaching practice, it would be recommended that a token of appreciation be awarded to them.

**Keywords:** Student Teacher Mentoring Programme (STMP); teaching practice experiences; case study; class control; evaluation; interview; lesson planning; qualitative research; scheming

## **Introduction**

This study set out to explore student teachers' teaching practice experiences in the context of the Student Teacher Mentoring Programme (STMP) in Zimbabwe, the focus being Masvingo Province. Teacher training in Zimbabwe is done at secondary and primary teachers' training colleges. It is also offered at universities where graduates with an academic qualification such as a Bachelor of Arts are trained to become teachers through programmes such as the Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE). Of late, the Zimbabwe Open University has introduced the training of teachers through open and distance education. In all these training programmes student teachers are expected to go on teaching practice where they are attached to a mentor who serves as a role model, guides them, and helps them to develop teaching skills and strategies. This study focuses on the experiences of student teachers trained at primary teachers' training colleges, focusing on issues related to their training during teaching practice.

Wright (1999) argues that teaching practice is a crucial component of teacher education and the preparation of teachers the world over. In agreement with the above view, Auala et al. (1998, v) posit that teaching practice (TP) is a vital cog in teacher preparation which "gives trainee teachers the opportunity to experience life in the classroom at first hand, and the chance to interact with experienced teachers in the schools." Similarly, Kiggundu and Nayimuli (2009, 347) point out that "Teaching Practice is a form of work-integrated learning that is described as a period of time when students are working in the relevant industry to receive specific in-service training in order to apply theory in practice." Implied by the cited views on TP is that it is a practice where student teachers undertake teaching tasks in the schools where they are deployed to teach. In the Zimbabwean context, primary teacher training follows the 2.5.2 government policy, whereby student teachers spend the first two school terms at teachers' colleges, the next five school terms at the schools (called host schools in this study) and the last two school terms back at college completing their training. The University of Zimbabwe (2013, 12) states that teacher training in Zimbabwe is

a three-year pre-service programme targeted at generalist teacher training for suitable post-O' Level candidates to teach at primary school level (Grades 1–7). To pass this competitive, internationally recognised programme, candidates should satisfy examiners in the broad areas of teacher education competence, that is: Theory of Education; Professional Studies; Main Subject; and Teaching Practice as well as inclusive education.

The colleges thus provide some theoretical background during the first two terms of teacher training in the above cited disciplines, thereby giving student teachers some teaching basics which prepare them for TP. It is significant to point out that student teachers spend much of their training at the host schools under the supervision of host teachers (class teachers referred to as “mentors”). These teachers help student teachers in key teaching aspects: scheming, lesson planning, actual teaching and lesson evaluation. Host teachers and school heads supervise student teachers’ lessons (that is, scheming, lesson planning and lesson delivery). Clearly, host teachers play a pivotal role in complementing teachers’ college lecturers in TP supervision, a point supported by Ngoepe (2014, 41) who argues, “The art of teaching is not gained by student teachers in campus lectures but through teaching practice in real classrooms.” In a similar vein, studies by Sedibe (2014) and Ben-Peretz (2001) revealed that student teachers acknowledged their practicum experience as critical to their induction into teaching. Galbraith and James (2004) also posit that the mentor determines the student teacher’s performance during teaching practicum. Similarly, Graham (2006) recognises the importance of mentors who play a key role in teaching practice through guiding and supporting student teachers. All the above views point to the significance of mentors (host teachers) in guiding student teachers towards professional development during TP. Before much can be discussed concerning student teachers’ induction into teaching activities, it is essential to define mentoring to get a proper view of what this process entails. A literature review will now be provided where views regarding mentoring will be discussed.

## **Literature Review**

This section deals with the concept of “mentoring” and highlights experiences of student teachers in mentoring programmes in different countries. Prior to the definition of this concept, its historical background will be briefly provided.

