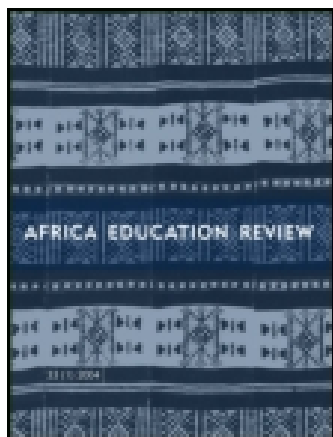


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### Teaching practicum supervisors' identity and student assessment on the practicum: An assorted mind-set?

Proscovia Ssentamu-Namubiru <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Curriculum Teaching and Media, School of Education, Makerere University

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# Teaching practicum supervisors' identity and student assessment on the practicum: An assorted mind-set?

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Proscovia Ssentamu-Namubiru  
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Media  
School of Education  
Makerere University  
pros07@yahoo.com or  
spnamubiru@educ.mak.ac.ug

## Abstract

The study examined the influence of teaching practicum supervisors' identity on student assessment during the practicum. Identity was based on supervisors' teaching experience and subject background. Using a confirmatory research design with qualitative and quantitative methods, data was drawn from 150 assessment forms on lessons observed by 15 supervisors' during practicum besides follow-up interviews. Findings show that there is no relationship between supervisors' identity and assessment of students' knowledge of subject content. However, a significant relationship is suggested between supervisors' identity and rating of students' teaching plans, communication, use of instructional materials, classroom management, and evaluation of the teaching and learning process.

Emphasis during assessment was placed on context-dependent rather than context-independent variables of the observed lessons. Context-dependent aspects are perceived differently by supervisors because they require students to reconstruct acquired knowledge to solve diverse teaching-related challenges. The assessment form completed by supervisors during lesson observation is a platform for discourse between the objective and subjective elements of assessment, whose outcome eventually determines students'

teaching performance. The form elevates supervisors to final judges as they negotiate along the objective and subjective continuum. Although perceived as rigid, it ensures validity and reliability of the scores obtained.

**Keywords:** Teacher education, teaching, teaching practicum supervisor, practicum, profession, assessment.

## Introduction

Practicum is an integral and highly valued component of initial teacher education (Beck and Kosnik 2002; Morine-Darshimer and Leighfield; 2006). It exposes students to the practicalities of teaching in a real school setting. During the practicum, assessment of students' performance by supervisors is a key element. Recognising the centrality of institutions in structuring identities, the major assumption in this study is that supervisors perceive the practicum differently. Studies indicate that certain discourses exist in schools which affect students' practicum experiences (Santoro 1999 cited in Ortlipp 2006; Reddy, Menkveld and Bitzer 2008). Comparable discourses influence supervisors' assessment of students during the practicum.

Reddy et al. (2008, 145) quote five orientations emerging from a variety of literature on teacher education programmes (Beyer and Zeichner 1987; Feiman-Nemser 1990; Diamond 1991; Liston and Zeichner 1991; Stuart 1999 and Zeichner 1983 cited in Reddy et al. 2008). These include the academic, the practical, the technological, the personal, and the critical social or social reconstructionist orientation. These affect students and teacher educators alike. Elsewhere, teachers' mastery of subject content (Huberman and Miles 1984; Lockheed and Verspoor 1991) and their teaching experience (Haddad, Carnoy, Rinaldi, and Regal 1990) define the capability of an institution's teaching force. Drawing from the above, this study leaned on the assumption that teaching practicum supervisors' academic and professional experience influences their assessment of students on various lesson aspects. Teaching practicum supervisors develop along the continuum of learning (Craig, Kraft and Plessis 1998; Darling-Hammond, Wise and Pease 1983). The professional changes that teaching practicum supervisors undergo affect their development in pedagogy and management of students' learning and assessment.

