

## Investigating the Extent to Which Assessment Practices in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 Teaching Practice System Enhance Continuous Improvement of Student Teachers' Teaching Skills

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**ABSTRACT** The study sought to establish the experiences and perceptions held by mentors, teaching practice lecturers and student teachers on the extent to which assessment practices of student teachers on teaching practice enhance continuous improvement of their teaching skills and competences in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teacher education programme. The mixed methods design was used to collect data in two phases. The first phase used questionnaires to collect survey quantitative data while the second phase collected qualitative data through interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis. The researchers sampled 28 teaching practice lecturers, 100 mentors and 100 final year student teachers from the ten national primary teacher education institutions to participate in the first phase. Three teaching practice lecturers, three mentors and three focus groups of six students each were conveniently selected from neighbouring host schools for interviews in the second phase. The research findings revealed that student teachers in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice were formally assessed through lesson observations only by lecturers and mentors while peer or collegial assessment existed on voluntary basis among student teachers. The study further revealed that Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice did not use any form of self assessment practice to promote continuous improvement of student teachers' teaching skills and competences during teaching practice. The study recommends the adoption of self assessment practices to complement the current lesson observation assessment practices and formalization of peer/collegial assessment.

### INTRODUCTION

In Zimbabwe, all primary teacher education institutions follow the 2-5-2 teacher education model in which student teachers spend the initial two terms (thirty-two weeks) at college learning theory of education, applied education and research methods and then proceed on teaching practice for five terms (eighty weeks) and finally return to college for revision and examinations for two terms (thirty-two weeks) hence is referred to as 2-5-2 model. Under Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teacher education model, student teachers spend most of their course duration time (55%)

of five terms or eighty weeks on teaching practice in host schools, attached to experienced classroom practitioners. During these five terms or eighty weeks of teaching practice, student teachers' teaching skills and competences are monitored through internal assessment practices. In Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice, the internal assessment of student teachers is the joint responsibility of the teacher education institutions' lecturers and mentors. The University of Zimbabwe's Department of Teacher Education as the certificating institution sets the assessment criteria for student teachers on teaching practice which ensures regular assessment of the students. Regular assessment leads to continuous improvement of student teachers' teaching skills and can be best achieved through a combination of lecturer and mentor lesson observation assessment, collegial/peer assessment and self assessment. Self and peer assessments are viewed as very important in the global assessment practices towards enhancing continuous improvement of student

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teachers' teaching skills and competences (Ogunniyi 1996; Nouwens and Towers 1997; Lavey and Shriki 2014; Thompson et al. 2014).

### **The Purpose of Assessment during Teaching Practice**

The major purpose of assessment in teaching practice is to improve the quality of teaching by student teachers as it allows for the identification of those candidates who are doing well and those that need remedial assistance and help guide the student teachers improve their quality of teaching skills and competences. Assessment is seen as the thread that links all the elements in the study package together which begins with the identification of learning goals and ends with a judgment concerning the extent to which those goals have been achieved (Linn and Gronlund 1995; Nouwens and Towers 1997; Angelo 1999). Lavey and Shriki (2014) cite Topping (2003) who defines assessment in educational context as the process in which students' products, which are results of their knowledge and skills are measured. In teaching practice, assessment ensures that students who enter the teaching practice program exit with the requisite quality of teaching skills and competence. The assessment practices need to be continuous in character which is best achieved through combining lecturer and mentor lesson observation assessment, collegial or peer assessment and self assessment by students themselves.

Continuous assessment is an ongoing process of gathering and interpreting information about students' learning used to make decisions about what to teach and how well students have learned (Olatomide and Oluwatosin 2014) hence provides a more comprehensive over-all picture of a student's performance (Ogunniyi 1996). It monitors and supports the learning and teaching process by providing regular feedback to both student teachers and lecturers concerning what a student has learnt towards achieving quality teaching practice (Linn and Gronlund 1995; Luckett and Sutherland in Makoni 2000; Olatomide and Oluwatosin 2014). Regular assessment can be carried out by colleagues or peers on each other, the student teachers on themselves, lecturers and mentors on the students which resonates well with current global assessment practices in teacher education. Taras (2002) shows that formative feedback implies and

necessitates a partnership, a symbiotic relationship which works in a two-way system, however, it does not count as formative feedback unless the student has understood what the purpose of the assessment was, how they are assessed or judged, and how they can use their shortfalls in the future