### **The Concept of Mentoring**

Mentoring is based on the concept of a “mentor,” which dates back to Homer’s *Odyssey* (Young et al. 2009), an epic poem in which Homer describes his hero, King Odysseus. Before going to war in Troy, Odysseus entrusts his son Telemachus into the care of his trusted friend Mentor to guide and nurture him to all-round development on his behalf. The relationship between Mentor and Telemachus, especially the role of Mentor from a more experienced perspective, has given impetus to the need for mentorship in various fields, including education. Now the definitions of mentoring will be given from various authorities.

Ngoepe (2014) notes that “mentoring” has been defined differently by various researchers, implying that this term defies definition, a point shared by McIntyre, Hagger, and Wilkin (1994). McIntyre, Hagger, and Wilkin (1994) say that while applied to initial teacher education in the United Kingdom, this term has been imported to education from other diverse occupational contexts. Despite this lack of consensus concerning conceptions of

mentoring, a few definitions of mentoring are necessary. Clarifying mentoring, McGowan et al. (in Ragins and Kram 2007, 401) assert that

Our understanding of mentoring is grounded in the notion that it is a reciprocal, developmental relationship that develops between persons relatively more experienced (mentors) and less experienced (protégé). ... While some mentoring relationships emerge spontaneously or “informally” between individuals, others are the result of organisational intervention or “formal” programmes.

What is suggested in the foregoing is that mentoring is a two-way process. Reinforcing the above view of mentoring, Malderez (2001, 57) states that mentoring is “the support given by one (usually more experienced) person for the growth and learning of another, and for their integration into and acceptance by a specific community.” Feiman-Nemser and Beasley (in Richardson 1997, 108) further define mentoring as a “face-to-face, close-to-the-classroom work on teaching, undertaken by a more experienced teacher in order to help the latter develop his or her practice.” The latter quotation highlights how experienced teachers can induct novices into the intellectual and practical challenges of reform-minded teaching and suggests that teachers’ experiences guide the induction of less experienced teachers (in this study student teachers) into the teaching profession.

The above definitions of mentoring place value on experience, where experienced teachers can guide student teachers and beginning teachers into the teaching profession. Ngoepe (2014) agrees that viable mentoring programmes “pair an experienced teacher with a student teacher so that the former can provide the latter with regular coaching and feedback that are essential for student teachers to know areas where they are doing well or where they need to improve.” The quotation implies that mentors have the potential to be good role models for student teachers in enabling the latter to develop professionally. This aspect of development is alluded to by Zachary (2000, xiii) who points out that mentors “at their best, inspire us to reach beyond ourselves; they show us how to make a positive difference in a wider world.” In addition, Phillip Jones (1982) (in Shumbayaonda 2013) defines mentors as influential people who greatly assist protégés (mentees) to realise their goals through promoting their welfare and professional development. The worth of experience in the teaching profession is stressed, a view supported by Brooks and Sikes (1997). To conclude the definition of mentoring, Sweeny (2001) declares that mentoring is a process of accomplishing a series of developmental tasks while cultivating a confidential, supportive and mutual relationship, a view shared by Jonson (2002, 8), who adds that the mentor’s chief task is to “establish a relationship with the beginning teacher based on mutual trust, respect and collegiality.” This mutuality between mentors and mentees seals the trust between these stakeholders. The focus of mentoring is the need to provide guidance to the less experienced by the experienced on the basis of the latter’s expertise and experience, which paves the way for the relationship between the mentor and mentee founded on trust—among other related attributes.

## **A Literature Review of Student Teachers' Experiences of Teaching Practice**

In an attempt to understand the dynamics involved in training to become a teacher, Caires, Almeida, and Vieira (2012) carried out a study on 295 student teachers on teaching practice. They analysed their feelings, experiences and perceptions of teaching practice. Key findings were that most of the student teachers experienced stress, a sense of weariness and vulnerability. They viewed teaching practice as a stressful period that required much adjustment as it involved intense exploration of self, others and the new scenarios. However, the student teachers also recorded positive experiences and these included their growing professional knowledge and skills, sense of efficacy, and improvement in their performance and interactions. They also registered accomplishments in their levels of acceptance and recognition within the school community. Most importantly, they hailed the guidance and support provided by their supervisors and mentors as key facilitators of their training.