Therefore, the study hypothesised that successful performance of students on the practicum has a direct relationship with practicum supervisors' teaching experience and subject background. In this study, the term teacher educator is used broadly to mean the personnel qualified to offer both theoretical and practical teacher education. On the other hand, teaching practicum supervisors are teacher educators based at the university who participate in assessing students

during school practicum. The support given to students by practicum supervisors is minimal since it is based on the rubric of the assessment form provided by the School of Education, Makerere University. This supervisory role is a limited version of that of mentors, which focuses on an array of student learning support provided by staff at the practice school aimed at holistic professional growth. In terms of valuable experiences, mentors have the most powerful influence on the quality of student teaching experience (Glickman and Bey, 1990), for instance in terms of support and collaboration (Beck and Kosnik, 2002).

Supervisors' conception of teaching also affects their expectations on the practicum. The conception of teaching has various dimensions. Darling-Hammond et al. (1983) conceive teaching in four different ways, i.e. as labour, as craft, as a profession and as an art. Teaching as labour is the acquisition of techniques to implement educational programmes designed by others along with adherence to prescribed procedures and routines, which are monitored and supervised. Supervisors having this perception about teaching merely check out students' levels of competence and ability to deliver knowledge.

As craft, teaching is the possession of specialised techniques and knowledge of general rules for their application. This renders assessment on the practicum a managerial and 'checking up' function. Supervisors aim to ascertain whether students on the practicum are doing things the right way, but this time with a range of techniques. In teaching as a profession, teachers possess specialised techniques backed by judgement based on theoretical knowledge, which they have to arbitrate and use tactfully depending on the uniqueness of the situation. Teaching is not easily evaluated whether by managers or by the use of a checklist of competences. Rather, it calls for responsibility for strategy and evaluation by professional peers. Moreover, as an art, teaching is novel, unconventional, unpredictable, and considerably autonomous. Evaluation aims to improve teaching; therefore, self- and critical assessment by peers, based on holistic criteria, are significant ingredients.

Each of the above described conceptions about teaching has underlying implications on the way supervisors might assess students on the practicum. The practicum is either a bureaucratic and managerial concern, or a professional and autonomous practice. It is either an unconventional application of techniques in standardised forms, or an application of techniques in personalised forms. It is either a possession of knowledge and how to deliver it, or an engagement of teachers and students in complex interactions. In a pure bureaucratic conception, the practicum is context-independent and education institutions issue supervisor-proof assessment plans to perform specified assessment tasks. From a professional viewpoint, the practicum is context-dependent and supervisors

have discretion in student assessment. The focus is on the appreciation of students' performance under various conditions rather than the assessment tool used. At this level, assessment is synonymous with professional maturity. The study aimed to investigate the influence of supervisors' teaching experience and subject background on their assessment of students.

### **The practicum at Makerere University, School of Education**

The practicum appears in different forms in professional education - as field placement, cooperative education, sandwich programs, internship, and clinical placement (Toohey, Ryan and Hughes, 1996). As an internship in Makerere University, the practicum is a component of the three year Bachelor of Arts/ Science degree with Education (B.A/Sc.Ed.) initial teacher education program. As an examination, it is scored out of 100% and accounts for a total of 10 credit units (5 in year 2 and 5 in year 3) of students' total credit units (Ssentamu, Ezati and Ocheng, 2006). Students have 34 weeks of theoretical training per academic year at the University and six weeks of practicum in each of the second and third years. Different supervisors observe various students teach between four and eight lessons spread across the period. During a lesson, a supervisor sits at the back of the classroom to observe issues arising and capture them in an assessment form. After the lesson, the supervisor conferences with the student to discuss observed areas of strength and weakness and agree on strategies for improvement (Ssentamu, Ezati, and Ocheng, op cit.).