The regular feedback students receive from constant assessment during their teaching practice enables them to know how they are progressing, identify their weaknesses and how they can improve their teaching skills and competences hence student assessment ought to take place as often as possible throughout the teaching practice period (Fourie et al. 1996; Ogunniyi 1996; Nouwens and Towers 1997; Luckett and Sutherland in Makoni 2000). Students who receive regular assessment develop confidence and self-esteem which enables them to reflect on their own performance and take self-directed steps to improve their teaching practice and promote continuous self improvement (Ogunniyi, 1996; Nouwens and Towers 1997). The main objective of regular assessment is to provide the student teachers with maximum opportunities to learn and to demonstrate from time to time the knowledge, skills and competences that they would have acquired during their teaching practice period. In this regard, Ndebele (2013) talks of assessment for learning which provides regular timely feedback to students during the course of their learning so that they have opportunities to improve. In instances where lecturer supervision of student teachers is erratic and mentors are not trained as is the case with Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice revealed in studies by Mhandu and Mashava (2005) cited in Tshuma and Shumba (2014), the use of peer and self assessment could complement common lesson observation assessment practices and ensure the continuous improvement of students' teaching skills and competences.

### ***Forms of Assessment***

Peer assessment occurs when student teachers of equal status on teaching practice work together in assessing each other's work and learn from each other (Thomson et al. 2014). Lavey and Shriki (2014) argue that peer assessment is based on the assumption that peers can recognize each other's work quickly and easily and that a larger and more diverse group of peo-

ple might find more weaknesses and errors in a work. According to Hanrahan and Isaacs (2001) in Lavey and Shriki (2014) peer assessment involves students directly in learning and might promote a sense of ownership, personal responsibility and motivation. Peer or collegial assessment, according to Queen's University (2005) and Thomson et al. (2014) is a powerful metacognitive tool that engages students in the learning process to develop in students the ability to work cooperatively, to be critical of others' work and receive critical appraisals of, and feedback on their own work. In peer or collegial assessment student teachers jointly scheme and plan lessons, produce instructional materials, observe and analyze colleagues' classroom appearance, lesson presentation, conduct peer coaching and offer each other advice (Sergiovanni and Starratt 1993; Groundwater-Smith et al. 1996;). Zhao (2014) contends that peer assessment develops learner autonomy by transferring responsibility of student learning from teachers and developing students' higher order thinking through the critical analysis of peers' work. Shah (2011) identifies seven dimensions of collegiality; demonstrating mutual support and trust; observing one another teaching; joint planning and assessment; sharing ideas and expertise; teaching each other; developing curriculum together; and sharing resources. The peer assessment practice indicates the existence of high levels of collaboration among and between student teachers that is characterized by mutual respect, shared work values, co-operation and discussions about teaching and learning which is ideal for continuous professional improvement. Peer or collegial assessment emphasizes the capacity of student teachers to examine and evaluate each other's teaching practice through reflective analysis of colleagues' teaching by themselves and for each other's continuous professional improvement.

Peer or collegial assessment encourages a more active and participatory style of learning, provides immediate feedback, helps to remove stress and anxiety associated with higher self-disclosure among the students (Thomson et al. 2014) since it is administered in a non-threatening atmosphere that engenders mutual trust, shared responsibility and respect, which fosters continuous professional growth. According to Goldhammer et al. (1993) collegiality promotes quality teaching in that peers generally

want to do their best when colleagues are watching hence thoroughly prepare, select the most effective teaching strategies at their disposal and employ new and innovative ideas when teaching under collegial or peer observation. More so, colleagues tend to learn a lot from each other as they observe peers teaching in different styles, methods and approaches. The observing colleagues directly or indirectly receive a better understanding of the effectiveness of their own teaching styles by observing and analyzing colleagues' teaching.

Working collectively stimulates and accelerates cognitive growth, career satisfaction, reduces teacher isolation, and encourages student teachers to attempt curricular-instructional innovation they would probably not have tried as individuals, hence learn from each other (Mowah and Scann 1997; Sternberg 2001; Grimmit and Greham 2003; Shah 2011). Sternberg (2001) concurs by emphasizing that collegiality encourages student teachers to participate in communities of learning in which the individual students think and solve problems with others engaged in similar tasks. Through peer or collegial assessment student teachers get to realize that co-operation and shared experiences are more beneficial than working alone, hence co-operatively work together in demonstration lessons, inter class visitations, drawing of schemes of work and lesson plans, media making and offering each other feedback on their observations on professional issues. Lavey and Shriki (2014) argue that students working collaboratively learn to give and accept criticism, justify one's position and reject suggestions all useful transferable social and assertion skills. Peer assessment according to Lavey and Shriki (2014) is rarely implemented in higher education hence this study seeks to establish the extent to which peer assessment is implemented in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teacher education programme. Peer or collegial assessment can be complemented by self-assessment (Roberts and McInnerney 2007).