In another study conducted in South Africa by Kiggundu and Nayimuli (2009), the respondents indicated the importance of teaching practice, commenting that although the theory acquired during university lectures provided them with enough information on how to teach, teaching practice exposed them to the experiences of the real teaching world. It gave them the opportunity to integrate the theory of education with its practice. The student teachers recounted that although some mentors effectively fulfilled their role of guiding them by showing them the ropes, others were dissatisfied with their mentors. They complained that their mentors allocated to them heavy teaching loads while they took a back seat. In a different study in South Africa, Mokoena (2017) found that some student teachers on teaching practice felt that although mentoring was beneficial to their training, their mentors exploited them and were not supportive. Similar sentiments were expressed by student teachers on teaching practice in Zimbabwe (Mapolisa and Tshabalala 2014).

The study by Kiggundu and Nayimuli (2009) further indicated that other mentors did not have confidence in the student teachers and consequently they would not leave their classes in the student teachers' care. Others would not let student teachers teach at any time because they felt that student teachers were delaying and wasting learners' valuable time and they had to finish the syllabus before the end of the year. This resulted in the student teachers getting discouraged and experiencing feelings of inadequacy and loss of confidence in their ability to teach. The student teachers also recorded experiencing learner-related discipline challenges that affected the execution of their duty. In Zimbabwe, Mapolisa and Tshabalala (2014) found that students on teaching practice experienced bad discipline in classrooms and the disruption of lessons due to unplanned activities.

Apart from the challenges already cited, the literature suggests that student teachers generally embark on teaching practice before they are fully prepared for the venture, hence there is much likelihood of encountering challenges in performing their professional duties during their teaching practice (Kiggundu and Nayimuli 2009; Mapolisa and Tshabalala 2014; Mokoena 2017).

## **Statement of the Problem**

Most studies on teacher education in Zimbabwe tend to explore issues related to school-based mentors. These include studies on mentors' challenges (Musingafi and Mafumbate 2014), their importance (Mpfu and Chimhenga 2016), their role (Samkange 2015) and their experiences and preparedness (Tirivanhu 2014), among other aspects. The student teachers' voice concerning their training is missing. As such, little is known about their experiences from their own perspective. According to Naidu (2017), "Great teaching is when students claim to have learned." If students' voices are not heard it will not be possible to comprehend their experiences and to address issues that might affect them during their training. This study thus comes as a resource that attempts to fill this gap.

## **Aims of the Study**

This study thus aims to explore the experiences of student teachers in the STMP concerning the different aspects of their training—that is, scheming, lesson planning, classroom management and lesson delivery. The ultimate goal is to contribute towards the process of teacher training in Zimbabwe.

## **Research Questions**

The research question that guides this study is the following: What are the teaching practice experiences of student teachers in the STMP in Zimbabwe? The objectives of the study are to (1) explore the experiences of student teachers in the STMP in Zimbabwe and (2) to suggest ways in which student teachers' experiences could possibly be incorporated into teacher training programmes in the country.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Two theories, namely the action-reflection theory and the social learning theory, were found suitable for the purpose of this study. The first theory is basically a Norwegian mentoring theory (Skagen 2004). The focus of the theory is on planned, formalised mentor–mentee conferences, where the mentee is asked to develop a mentorship plan for the practicum that helps both the mentor and the mentee. Mentoring within this theory is to assist the mentees to understand their own practice in the context of core values that direct their actions (Skagen 2004). This theory was found to be relevant in considering the mentor–mentee relationship in the teaching practice schools in Zimbabwe where the two have to sit down together and discuss professional issues related to planning, compiling schemes of work and so forth which are key for the development of the mentee. In most cases, if a student teacher experiences difficulties in planning a lesson or coming up with lesson introductions or activities they request the mentor to assist and the mentor guides them appropriately, hence the planned formalised mentor–mentee relationship as explained by the theory.