This study is significant because it attempts to respond to present teacher educators' and students' discomfort with the way assessment during practicum is conducted at the School of Education. Specifically, there are concerns regarding the assessment behaviour of teaching practicum supervisors, especially the discrepancy in the grades awarded to students given that an assessment rubric is provided. In an effort to unravel the contribution of teacher educators' identities on the assessment of students during practicum, it is hoped that teacher educators are aware of and can work within their identities to make assessment a valuable experience for the parties involved. It is also envisaged that through this study, debates on assessment during the practicum can further be explored at the School of Education and beyond. This is for the reason that locally and internationally, teacher education and all that goes on in its name is open to public scrutiny like never before (Schwille and Dembélé, 2007). Since teachers play a vital role in shaping society, quality teacher education constitutes debate in various academic, social, and political forums. The study is also significant for corroborating similar studies conducted in different settings and times.

## Methodology

The study used a confirmatory research design to determine whether there is a relationship between supervisors' identities and assessment of students on various lesson aspects during the practicum. The study's major hypothesis was: supervisors' professional identity has no influence on their assessment of students on various lesson aspects. The researcher used quantitative and qualitative methods to collect and analyse data. The study used both convenience and purposive sampling strategies. Using convenience sampling, 15 supervisors who had recently supervised students on the practicum were selected from various departments in Makerere University. At the time of this study, the practicum had come to a conclusion and most of the supervisors had gone on holiday. Therefore, participation in this study depended on supervisors' availability and willingness to provide the researcher with their completed practicum assessment books as well as participate in the follow-up interview. Through purposive sampling, the study considered teaching practicum supervisors' professional experience and subject bias (Table 2 for subject bias). Some of the teaching practicum supervisors were at the beginning of their professional career, some in the middle, and some at the end. Consequently, among those selected, eleven had taught in their respective departments for less than ten years, and four for over ten years. Nine were at the rank of assistant lecturer, while six were at the rank of lecturer.

The bulk of the data was collected from the 15 supervisors' school practice supervision book. The researcher randomly selected ten lessons from each book to analyse supervisors' comments on six broad areas of the assessment form, i.e. lesson plan and scheme of work, teacher's communication, knowledge of subject content, use of teaching aids and chalkboard, classroom organisation and management, and assignment and evaluation (Table 1: Selected aspects of the School Practice Assessment Form.) These areas were considered rich in data relating to supervisors' identities in assessment. To facilitate analysis, the comments from the 150 assessment forms were coded and entered in the Statistical Package for Social Scientists. Chi-square was used to test for the statistical significance of the relationship between the study's variables. Follow-up interview data further queried, clarified, and confirmed the data obtained from the comments in the selected assessment forms. The practicum being a major examination, the names of students and supervisors are confidential. The major study limitation is that the limited sample size cannot render the findings representative of the entire staff of the School of Education, Makerere University.

**Table 1:** Selected aspects of the School Practice Assessment Form

Name of student teacher:.....

Subject taught:.....

Name of supervisor:.....

Aspect	Score	Points arising out of the lesson
1. Lesson plan and scheme of work (15 marks) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appropriate format/layout</li> <li>• Clear statement of objectives</li> <li>• Adequate content to be covered in a lesson</li> <li>• Appropriate teaching methods</li> </ul>	0 1 2 3 0 1 2 3 4 0 1 2 3 4 0 1 2 3 4	
2. Teacher’s communication (20 marks) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Motivating introduction of lesson and clear linkage between previous and current lessons</li> <li>• Adequate voice level projection</li> <li>• Clarity of explanation and instruction</li> <li>• Questioning technique (relevance, clarity, frequency and distribution, thought provoking, answerability)</li> <li>• Encourages students’ participation and involvement in the lesson</li> </ul>	0 1 2 3 4 0 1 2 3 0 1 2 3 4 5 0 1 2 3 4 0 1 2 3 4	
3. Knowledge of subject content (16 marks) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subject content appropriate to level of class</li> <li>• Use of relevant examples and illustrations</li> <li>• Sequencing of content into the lesson</li> <li>• Use of students’ questions and answers</li> </ul>	0 1 2 3 4 0 1 2 3 4 0 1 2 3 4 0 1 2 3 4	