Self-assessment occurs when learners assess their own work and undertake evaluation by themselves, for themselves and for their continuous self improvement. Self-assessment is a process where students are involved in and are responsible for assessing their own piece of work. It involves students taking responsibility for monitoring and making judgments about the aspects of their own learning (Ndebele 2013). It

encourages students to become independent learners and can be extremely valuable in helping students to critique their own work, and form judgements about their strengths and weaknesses. Ndebele (2013) contends that self assessment promotes quality teaching and learning by empowering students to take ownership and responsibility for their own learning and become active participants in assessing themselves by setting individual targets for themselves, reflecting on their learning and thereby experiencing improved self-esteem. In self-assessment, student teachers are invited to assess themselves against a set of given or negotiated criteria, usually for continuous self improvement. Self-assessment can be a central aspect of the development of lifelong learning and continuous self improvement in which student teachers set individual targets for themselves, review their teaching and develop plans for their future teaching and consolidate their teaching skills and competences hence become more reflective and effective teachers (Luckett and Sutherland 2000; Ndebele 2013).

Self-assessment enables student teachers to understand better the instructional objectives, recognize the progress being made towards the objectives, diagnose their strengths and weaknesses and increase the skill of self assessment. Many global teacher education institutions now require student teachers to develop and maintain their own means of self assessment such as reflective journals, critical incidents, portfolios and diaries or records of achievement, hence take responsibility for and manage their own learning (Luckett and Sutherland 2000)

In using journals as self assessment tools, student teachers make 'daily' reflective recordings of events, observations; personal views and interpretations of operations in which they are involved in the learning environment. Student teachers use journals to record their thoughts, observations, feelings, activities and questions throughout their teaching practice. Similarly, diaries also enable student teachers to make entries of daily social, professional and academic experiences that promote reflective evaluation and have a bearing on one's continuous professional growth during the teaching practice period (Luckett and Sutherland 2000). Entries in students' journals and diaries could include their experiences during participation in joint lesson planning and scheming, demonstration lessons,

inter-class visits and collegial study groups. Critical incidents also serve a similar purpose in self assessment.

In using critical incidents as self assessment tools, student teachers make straight forward accounts of commonplace events that occur routinely in professional teaching environment such as the significant incidents that stand out in the lives of teachers which include the reflection of the high and low moments in their teaching practice (Brookfield 1995; Crisp et al. 2005). What makes them 'critical' is that they cause students to think and reflect at a particular time and facilitate reflective learning. Critical incidents involve students both in describing, reflecting and analyzing the incident and identifying the learning that arose. Crisp et al. (2005) argue that critical incident assessment includes reflecting on situations by students in which they felt they had done something well, made wrong decisions, something went better than expected, lacked confidence, made a mistake, enjoyed working with someone, took a risk etc. Critical incidents can be a stand-alone piece of assessment or may form one element of a multi-faceted portfolio which demonstrates student learning. Burgum and Bridge (1997) in Crisp et al. (2005) inform that a critical incident analysis requires student teachers to submit a written critical incident analysis to tutors about an incident which occurred during their practicum and could be of great use to learners involved in some form of supervised learning in which student teachers may have limited access to their professional supervisors. Critical incidents reports could emanate from students' experiences in their participation in joint lesson planning and scheming, demonstration lessons, inter-class visits and collegial study groups by students.

According to Karsenti et al. (2014) portfolio assessment is rapidly gaining attention in initial teacher training programmes and has become one of the rare tools that can provide a tangible demonstration of individual learning trajectories. In using portfolios as self assessment tools, student teachers make purposeful collections of their carefully selected most recent work which include learners' work completed during the teaching practice period, all reflecting student teachers' efforts, progress and achievements of important performances and skills which demonstrate that a student teacher has met predetermined goals in a given area over a period of

time (Ryan and Kuhs in Sandoval and Stanley 2008; Greenhalgh et al. 2014). By making a careful selection of the documents to include, a student teacher's portfolio becomes an authentic summary of his/her professional knowledge and skills and mirrors the tasks and products that practicing professionals engage in which becomes direct evidence of the student teacher's ability to perform 'real world' professional tasks (Sandoval and Stanley 2008). Sandoval and Stanley (2008) concur with Greenhalgh et al. (2014), who argue that portfolios are grounded in authenticity as they portray the richest student teacher performance based on multiple sources of evidence collected over time during teaching practice in authentic settings. When using portfolios, students record and reflect on their observations and insights and collect samples of their teaching materials. The student teachers' portfolios can contain samples of learning materials or a series of lesson plans written to facilitate higher order thinking in learners, and reveal a wealth of information about the abilities of a student teacher that cannot be conveyed by any kind of test or course grade. Karsenti (2014) and Maha (2014) contend that portfolios are used to enhance student teachers' reflection on their learning process and to share their pedagogical discoveries in organising their pupils' work, document the scope and quality of their teaching performance and to improve their teaching skills through continuous reflection. Karsenti (2014) and Maha (2014) posit that a well designed portfolio system can motivate learners and provide insight to the mentor, parent and lecturer on the students' efforts, progress and achievements and can encourage learners to engage in self-reflection. Karsenti et al. (2014) and Maha (2014) contend that perhaps the greatest overall benefit of using portfolio assessment is that students foster the development of reflective skills, self esteem, self development and learning independence. This way, students engage in autonomous learning and become independent thinkers responsible for their continuous professional improvement during their training and throughout their career. According to Sandoval and Stanley (2008), portfolios focus on formative as well as summative assessment of candidates' learning; they facilitate candidate involvement in self assessment and are able to assess a full range of a candidate's skills and competences. Hence portfolios can contain reports on stu-

dents' experiences from their participation in joint lesson planning and scheming, demonstration lessons, inter-class visits and collegial study groups.