The main tenets of the social learning theory are that humans have the capacity to learn by observing, can represent external influences symbolically and later use such representations to guide their actions (Bandura 1971). The theory by Albert Bandura postulates that all learning phenomena result from direct experience and can occur on a vicarious basis through observation of other people's behaviour and its consequences for them (Bandura 1971). The main principle in this theory which we found relevant for this study is that learning is largely determined by direct experience and observation and that it is influenced by rewards and punishment (Bandura 1971). Learning by observation in the teaching practice context comes when the student teachers observe the mentors teaching. The rewards and punishment in the form of the grades that they eventually receive also have an influence on their teaching experiences.

Having explained the background, aims, objectives and the theoretical framework, it now becomes pertinent to explain the methodology that was employed to achieve the goals of the study.

## **Methodology**

### **The Research Design**

This study utilised a qualitative research design. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011, 3) claim that qualitative researchers strive for meaning that is derived from participants' lived experiences, circumstances and situations "as well as meanings people embed into texts and other objects." In a similar vein, Denzin and Lincoln (in Welman, Kruger, and Mitchell 2005) argue that the word "qualitative" implies an emphasis on processes and meanings that are not rigorously examined or measured with regard to quantity, amount, intensity or frequency. Arthur et al. (2012, 165) also concur with the above view of qualitative research, which they claim is based on the collection of verbal data, that is, "information about things that can be described in words; it is often presented in the form of narrative accounts of what people say and or do." Babbie and Mouton (2001) posit that qualitative research attempts to study human action from the perspectives of the social actors themselves. Since this study focused on student teachers' experiences during TP, this design was found to be the most appropriate in that it enabled an exploration of these experiences from the student teachers' perspectives.

A multiple case study of four primary schools and 20 student teachers (5 student teachers from each school) in Masvingo Urban was adopted for the purpose of this research. A case study is viewed as a means of organising social data to view reality (Fox et al. 2008; Punch 2006) within a "bounded system" (Creswell 2012; Johnson and Christensen 2000). "Bounded" means that the case is separated out for research in terms of time, place or some physical boundaries (Creswell 2012). The multiple case studies (also called a collective study) were preferred for the reason that they provided an insight into the students' experiences (Creswell 2012; Rule and John 2011) and further allowed an intensive examination of these cases (Huysamen 2001).

## **Sampling and Data Collection**

Twenty student teachers (5 from each of the 4 schools) who had just completed their teaching practice were purposefully selected to participate in the study owing to their vast experience on teaching practice. Oliver (2009) and Creswell (2012) emphasise the need to select a sample that has potential to provide rich data.

Two data collection instruments were used. Firstly, data were collected using two focus group interviews each made up of 10 participants. Focus group interviews were preferred because they are flexible (Liamputtong 2011), hence they enabled us to collect rich data from the participants. Furthermore, the method facilitated the echoing of each other's views, possibly providing additional comments beyond original responses, while pointing out differences (Patton 2002). The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researchers. This enhanced the credibility of the data through minimising potential bias (Yin 2011). Secondly, the data were also collected using open-ended questionnaires. The participants completed a questionnaire each before the focus group interviews. This was meant to elicit the participants' views before they could be influenced by other group members during the group discussion. This helped to corroborate and to triangulate the data for trustworthiness. Holliday (2007, 2) justifies the use of a questionnaire in qualitative research by arguing that qualitative research "will always involve quantitative elements and vice versa," implying that the questionnaire should not be tied down to quantitative research, as it can be implemented within either of the paradigms (quantitative or qualitative).

## **Data Analysis**

Qualitative data analysis, which primarily is a systematic, inductive process of coding, categorising and interpreting the data (McMillan and Schumacher 2014, 395) was adopted for this study. The collected data were organised into categories or themes that were analysed using content analysis, an approach acknowledged by Haralambos and Holborn (2008, 842) as vital in qualitative data analysis.