<p>4. Use of teaching aids and chalkboard (14 marks)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relevance/suitability of teaching aids</li> <li>• Creativity/use of environment/real objects</li> <li>• Clarity, attractiveness of teaching aids, readability of writing/ diagrams and pictures</li> <li>• Correct time and use of teaching aids</li> <li>• Systematic use of chalkboard, legibility of letters, straight lines and clean chalkboard after lesson</li> </ul>	<p>0 1 2 3</p> <p>0 1 2 3</p> <p>0 1 2 3</p> <p>0 1 2</p> <p>0 1 2</p>	
<p>5. Classroom organisation and management (18 marks)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classroom cleanliness</li> <li>• Effective classroom control and management</li> <li>• Use of relevant humour and awareness of class climate/ addresses students by names</li> <li>• Supervision of class work and posture in class before chalkboard</li> <li>• Time management</li> </ul>	<p>0 1 2</p> <p>0 1 2 3 4</p> <p>0 1 2 3</p> <p>0 1 2 3 4</p> <p>0 1 2</p>	
<p>6. Assignment and evaluation (14 marks)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relevant assignment given marked and feedback given</li> <li>• Evidence of whether learning has taken place through quick review of what has been taught</li> <li>• Nature of work in students notebooks/evidence of monitoring students' work</li> <li>• Meaningful self evaluation</li> <li>• Record keeping</li> </ul>	<p>0 1 2 3 4</p> <p>0 1 2 3 4</p> <p>0 1 2 3</p> <p>0 1 2 3</p> <p>0 1 2</p>	

Source: Makerere University (n.d.), School of Education, School Practice Supervision Book



## Discussion of Findings

### Teacher Educator Professional Identity

Research acknowledges that academic and professional training of teachers has a direct bearing on the quality of their performance (Avalos and Haddad 1981 cited in Craig et al. 1998; Reddy et al. 2008). One characteristic of the teaching profession is possession of an esoteric knowledge base, a long and substantial amount of training, code of ethics, significant professional autonomy, and strong orientation towards service and client welfare (Strike 1990, 91). According to Furlong, Burton, Miles, Whiting and Witty (2000) professional knowledge based on fundamental values and educational theory may form part of teachers' concrete repertoire of knowledge that is applied in specific and diverse situations. The practicum provides what Furlong et al. (2000, 13) describe as "a practically focused view of professionalism."

Supervisors' conceptualisation of teaching as a profession influences their assessment of students during the practicum. In this study, supervisors had differing definitions of effective teaching, which they carried into the practicum. From the comments on the assessment forms completed by the 15 supervisors during lesson observation, the definition of effective teaching appeared in various shapes. Teaching meant a display of adequate knowledge of subject matter, use of appropriate pedagogy for particular content and class level, classroom management, creating and sustaining an effective classroom learning environment, student teacher personality, problem solving, communication skills, and creativity, among others. Several of these combinations constituted supervisors' rating of students' classroom performance. These conceptions shift from the view of teaching as labour or as a craft, to teaching as a profession or as art (Darling-Hammond et al. 1983). Supervisor's conceptualisation of teaching moved from a purely academic to a practical orientation, from a purely technological to a personal orientation, and from an individualist to a social reconstructionist view (Reddy et al. 2008).

In this study, professional identity meant supervisors' teaching and supervision experience, and subject background. Supervisors' teaching subjects and the lessons they observed were categorised into four to include: Language Education, Arts and Social Sciences Education, Sciences Education and Foundation Studies (Table 2, Supervisors' subject background and the subjects they observed during practicum). Codes such as adequate or inadequate, appropriate or inappropriate, knowledgeable or not knowledgeable, and available or not available were used to categorise supervisors' comments on the assessment forms during lesson observation.