Student teachers on teaching practice are commonly assessed through lecturer and mentor lesson observation. Lecturer and mentor lesson observation assessment is usually guided by standard assessment criteria that focus the assessor on common attributes that constitute good teaching such as the quality of daily lesson plans and schemes of work, lesson presentation, use of educational media in lesson delivery, teaching practice documents and personal appearance and sensitivity to students' learning needs. Tillema (2009) in Maphosa and Ndamba (2012) argues that assessment practices such as lesson observation provide information feedback that helps the student teachers gain insight into their performances that are valuable to their professional growth. According to Grimm et al. (2014) and the Annual Inspection of Amberleigh Therapeutic School by Estyn (2014), lesson observations practice enables the school head to identify good teaching practice that could be shared with the staff in feedback meetings and could result in peer teachers observing each other's lessons to increase their pedagogical knowledge and improve their teaching strategies across the institution. Hudson (2014) cite research by (Kohler et al. 2008) which revealed that assessment practices of pre-service teachers generally use observations of students' performances as formative assessment strategies yet other methods such as engaging students in self assessment were rarely accomplished. This study sought to establish the extent to which assessment practices in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice system enhanced continuous improvement of student teachers' teaching skills.

In its quest to improve on the quality of assessment in teacher education, the Department of Teacher Education at the University of Zimbabwe in 2004 organized a workshop that sought to provide direction and uniformity in the assessment of student teachers on teaching practice that was attended by stakeholder representatives of Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture, Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education and DTE (Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education 2004). Emphasis was however placed on lecturer lesson observation assessment in conjunction with mentors but the workshop was

silent on the use of peer or collegial and self assessment in Zimbabwe's teacher education.

### Objectives of the Study

This study sought to establish the assessment practices used by Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teacher education model, the implications, the extent to which continuous improvement of student teachers' teaching skills and competences are achieved and whether the practices are in tandem with global assessment practices in teacher education. The specific objectives of the study were to;

Determine the internal assessment practices used to assess student teachers on teaching practice in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice.

- ♦ Investigate the extent to which the assessment practices in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice enhance continuous improvement of students' teaching skills and competences.
- ♦ Determine the implications of the assessment practices of student teachers being used in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study is premised on the mixed methods research design. The design was preferred because it enabled the researchers to use both qualitative and quantitative approaches in a complementary manner and provided interaction rather than a dichotomy between these approaches (Gelo et al. 2008). The mixed methods research design enabled the researchers to overcome the limitations of purely quantitative or qualitative approaches by maximizing the advantages and minimizing the disadvantages connected to the single application of one of the two approaches (Creswell 2007; Maree 2007; Gelo et al. 2008). The mixed methods design enabled the researcher to triangulate the quantitative and qualitative methods and data sources as well as provided a convergence and corroboration of results from the different methods and designs in studying the same phenomenon (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004; Creswell 2007). The mixed methods design enabled the researchers to establish the extent to which the internal assessment practices in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice are in

tandem with global practices and promoted continuous improvement of the students' teaching skills.

### Population and Sampling

The target population comprised three teaching practice lecturers, all final year student teachers and their mentors in each of the ten (10) national primary-teacher education institutions in Zimbabwe. The target population was too large for all members to participate hence the researchers drew a sample of the final year student teachers on teaching practice, their mentors and lecturers from the ten primary teacher education institutions that participated. Purposive sampling procedure was used to extract three teaching practice lecturers per teacher education institution totaling to 28 teaching practice lecturers from the ten national primary teacher education institutions that responded. Due to the geographical spread of host schools in which student teachers were deployed and the prohibitive travelling cost involved, the researchers used convenience sampling to select host schools from which 100 mentors and 100 students who responded to survey questionnaires during the first phase of this study were drawn. Convenience sampling also enabled the researchers to sample one college where one of researchers was employed as the case to study and to select host schools from which three mentors and three groups of six student teachers were identified for face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions respectively.