## **Ethical Considerations**

Research ethics are imperative in any study (Babbie 2005; Yin 2011). Wellington (2010, 129) comments thus: "Ethics comes in at every stage: of planning, doing and writing up research." Ethical principles, such as anonymity, confidentiality and privacy inform research (Rule and John 2011; Yin 2011). Silverman (2011) reinforces the centrality of ethical guidelines, particularly informed consent that gives participants the option to participate in or withdraw from a study. In this study, these ethical concerns were addressed. Data in research is collected through the gatekeeper: "A person in an official or unofficial role who controls access to a setting" (Neuman 2014, 441). To facilitate research, the researcher has to establish rapport with both the gatekeepers and research participants. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in Zimbabwe as the gatekeeper afforded the researchers the opportunity to conduct the research in its schools.



The student teachers' experiences will now be discussed based on the key themes, namely, schemes of work and lesson plans and lesson delivery. Experiences here refer to students' knowledge of their personal encounters during teaching practice.

## **Presentation and Discussion**

This section presents and analyses the data from the participants. The researchers find it convenient to engage in these two processes simultaneously rather than having two different sections.

A considerable number of student teachers from the three teachers' colleges had challenges with stating aims of schemes of work and lesson objectives. They also encountered problems with lesson planning. Class control was a big challenge for many student teachers, as was lesson delivery. The last issue to be examined was lesson evaluation, which troubled student teachers. Student teachers' reactions to the above problems will now be discussed individually, starting with scheme aims and lesson objectives. Student teachers' views will be quoted.

### **Student Teachers' Responses to Aspects of Schemes of Work**

Some student teachers found it difficult to interpret the syllabus for use in their schemes of work. They said they depended on their mentors who had to sit down with them and teach them. In some cases, the mentors simply gave them their schemes so that they could copy them with the hope that the student teachers will learn as they go along.

Student teachers generally were positively predisposed towards the assistance from their mentors in respect of scheming. Comments in support of this thinking are provided below. "He helped me in the corrections of aims and comments," said one student teacher in acknowledging assistance from the host teacher. Fifty per cent (50%) of the respondents concurred with this view. They indicated that this was especially so at the start of the teaching practice (TP) when student teachers were very raw as far as scheming was concerned. Many student teachers thus appreciated the help from their mentors. "She helped me with a syllabus and showed me how to scheme," one observed. This response by the student teacher was quite comprehensive because it linked the scheme of work and the syllabus: the former is derived from the latter. Musingafi et al. (2015) back this view as they argue that a syllabus contains aims, assessment objectives and procedures of a subject with which student teachers have to be well versed.

Apart from the responses given above and similar ones, student teachers mentioned cooperation between host teachers and student teachers in scheming as being pivotal. One student teacher remarked as follows: "We worked together on topics to be covered per term and the way he worked on his schemes gave me direction and motivation." In a similar vein, one student teacher came up with this statement: "The mentor gave me the topics we were supposed to cover for the term for me to scheme during the holidays." Mentors take

this step to assist student teachers especially in stating the aims of the scheme. Such cooperation between host teachers and student teachers helps the latter to be organised as far as scheming is concerned. This helps enhance their grasp of scheming, especially aims, content, source of matter (the syllabus and other sources which inform schemes of work) and comments (which assess the extent to which the content of schemes has been achieved). Makokha and Ongwae (1997) stress the need for organisation in the structure of the scheme. These authors claim that a well-prepared scheme of work should give an overview of the total course content, provide for an orderly listing of learning tasks, show a relationship between content and support materials, and provide a rationale for long range planning, training and evaluation of the course. In concurrence with the above, Okai (2010) says the scheme of work facilitates the teacher's work through keeping records of what is taught as well as what should be taught. The scheme comments are crucial as they reflect the extent to which the content has been covered and hence determine what should be taught next or how the teacher should proceed.

From the above, schemes of work are essential to master in order to enhance lesson planning, since the lesson plans are derived from schemes. Now student teachers' experiences of lesson plan objectives will be discussed.

### **Student Teachers' Responses Concerning Their Experiences of Lesson Planning**

Several student teachers (40%) indicated that they had challenges with lesson planning, particularly the statement of lesson objectives. Some said it was difficult for them to state behavioural and measurable objectives and hence they tended to mix up aims and objectives in some cases. Van Wyk and Dos Reis (2016, 184) explain that "a learning objective describes what the learner should know, do and understand at the end of a (range of) lesson(s) or at the end of the grade." The objectives inform the lessons and they need to be well grasped.