**Table 2:** Supervisors' subject background and the subjects they observed during the practicum

Supervisors' Subject Bias	Subject Areas Supervised			Total
	Languages	Arts and Social Sciences	Sciences	
Language Education	6	31	4	41
Arts and Social Sciences Education	9	22	9	40
Sciences Education	7	17	6	30
Foundation Studies	8	25	6	39
Total	30	95	25	150

Findings suggest that, supervisors' teaching experience at the university had no significant influence on their assessment of students' knowledge of subject content. On further testing, the significant difference of 0.884 was found. Apart from two lessons, in the rest of the 148 (99%) lessons, supervisors rated students' knowledge of subject content as adequate. Since this relationship was not significant, the interpretation is that students had good mastery of their respective subject content. In a follow-up interview, a supervisor made the following remark:

As a history lecturer when I supervise a history lesson, the student must present correct content and be able to deliver it well. I judge the student as a learner. I do not use my expertise as a lecturer of history at university level to judge. I give the student room to improve.

The above supervisor is critical when observing his subject of specialisation. However, he judges students as learners, bound to err on subject delivery. Further, students' mastery of subject content was highly rated by supervisors with a teaching experience of over ten years, compared to those observed by supervisors who had spent less time teaching at the university. Supervisors with more teaching experience would be expected to be more critical, since they are well-grounded in their respective disciplines, and have broadened their knowledge of other disciplines along the years.

Findings further showed that supervisors' teaching experience at university level had a significant influence on their assessment of students' teaching

plans, communication, use of instructional materials, classroom organisation and management, and assessment and evaluation of the teaching and learning process. On further testing, the significant difference of less than 0.05 was found. Since the above aspects are related to pedagogy and foundation studies which are crosscutting, supervisors had more autonomy in assessing them than they had in assessing subject content. To further confirm this finding, during interviews supervisors acknowledged that they came from different disciplines; therefore, they relied on the knowledge of general methods when supervising other subjects. One commented thus:

I use my knowledge of general methods of teaching when I supervise other subjects. I also draw on my past experiences during supervision. I easily remember how I dealt with certain problems. I also rely on how I was taught and supervised as a student. Of course, I have to sieve through for best practices.

This and other supervisors interviewed drew on various experiences and conceptions of what in their view constitutes good teaching to assess students. Although it was acknowledged that as teachers it was easy for them to detect and follow-up content errors made by students during the lesson, supervisors with a humanities background supervised humanities-related lessons with ease, while those with a science background were comfortable supervising science-related lessons. However, local and international languages such as Luganda, Swahili and German needed specialists in those languages.

The study further analysed the influence of supervisors' experience in supervising students on the practicum and the comments they made on various aspects in the lessons observed. Similar to supervisors' teaching experience at the university, their experience in supervising the practicum had no significant influence on their assessment of students' knowledge of subject content. On further testing, the significant difference of 0.444 was found. Apart from one lesson, in the rest of the 149 (99%) lessons, supervisors rated students' knowledge of subject content as adequate. Similarly, all lessons observed by supervisors who had spent over 10 years supervising the practicum were assessed positively, compared to those observed by supervisors who had spent less time supervising the practicum. Further analysis of supervisors' comments showed that supervisors generally made minimal comments regarding students' knowledge of teaching subject content. Such expressions as knowledgeable, used vivid examples, content appropriate to class level, commendable and good, well-sequenced presentation were common in most of the selected assessment forms.

Nevertheless, supervisors' experience in supervising the practicum had a significant influence on their assessment of students' teaching plans,

communication, use of instructional materials, classroom organisation and management, as well as assessment and evaluation of the lesson. On further testing, the significant difference of less than 0.05 was found.

Despite the positive rating of many lesson aspects, analysis of supervisors' comments in the assessment forms showed no significant distinction between comments made in a particular subject and those made in another subject by the same supervisor. For instance, comments made in a Maths lesson were similar to those in a Geography lesson observed by the same supervisor. Further, a supervisor who had taught religious studies for over ten years made similar comments on a religious studies lesson and a biology lesson. This implied that supervisors did not rely on their subject expertise to influence or enlighten assessment. There were few lessons in which supervisors with different subject backgrounds critically observed lessons in other subjects as cited below.