### Data Collection Procedures

The researchers used the survey questionnaires to collect quantitative data in the first phase of the study. The survey questionnaires provided a general overview of perceptions and experiences held by lecturers, mentors and students on the extent to which assessment practices of student teachers on teaching practice enhance continuous improvement of their teaching skills and competences in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teacher education system. The survey questionnaires comprised of both open-ended and closed-ended questions that were administered to final year students on teaching practice, their mentors and teaching practice lecturers. Qualitative data were collected in the second phase

through semi-structured interview schedule that comprised structured questions and unstructured open-ended questions which enabled the researchers to collect descriptive data from the information rich respondents. The interview schedule enabled the researchers to document real events, record verbatim what people said and observe the behaviour of respondents who were immersed in the natural setting of everyday life in which the study was framed (Neuman 1997; Maree 2007). The semi-structured interviews enabled the researchers to recognize several nuances of attitude and behaviour that could have gone unnoticed had they used other methods. The focus group discussions facilitated in-depth understanding of student teachers' experiences and perceptions on assessment practices in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice. The researchers also analyzed available teaching practice documents which stored data that reflected the assessment practices in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice.

#### Data Analysis

Data analysis enabled the researcher to systematically search, organize, synthesize, present and transform data from questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions and documents into manageable units and increased the researcher's understanding of the phenomena under study (Borgden and Biklen 1992; Leedy 1993). The survey questionnaires generated 228 general overview responses, while interviews and focus group discussions generated in-depth understanding of the extent to which assessment practices promoted continuous improvement of students' teaching skills and competences in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice.

In the first phase, the quantitative numerical data collected through survey questionnaires

were manipulated to reveal patterns and relationships between variables and had raw data coded or organized into a computer readable format (Neuman 1997). The collected data was summarized through a table of frequency distributions and percentages. The table of frequency distributions revealed patterns, relationships and trends of student teachers' experiences and perceptions on the extent to which assessment practices enhanced continuous improvement of students' teaching skills and competences in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice. In phase two, the researchers organised the qualitative data on the basis of themes, categories, general ideas and concepts. This study transcribed verbatim the audio taped interviews and the results were cross-checked with the participants before their analysis.

## RESULTS

The results are presented under the following emerging themes; student participation in joint lesson planning and scheming, demonstration lessons, inter-class visits, collegial/peer study groups, self assessment and lesson observation by mentors and lecturers

#### Joint Lesson Planning and Scheming by Students

Data in Table 1 from mentors (56%) and students (73%) indicate that students participated in joint lesson planning and scheming while some mentors (36%) and students (24%) revealed lack of student participation in joint lesson planning and scheming. This inconsistency reveals that joint lesson planning and scheming is not mandatory in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice. This is what two interviewed lecturers said:

**Table 1: Collegial/peer assessment in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice**

	<i>Agree</i>		<i>Disagree</i>		<i>Not sure</i>		<i>Total</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Joint lesson planning and scheming-mentors	56	56	36	36	8	8	100	100
Joint lesson planning and scheming –students	73	73	24	24	2	2	100	100
Demonstration lessons-mentors	63	63	27	27	10	10	100	100
Demonstration lessons –students	75	75	23	23	2	2	100	100
Inter class visits –mentors	61	61	28	28	11	11	100	100
Inter class visits –students	75	75	23	23	2	2	100	100
Use of study groups –mentors	43	43	33	33	24	24	100	100
Use of study groups –students	67	67	32	32	1	1	100	100

*-We expect students to help each other as students, have their own sessions where they help each other in scheming, evaluating each other's work, you have to be with your friends evaluating what you are doing and help each other in that you are not doing well in this area and this will assist them to develop themselves so that when they are assessed or supervised they will be having less mistakes. Because at times we discover that at the same school there is a distinctive student and there is one who is performing poorly so if they work as a team and help each other that will lessen their problems, those that are not doing well will learn from those that are doing well.*

*-Among them I think they should discuss and share ideas, may be during planning they can come together, assist each other to say how can I help this one.*

The fact that lecturers have observed the existence of distinctive student teachers along with poorly performing students in the same host school could be attributed to lack of college policy to enforce joint lesson planning and scheming among student teachers in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice. What emerged from the study is that student teachers voluntarily participate in joint lesson planning and scheming and there is lack of a policy from teacher education institutions guiding and empowering mentors and lecturers to monitor and enforce student participation in joint lesson planning and scheming in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice. Lack of guiding policy from teacher education institutions makes the participation of students in joint lesson planning and scheming, be voluntary, resulting with some students choosing not to participate.

#### **Participation in Demonstration Lessons by Students**

The majority of mentors (63%) and student teachers (75%) indicated that student teachers participated in demonstration lessons with colleagues. A few mentors (27%) and students (23%) indicated that students did not participate in demonstration lessons. Interviews with mentors and students showed that students participated in demonstration teaching in which they observed lesson delivery by colleagues before engaging in post lesson delivery discussions. The demonstration lessons provide the student teachers with maximum opportunities to learn

and demonstrate the knowledge, skills and competences they would have acquired during their teaching practice period.