One response from one of the student teachers explained, "Stating objectives is a problem to me because learners are not fast in learning. The 30-minute lesson is too brief to achieve the stated objectives." The issue of slow learners means the student teacher has a problem in matching the time for the lesson and the content taught. This occurs at the start of TP. Host teachers sit down with student teachers to give them more experience in lesson planning. Another response was as follows: "The mentor helped me on stating objectives especially at the beginning of our teaching practice. However, I improved in stating the objectives as time went on." This joint operation headed by host teachers has the potential to assist student teachers to come up with reasonable objectives.

Apart from lesson objectives, student teachers also dealt with lesson activities such as introductions, lesson development (lesson steps) and conclusions. Regarding lesson introductions, one response was as follows: "I learnt that the content should be known, not assumed to be known. I learnt to vary the approaches to the lessons to arouse the pupils' interest." Lesson introductions are important as they motivate pupils to want to learn.

However, teaching goes beyond introductions, hence the need to master other lesson activities. If student teachers become good at motivating learners to learn, learners' performance will improve. Another comprehensive response stated the following: "The mentor helped on how to motivate pupils in the introduction, group work and conclusion." Group work is a crucial method of organising learners for learning purposes. Van Wyk and dos Reis (2016, 109) define it as "a planned, systematic conversation between the teacher and learners. It is a discussion in which information is shared. It involves communication between learners and is influenced by how they respond to each other." Reinforcing the foregoing, Petty (2001, 192) posits that "group work involves learners in task-centred talking. As well as being an enjoyable activity in itself, this provides huge opportunities for learning. ... Students get a chance to practice high-order mental skills such as creativity, evaluation, synthesis and analysis." Such is the potential of group work. However, group work has potential pitfalls such as rendering some less talkative group members "passengers, letting others take the lead" (Petty 2001, 193), hence the need to prepare it effectively.

Lesson planning concludes with a conclusion. Some student teachers have challenges with this activity owing to time mismanagement between activities which leaves little time for it.

The next section presents and analyses data on student teachers' views on lesson delivery.

### **Student Teachers' Experiences of Lesson Delivery**

Lesson delivery is a product of lesson planning. Some student teachers found lesson delivery to be difficult. They indicated that they lacked adequate assistance from host teachers in this aspect. The following view, endorsed by several student teachers, sums up their disadvantage as a result of their mentors' inadequate practices: "The teacher must be prepared. The teacher should have enough media to use during lessons." The use of media increases learners' level of learning. Student teachers also said some host teachers did not adequately use group work during lessons as reflected by this narrative: "There is need to motivate pupils by engaging them in group work and asking them questions during the lesson. Media should also be almost real so that pupils can enjoy the lessons." Media plays a vital role in learning. Host teachers, in spite of their teaching experience, need to engage learners to motivate them. The above narrative indicates that despite being protégés, student teachers were also able to critique poor teacher practices of their mentors.

Despite the above shortfall, some of the mentors did a sterling job, as indicated by many of the respondents: "She really assists me very well in the delivery of lessons, asking me to start from known to unknown"; "The host teacher comments on the lesson plans, showing the strengths and weaknesses"; "The host teacher knows how to introduce, develop and conclude lessons very well, hence we learn much from them on lesson delivery."

Teaching methods are essential in lesson delivery to facilitate pupils' performance. Commenting on the worth of teaching methods, such as games, Petty (2001, 211) encourages their use: "games are universally enjoyed, and encourage real attention to the task, and intrinsic interest in the subject matter." For lesson delivery to succeed, lesson planning has to be thoroughly done so that student teachers have a good grasp of the lessons.

Student teachers' views on class control will now be presented and discussed.