- Teacher accepts or rejects students' answers with confidence.
- Knowledge processing taken care of. Learners validate each other's answers.
- A free and expressive maths atmosphere.
- Attempt to deliver content in bits for easy analysis and reflection.
- You are presenting on relief and altitude without allowing learners to reflect and ask questions.

In another instance, a supervisor with an English Language background observing a physics lesson on Optics: Rectilinear Propagation of Light commented thus: "Where is the torch?" The student had planned to use a torch to demonstrate that light travels in a straight line. However, the student had forgotten to bring the torch to class. The above comments show that most supervisors generally placed emphasis on methods-specific rather than content-specific aspects of the lesson.

In conclusion, the above study findings confirm that supervisors' professional identity does not influence their assessment of students' knowledge of subject content. Nonetheless, it influences supervisors' assessment of students' teaching plans, communication, use of instructional materials, classroom organisation, management and assessment and evaluation of lessons. This influence relates to the controversy in teacher education, for instance regarding the definition, selection, and use of instructional materials. While some supervisors regard chalk, chalkboard, and duster as instructional materials, others do not. Further, although some students had the 'right' instructional materials, these were either poorly illustrated, ineffectively used, untimely used, planned for but not used or unplanned for, which features depended on supervisors' personal judgement. Classroom management and organisation are also contentious aspects in teaching. From the assessment form, supervisors' conceptions of

classroom organisation and management included how long the class took to settle, handling of group and individual work, learner reinforcement, attention given to learners, student mastery and frequent use of learners' names, use of humour, movement and posture before class, time management and classroom cleanliness, which also largely depended on supervisors' prudence.

Therefore, teaching plans, communication, instructional materials, classroom organisation and management, and assessment and evaluation of lessons are context-dependent variables which keep shifting in view of individual supervisors, students, and classroom environment. The unpredictability in selection and application of these aspects is likely to influence supervisors compared to students' knowledge of subject content. These variables transcend the sheer possession of knowledge to include how students transform that knowledge into practice in varying situations. Shulman (1986) refers to this as pedagogical content knowledge. Further, as cited in Reddy et al. (2008) such orientation tends towards the practical, the personal, and the social reconstructionist viewpoints of teacher education.

Conceptualisation of the practicum in terms of supervisors' professional background recognises the subjective nature of supervisors and the supervision process. Subjectivity in such instances is inevitable and welcome; it is not something to be eradicated or denied, since judgements about competence depend on the tacit knowledge and expertise of the assessors (Hager and Butler, 1996). Hager and Butler (op cit. 372) argue that subjectivity is not equivalent to bias; rather it is the learned, relative standards of the assessor being used as the basis for judgement. Others might argue that subjectivity puts at stake the reliability and validity of students' scores, a much needed quality assurance mechanism in teacher education. In the judgmental model proposed by Hager and Butler, the assessor delivers objectivity, not the predetermined set of data. This predetermined set of data is captured in an assessment form, which in this study was singled out by supervisors during the interviews as space where the objective and subjective judgements converge.

### **The Assessment form**

To address reliability and validity issues, a single standard assessment form is used to determine students' success on the practicum. This institutional tool is an indicator that the University favours knowledge-based assessment and assessment methods which, according to Toohey et al. (1996, 216), enable grading of students. The form specifies the rationale for assessing students and the content for assessment. Supervisors use it to assess broad aspects such as students' planning skills, subject content knowledge and its delivery as well as

teacher personality and attitudes towards teaching. Under the broad aspects are discrete competences. Therefore, the form integrates the specific competences model and the broad abilities model (Toohey et al. 1996). With the emphasis on competences, the combination of the two models gives birth to the outcomes-based model of assessment of the practicum.

Further, the assessment form is criterion-referenced, since supervisors rate students' performance on each of the specified competences on a 2-5 point scale. Although follow-up interview data shows that the current assessment form was preferred to earlier ones for controlling bias, the point-scale introduces subjectivity in that supervisors will rate a lesson differently. A supervisor described the assessment form thus:

The form is broad enough since it touches on all areas of teaching and learning. However, the problem is with the scoring. It is upon my discretion if the student has performed well to give three and four. The difference between the three and four depends on the supervisor. If there are two supervisors in the same class, we will get different scores.