Data show that in some host schools students did not participate in demonstration lessons and this could be partly attributed to lack of policy empowering mentors to enforce student participation. Failure to provide demonstration lessons deprives student teachers of the opportunity to improve their teaching skills and competences through observing and analyzing colleagues teaching and receiving free collegial advice concerning the effectiveness of their teaching styles. What emerged from the study is that student teachers voluntarily participate in demonstration lessons and that there is lack of a guiding policy from teacher education institutions to empower mentors and lecturers in monitoring and enforcing student participation resulting in some students choosing not to participate.

#### **Participation in Inter-class Visits by Students**

As shown on Table 1, most mentors (61%) and students (75%) indicated that student teachers on teaching practice participated in inter-class visits. A few mentors (28%) and students (23%) indicated that students did not participate in inter-class visits. Data show that most student teachers participated in inter class visits in which they observed lesson delivery by experienced classroom practitioners who were not their mentors and learnt different classroom management skills which helped them to improve on their teaching skills and competences. Focus group discussion with students revealed that through inter-class visits students learnt how to better decorate their classrooms and to improvise in the absence of appropriate teaching materials. An interview with one teaching practice lecturer revealed that student teachers could observe lessons taught by other senior teachers who are not their mentors, visit their colleagues' classes and also visit the neighbouring local schools to study the quality of charts displayed, observe any improvisation in the classroom in order to enhance continuous improvement of their teaching skills and competences. Data show that in some host schools student teachers did not participate in inter-class visits which deprive them of the opportunity to learn from other experienced practitioners besides their mentors.



### ***Participation in Collegial or Peer Study Groups by Students***

Data from mentors (43%) and student teachers (67%) in Table 1 indicates that student teachers participate in collegial/peer study groups. A few mentors (33%) and student teachers (24%) revealed that students did not participate in peer study groups. Data therefore confirms that student teachers participate in collegial/peer study groups and that some do not. Hence the participation of students in collegial/peer study groups appears to be on voluntary basis since some students choose not to participate. The following is what two teaching practice lecturers said;

*-Ehh... in our department of teaching practice ehh... we encourage students to meet regularly as a team at a school so that they discuss their documents, criticize each other and suggest what improvements to be made by their colleagues.*

*-Of course they have their study groups as a team according to their intakes that I have seen. They always meet regularly, particularly to discuss issues that relate to their college work, well it becomes very difficult whether such discussions deliberately focus on how best to teach or they will be focusing on their assignments, but yes meeting they do meet and more often than not they have always met in the intention that they are meeting to deliberate on their college work and of course we assume that such meetings definitely have a bearing on the quality of teaching.*

The indication by the first lecturer that students are only encouraged and not compelled to meet regularly suggests lack of college policy making participation in collegial study groups imperative for all student teachers on teaching practice. Focus group discussions with mentors revealed that students worked together in lesson planning and scheming, making of learning and teaching media and in writing their distance education assignments. What emerged from the study is that student teachers voluntarily participated in study groups during teaching practice and that there was lack of college policy empowering mentors and lecturers to enforce student participation hence a few chose not to participate.

The study also sought to establish the extent to which self assessment was used in assessing students in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teacher

education model. The different forms of self assessment presented below include the use of journals, diaries, critical incidents, portfolios and lesson observation.

### ***The Use of Journals in Self Assessment***

From data on Table 2, the majority of lecturers (82.14%) and student teachers (58%) indicate that journals are not used to assess student teachers on teaching practice in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice. Very few lecturers (7.14%) and students (16%) indicated that journals were used to assess them while 10.71% lecturers and 26% students were not sure. Information from open ended questions by some lecturers revealed a need for the introduction of journals as complementary assessment means to lesson observations by mentors and lecturers in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice. What emerged is that journals are not used to assess students in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice. Failure to use journals in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice does not resonate well with current global assessment practice in teacher education which requires student teachers to develop and maintain their own means of self assessment such as journals and diaries discussed next.

### ***The Use of Diaries in Self Assessment***

Data in Table 2 from majority of lecturers (82.14%) and student teachers (67%) revealed that diaries were not used as self assessment means of students in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice. Very few lecturers (10.71%) and students (13%) indicated that diaries were used in the assessment of students on teaching practice while 7.14% lecturers and 20% students were not sure. Failure to use diaries in the assessment of student teachers in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice does not promote reflective.