### **Student Teachers' Responses to Class Control**

Maintaining class discipline is one of the hallmarks of good teaching. Most student teachers had problems with this aspect and alluded to students' backgrounds; "their behaviour is influenced by their background," one observed. Learners come from different cultural backgrounds, hence their different behaviours which make it a challenge to student teachers to control them. Most student teachers agreed with this view: "During the first days it was difficult for me to discipline the class because they knew already that I was a student teacher. Pupils already know that beating a learner (a child) is an act of abuse. That's how I failed to control the class." This response calls on the school's administration to adopt a more professional approach to the student teachers by telling pupils that being a student teacher does not imply a lack of professional skills. It further suggests that colleges do not equip student teachers with adequate techniques for maintaining discipline in the classrooms.

Another student said, "Always be strict, firm but fair for better communication. Be consistent in your discipline, to maintain discipline in learners to promote their performance." Being firm is good but a more professional approach is called for. Host teachers helped student teachers maintain order through their communication with the pupils. While this measure is welcome, if used often, there is a possibility that the learners will continue to view the student teacher as weak and dependent on the mentor. To create a conducive atmosphere in the classroom which engenders learning, van Wyk and dos Reis (2016, 111) recommend the following:

Establish a basic set of rules for large class discipline and control. Before you start teaching, set specific rules and regulations for your class at the beginning of the year. ... Set clear expectations for your class. At the beginning of the lesson set specific expectations about what you expect from the class regarding tasks and assignments.

Consistency in the quest for discipline is critical in teaching. This implies the need to be objective in handling disciplinary issues. If student teachers observe the above set of rules (in the quotation), their chances of maintaining discipline are good. In the Zimbabwean scenario, discipline posed a problem to the student teachers.

## **Student Teachers' Responses to Lesson Evaluation**

Lesson evaluations involve indicating the extent to which the lesson objectives were achieved. Student teachers found this aspect problematic because they were not critical in their approach to it. They said they found comments like “The objectives were achieved” easy to write. Sometimes they were stuck, as they did not know what else to write. As a result, they said they were criticised by the school administration, mentors and their college lecturers for not being critical in their disposition.

Evaluation goes hand and hand with assessment. According to Gultig and Stielau (2012, 157), “Essentially, assessment is the process of gathering information on each learner’s progress. We then use this information to plot our teaching and remedial gaps in learning.” Reinforcing the value of assessment in learning, Kyriacou (2001) argues that assessment provides learners with feedback which enables teachers to meet pupils’ future learning needs. Lesson evaluations help student teachers to re-plan lessons if objectives were not met and even plan future lessons from a more enlightened position after serious reflection on the taught lessons.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

This study examined student teachers’ experiences during teaching practice in the context of the STMP in Zimbabwe, the focus being on Masvingo Province. Student teachers’ responses to all raised issues, from scheming to lesson evaluation, show that there are many challenges related to different aspects of their teacher training during TP. The study revealed that student teachers had problems stating the aims of schemes of work. They also had difficulty using syllabuses to scheme. Lesson objectives also presented challenges to student teachers. The study established that student teachers’ lesson delivery skills were initially poor, as was their class control. Finally, student teachers’ lesson evaluations were not critical. The findings show the pivotal role host teachers play in assisting student teachers during TP; most student teachers acknowledged host teachers’ assistance in acquiring basic teaching skills. Without doubt, host teachers are a vital cog in the government’s 2.5.2 teacher training policy.

On the basis of the above findings, the following are some of the recommendations that could be adopted:

Teachers’ colleges need to devote more time to students in the Professional Studies Section to improve scheming and planning in the various disciplines to prepare student teachers for TP. More time in the various subject areas can fine tune scheming and lesson planning skills. Microteaching should be a regular feature at teachers’ colleges prior to TP to make student teachers better prepared for TP. Finally, prior to student teachers being deployed on TP, TP workshops can be mounted by teachers’ colleges where TP schools represented by host teachers and school heads are invited, together with provincial district and education officers. Such diverse views on TP can lead to a more thorough preparation of

student teachers for TP, with the possibility of several distinction cases and less TP casualties. Considering the role that school-based mentors play in the training of teachers in Zimbabwe, it would be proper if they could be given a token of appreciation to acknowledge the key part they play.

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