For this and other supervisors interviewed, arrival at a score using the point-scale was *'technical'* and *'complex.'* According to one supervisor, "there was Part B of the form, which was hidden, but which played an important role." Part B of the form, which Bates (2001: 4) refers to as the *'invisible pedagogy'*, was in this study related to the way students welcomed supervisors, students' physical presence and the activities they engaged in, in the practice schools. These were important indicators of students' interest in teaching and could determine their performance. Supervisors' comments made in relation to the form depicted mixed reactions. For instance, some positively rated the form as thus:

- The form is just a guide to assist me not to go too far to the negative or positive side.
- The best thing to ask oneself when using the form is how far your assessment falls away from best practice and one's expectations as a teacher.

Other supervisors did not like the point-scale since it limited their assessment. For instance:

- The likert point scale ties me down. I would prefer if that gap was empty. I would then assess students basing on my comments.
- Even if the point-scale was not there, I can draw on my experience as a teacher and as a learner to assess a student.
- When I observe the lesson, I can at the end of it automatically say that this student deserves an 80%. However, when I do the *'small scores'* I tend to end up with less marks than I originally expected.

The above observations show mixed judgements about the role of the form in enhancing supervisors' assessment task. A supervisor has to be compliant and 'negotiate' within the boundaries of the form to come up with the scores in the various sections, which makes the exercise complex.

Although the tool's dependability is further enhanced by the several times supervisors assess students, and the use of more than one supervisor in assessing a student at different schedules during the practicum, it is rigid since it leaves little room to appreciate and track student growth. According to Toohey et al. (1996, 220) such a broad abilities model of assessment specifies the abilities "so broadly that the assessor has difficulty in determining what constitutes sufficient evidence of satisfactory performance." At the same time, the competences under each of the six areas are too discrete to give a holistic perspective of students' teaching performance. This is likely to leave supervisors in a predicament in their attempt to strike a balance between the holistic and descriptive; and the discrete and prescriptive aspects of the assessment form.

Such a standardised assessment form takes on a positivist rather than an interpretivist and critical-inquiry orientation. It is rule-governed, neglecting the complexities underlying the practicum and its emancipatory nature. Assessment based on interpretivist and critical-inquiry viewpoints draws on specifics such as case studies in which the supervisor is an adaptive rather than adoptive assessor. Further, competences become outcomes exhibited rather than specified behaviours or attributes required of students. It is difficult for supervisors to appraise what students have learnt during the practicum if it does not appear on the form. Findings demonstrate that after a few lessons observed, supervisors' comments on the assessment form become repetitive, dull, and routine-like. This defeats the developmental model (Stoltenburg and Dilworth, 1987) in which the supervision process moves along a continuum from self-awareness to autonomy. Further, it is a sign of a negative backwash effect on the assessment of students, which affects reliability and validity, the very issues it is designed to reconcile.

Teaching characterised by a long list of competences renders knowledge susceptible to what Strike (1990: 102) calls 'manualisation'. This implies that it is possible to provide the un-initiated or novices with a 'cookbook' that would enable them teach and judge their practice without much ado (Ssentamu-Namubiru, 2006). Similarly, competences reduce educational practice into technical formulae easy to measure and manage to create the desired efficiency and control (Dahlström and Lemma 2008, 30-40). Consequently, students' performance is described in terms of isolated behaviours. In a more professional conception, the context in which assessment takes place as opposed to a paper instrument provides the benchmark for assessing the practicum as is the case

in nine teacher education institutions studied by Reddy et al. (2008, 155-156) in South Africa. In these institutions, a shift from likert-type-scaled behaviour lists of competences to varied holistic assessment strategies is reported. This paradigmatic shift in assessment recognises the learning richness in the practice setting and the contextual subtleties that impinge on the process of practice (Hager and Butler 1996, 371).