### ***The Use of Critical Incidents in Self Assessment***

Data in Table 2 indicate that the majority of lecturers (64.29%) and students (68%) feel that critical incidents are not used to assess student teachers in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice. A few lecturers (21.43%) and students (17%) indicated that critical incidents are used as assessment strategies in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teach-

**Table 2: Use of self assessment and lesson observation in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 practicum**

	<i>Agree</i>		<i>Disagree</i>		<i>Not sure</i>		<i>Total</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Use of journals-lecturers	2	7.14	23	82.4	3	10.71	28	100
Use of journals –students	16	16	58	58	26	26	100	100
Use of diaries-lecturers	3	10.71	23	82.14	2	7.14	28	100
Use of diaries –students	13	13	67	67	20	20	100	100
Use of critical incidents-lecturers	6	21.43	18	64.29	4	14.29	28	100
Use of critical incidents –students	17	17	68	68	15	15	100	100
Use of portfolios –lecturers	6	21.43	18	64.29	4	14.29	28	100
Use of portfolios-students	8	8	64	64	28	28	100	100
Use of lesson observation-lecturers	26	92.86	2	7.14	0	0	28	100
Use of lesson observation-students	89	89	7	7	4	4	100	100

ing practice while 14.29% lecturers and 15% students are not sure. The picture that emerged is that critical incidents are not used in student assessment in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice. The use of portfolios in self assessment is discussed next.

#### *The Use of Portfolios in Self Assessment*

Data from the majority lecturers (64.29%) and students (64%) indicated that portfolios were not used to assess student teachers on teaching practice in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teacher education model. A few lecturers (21.43%) and students (8%) indicated that portfolios were used in the assessment of students while 14.29% lecturers and 28% students were not sure. The study also sought to ascertain the extent to which lesson observations by mentors and lecturers were used in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teacher education system and the results are presented below.

#### **Lesson Observation Assessment by Mentors and Lecturers**

Data from the majority lecturers (92.86%) and student teachers (89%) reveal that lesson observation was the sole means of assessing student teachers in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice. Very few lecturers (7.14%) and students (7%) indicated that lesson observation was not used to assess students. The picture that emerged is that lesson observation by mentors and lecturers was the only formal strategy of assessing student teachers in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice. The lesson observation assessment is guided by standard assessment criteria that focuses on specific teaching attributes to be ex-

hibited by student teachers, the daily lesson plans and schemes of work, lesson presentation, use of instructional media in lesson delivery, quality of teaching practice documents, personal appearance and sensitivity to students' learning needs. The use of lesson observation to assess student teachers in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice resonates well with current global assessment practice in teacher education.

#### **DISCUSSION**

The major purpose of this study was to establish the extent to which internal assessment practices in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice helped student teachers to continuously improve their teaching skills and competences. The findings of this study revealed that most student teachers in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice voluntarily participate in joint lesson planning and scheming while a few do not participate since there is no guiding policy. The study concurs with findings by Mowah and Scann (1997), Sternberg (2001) and Grimmit and Graham (2003) which revealed that participation in joint lesson planning and scheming promotes, stimulates and accelerates cognitive growth, career satisfaction and reduces teacher isolation hence enable student teachers to realize that co-operation and shared experiences are more beneficial than working alone as they learn from each other. The few students that do not participate in joint lesson planning and scheming are deprived of opportunities to learn from each other. Non participation appears to be motivated by lack of a guiding policy that empowers mentors and lecturers to enforce participation by all student teachers in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching prac-

tice. The introduction of policy that enforces participation in joint lesson planning and scheming by all student teachers in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice is recommended. Participation of student teachers in demonstration lessons is discussed next.

With regards to participation in demonstration lessons by students, data revealed that most student teachers in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice participate in rotational demonstration teaching in which they visit each other's classrooms, observe lesson delivery by colleagues and offer advice. This way, student teachers improve each other's teaching skills and competences. There are however pockets of student teachers who do not participate in demonstration lessons probably due to lack of a guiding policy from teacher education institutions that empowers mentors and lecturers to monitor and enforce participation by all students. The participation in demonstration lessons by most students concurs with studies by Ogunniyi (1996) and Nouwens and Towers (1997) in that such participation develops confidence and self-esteem which enables participants to reflect on their own performance and take self-directed steps that enhance continuous improvement of their teaching skills and competences. Similarly, Ogunniyi (1996) and Nouwens and Towers (1997) argue that demonstration lessons provide students with a chance to better understand the effectiveness of their teaching styles as well as develop confidence and self-esteem which enable them to reflect on their individual performance and take self-directed steps that enhance continuous improvement of their teaching skills and competences. The inconsistency in participation therefore means that those student teachers who do not participate are deprived of maximum opportunities to learn and demonstrate from time to time the knowledge, skills and competences that they would have acquired during their teaching practice

One beneficial finding of the study relates to the participation in inter-class visitations by students. Most student teachers in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice participate in inter-class visitations and observe lesson delivery by experienced classroom practitioners. The study revealed that student teachers voluntarily participate in inter-class visitations as there is no college policy that requires students to participate. The findings of the study concur with stud-

ies by (Fourie et al. 1996; Ogunniyi 1996; Luckett and Sutherland 2000) which revealed that such visits greatly benefit students enhance continuous improvement of their teaching skills and competences as they learn different teaching skills and classroom management styles from experienced classroom practitioners in a friendly and non-threatening atmosphere that engenders mutual trust. In the same vein, Sergiovanni and Starrat (1993) revealed that collegial assessment strategies such as inter class visits and demonstration lessons enable students on teaching practice to work together in assessing each other's work, offer each other advice and learn from other classroom practitioners who are not their mentors. Those students who are not exposed to inter class visits are deprived of the opportunity of professional growth through learning the art of teaching and class management from experienced class teachers. Inter-class visits as a way of learning from more experienced colleagues resonates well with current global assessment practices in teacher education and is recommended for formal use in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice. Participation in collegial or peer study groups by students is discussed next.

Participation in collegial or peer study groups by students on teaching practice in Zimbabwe is said to be of great benefit according to the findings although this is a voluntary initiative by the students. The collegial study groups in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice enable students to work together in lesson planning and scheming, demonstration lessons, inter-class visitations and writing their distance education assignments. The findings of the study concur with those of Mowah and Scan (1997), Sternburg (2001) and Grimmit and Greham (2003), Karsenti (2014) and Maha (2014), who indicated that participation in peer or collegial study groups provides students with experiences that enhance the stimulation and acceleration of their cognitive growth, boosts their teacher confidence, think and solve academic problems with colleagues. Lack of a guiding policy to enforce student participation in collegial study groups resulted in some students not participating and being deprived of learning from colleagues in a friendly and non-threatening atmosphere that engenders mutual trust. This study does not agree with Lavey and Shriki (2014) who argues that peer assessment is rarely implemented in

higher education since it is being implemented in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teacher education programme.

Self assessment, a critical means of self reflection by the student teachers, does not seem to be part of Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice assessment system according to findings. The study revealed that self assessment does not contribute to the overall assessment of student teachers in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice. Global assessment practices in teaching practice require student teachers to develop and maintain their own means of self assessment such as journals, critical incidents, diaries and portfolios. Information from the study shows that some lecturers would like self assessment to be introduced to complement lesson observation assessment by mentors and lecturers currently in use in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice. Failure to use self assessment in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice deprives student teachers of self-enlightenment, autonomy, independent thinking and reflective evaluation of their instructional progress and achievements when examining and evaluating their own teaching behavior and actions (Lockett and Sutherland 2000; Crisp et al. 2005; Sandoval and Stanley 2008). Lack of self assessment in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice does not resonate well with current global assessment practices in teacher education hence does not guarantee continuous improvement of students' teaching skills and competences. There is therefore a need for Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice to introduce the learner centered self assessment practices to complement the existing supervisor centered lesson observation practices discussed next. Failure to use such self-assessment instruments as portfolios for example deprives students of their autonomy and opportunities to critically analyse and self reflect on their instructional progress and achievements and it does not resonate well with current global assessment practice in teacher education (Sandoval and Stanley 2008; Karsenti et al. 2014).

One pertinent finding of the study was that lesson observation by lecturers and mentors is the sole formal means of assessing student teachers on teaching practice in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teacher education model. The use of lesson observation to assess student teachers on teaching practice in the 2-5-2 model provides feedback information that helps student teachers grow professionally (Tillema 2009 in Mapho-

sa and Ndamba 2012) and resonates well with current global assessment practices in teacher education. However, its sole use does not guarantee continuous student assessment that enhances continuous improvement of students' teaching skills and competences, particularly in Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice where studies by Mhandu and Mashava (2001) cited in Tshuma and Shumba (2014) revealed that lecturer visits to students on teaching practice are erratic and mentors are not trained in mentoring and assessment. There is therefore a need to complement lesson observation assessment with collegial and self assessment.

### CONCLUSION

Generally, the study revealed that Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice solely relied on the lesson observation practice to assess its student teachers' teaching skills and competences. The study revealed that the lack of a guiding policy enforcing students to participate in collegial assessment resulted in some students not participating while others voluntarily participated. The study shows that self assessment was not practised at all. Failure to formally complement lesson observation assessment practices with collegial and self assessment practice does not ensure regular assessment for the promotion of continuous improvement of students' teaching skills and competences hence does not resonate well with current global assessment practices in teacher education.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the above findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are made for consideration by teacher education institutions, practitioners as well as academics doing research in the field of teaching practice:

- ♦ Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice needs to formalize the use of collegial assessment strategies such as participation in joint lesson planning and scheming, demonstration lessons, inter class visitation and collegial/peer study groups to complement the current lesson observation by mentors and lecturers.
- ♦ Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice ought to introduce self assessment practices of using journals, critical incidents, diaries and

portfolios to complement the current lesson observation by mentors and lecturers.

- ♦ Zimbabwe's 2-5-2 teaching practice needs to introduce policies that empower mentors and lecturers to enforce the implementation of collegial and self assessment practices.

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