Drawing from the above viewpoints, we may say that the practicum is not a stable phenomenon whose performance can be consistently captured on paper. As a changing process, practice deals with isolated cases that are different and unique; therefore, one cannot subject two teaching occasions to equal and similar treatment. Assessment based on a judgmental model draws on supervisor professional intelligence, experience, far-sightedness, powers of critical reflection and practical inquiry. As evident in this study, such assessment ingrains rather than suppresses professional and academic thought in all lesson aspects. The assessment form acts as a guide towards making such decisions, but does not replace supervisor professional judgment. This way, the practicum pre-empts learning by supervisors. One supervisor who had engaged in the practice for less than five years suggest thus: "In the first week, supervising students on the practicum is fun. I know I can learn lots from the experience whether from a subject I am conversant with or not."

Another drawback of over reliance on the assessment form is related to supervisor-student ratio, which on average is one supervisor to 25 students in four lessons. This explains why supervisors have to supervise any subject irrespective of supervisors' subject background (Table 2, Supervisors' subject background and the subjects they observed during the practicum see attached file in MS Word Format). However, with such a ratio, after a series of lessons, assessment as an activity gradually diminishes into a dull, boring, and routine-like task, carried out as a bureaucratic event, rather than for improvement purposes. This is irrespective of a supervisor's professional experience and subject expertise. One comment may reflect this: "...with time, I begin to feel bored, as most of the lessons by various students seem the same in terms of format and approach. I begin supervising just to complete the exercise.... There is nothing of interest thereafter."

When supervisors and students become accustomed to the assessment format, it is difficult to see a value beyond it.

## Conclusion

In the practicum, the influence of supervisors' professional identity is reflected in their varied interpretation and assessment of context-dependent lesson aspects,



besides students' knowledge of subject content, which in this study is a more stable variable. This confirms observations by Craig et al. (1998) and Reddy et al. (2008, 147) that professional perspectives of supervisors can hamper change and the implementation of critical and developmental programmes for teacher education. It also corroborates the observation by Maatsch et al. (1987 cited in Hager and Butler 1996, 370) that when professional practitioners assess in a practice setting, they do not perceive performance in terms of the 'Knowledge and Skills' Model; rather, they grasp the general level of competence displayed in the total practice. However, findings in this study show that teacher educator identity is challengeable and controllable by using a standard assessment form. 'Control' reflects global trends in ITE. For instance, Hulme and Mentor (2008, 59-60) observe the following about ITE in the UK:

...there is considerable evidence of supranational influence...with clear indications of the influence of globalising tendencies that are indeed similar to developments elsewhere. Teaching, at least in the UK, has indubitably been influenced by discourses of performativity and by ideologies of technical rationalism over recent years...

This influence of 'globalising tendencies' on initial teacher education is equally valid in Uganda. Current initial teacher education at the School of Education, Makerere University combines the competence and outcomes-based models. These models encourage display of explicit behaviour, or what Bates (2002, 4) terms 'visible pedagogy' to be assessed by a set of pre-determined competences, bringing the role of supervisors in the predicament. Rather than shifting to the assessment of students' critical, analytical and problem-solving skills, current assessment practices are standardised formats in which outcomes, accountability and quality control become the targets for assessment, leading to what is referred to as cognitive apprenticeship (Collins et al. 1989 cited in Reddy et al. 2008). A discussion of the role of the practicum is inherently a discussion of the students' and supervisors' role. Although their roles have shifted to respond to the demands of an outcomes and competence-based teacher education, in Uganda and elsewhere, assessment strategies and practices should not deprive teaching practicum supervisors of their professional judgment in assessment in the local space.

For comparative purposes, this study can be replicated elsewhere. Additionally, further inquiry could be conducted on practicum assessment through gender lenses, students' perceptions of supervisors' assessment and support during practicum, the contribution of peer review and peer assessment by supervisors and students in promoting students' learning experiences during practicum, as well as the role of teaching practice schools in promoting effective student performance.

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