

# University of Limpopo Student Teachers' Experiences and Reflections During Teaching Practicum: An Experiential Learning Theory

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**KEYWORDS** Classroom Experience. Lived Experience. Experiential Learning. Learning in Practice. Work Integrated Learning

**ABSTRACT** This paper reports on a study in which the researcher sought to understand student-teachers' experiences and reflections during teaching practicum using an experiential learning theory. A qualitative multiple case study research design using unstructured interviews was adopted. Fifteen participants were purposively sampled from Bachelor of Education's final year students at the University of Limpopo. The findings revealed that student-teachers experience challenges with mentoring schools because in many schools mentor teachers do not provide adequate professional support and do not execute their roles and responsibilities as required by University guidelines. It was further established that effective practice teaching requires committed principals and staff who offer their school resources for student-teachers. The paper concludes with the recommendation that the university should send student teachers to effective schools that could provide enabling school environment that can handle student-teachers' mentorship and offer adequate classroom practice. Furthermore, universities-school partnership should be initiated and training for mentors to be provided.

## INTRODUCTION

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has brought many educational reforms that were challenging to the South African higher education system. Amongst others, reforms brought along are on-going curriculum improvement that Modipane and Themane (2014:1) regard as significant for improving the academic achievement of learners, and for the holistic development of learners. The Integrated Strategic Planning Framework (ISPF) (2011) and Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualification (MRTEQ 2015) policy were introduced by the government as plans to transform teacher education. The main purpose of ISPF is to strengthen teaching practice component of teacher education (Department of Education and Higher Education and Training 2011: 17) with a priority on experiential learning. This allows student-teachers to learn from practice; and the establishment of teaching schools. On the other hand, MRTEQ (2015) policy prescribes the structure of teacher education curriculum. The endorsement and adoption of the educational reforms such as ISPF and MRTEQ had challenges regarding resources for their adequate imple-

mentation. However, the inadequacy in the implementation of these policies resulted in ill-preparedness of student-teachers who had challenges in successfully adapting in their workplaces (Singh and Mabasa 2015: 168; Isaac and Waghid 2016). With MRTEQ prescribing practical knowledge with focus on learning in practice and work integrated learning (Government Gazette No. 38487 2015: 10), the question raised is do student-teachers succeed in attaining such learning from teaching practicum?

Inadequacies in initial teacher education (ITE) are further identified by Taylor (2014: 7), who identifies them as inadequacy of ITEs in promoting competencies of student teachers on classroom practices, low levels of English proficiency, lack of reading and basic numeracy pedagogies, and low level of subject knowledge among teachers. Stated policies were sought to address teacher related challenges, such as poor working conditions, poor teacher morale, high absenteeism, high turnover and attrition that cause instability in schools. The question raised is, are such educational reforms succeeding in transforming ITE and addressing identified challenges facing teachers and ITE?

Since student teachers will be expected to apply knowledge and skills in new as well as in unfamiliar contexts (Modipane and Kibirige 2015: 203), clinical approach to teaching practice is required. However, ITEs do not always succeed in providing such practice and they result in under-prepared teachers who enter teaching fraternity less equipped on good classroom practices (Modipane and Kibirige 2015: 203). The situation described above is part of the larger picture of the South African Education system which is in crisis (Spaull 2013; Madisaole 2012; Mncube and Harber 2013). The situation is exacerbated by the following factors as stated in Maphoto (2016: 218): lack of physical resources, on-going violent behaviour incidences, poor morale amongst teachers, lack of parental involvement and support and limited funding for school improvement. The condition portrayed above is prevalent in most South African rural and township schools that form approximately 75 percent (Spraul 2013). Most of these schools were previously disadvantaged. It is in these schools where 90 percent of student-teachers (Taylor 2014) and teacher educators received their basic education. The school-based model adopted by a relatively large South African university (Richter 2016: 1), and University of Limpopo in particular, uses the same schools during teaching practicum. The question raised by Thaba and Kanjere (2014) on whether schools have the capacity to render effective experiential learning and mentoring service is revisited.

### **Problem of the Study**

There is a growing concern which relates to getting teachers prepared for educating the youth (Mirzaei et al. 2014). Well-designed teacher education programmes are likely to produce high quality teachers. However, current teacher education programmes do not provide adequate field-based experiences, and after a program novice teachers in South Africa were found to be lacking teaching skills (Mirzaei et al. 2014). Akyeamong (2013) asserts that poor quality education in many African schools is as a result of poor teacher preparation. Teacher education fails in many schools as it supplies teachers of low quality. In addition to the above problem, Ming Lee's (2014) study found that a majority of primary teachers became experienced in their pedagogical content knowledge after they start-

ed teaching, whether through self-help, on-the-job training or through external interventionist's help.

Other factors such as problem of students overcrowding, bad timing by college assessors and absence of student formative feedback were also indicated as contributing to the challenges during teaching practicum in college-based training models (Hardman et al. 2012). In addition to the above, students' live experiences during teaching practicum may also be useful in addressing the problems raised. According to Mukeredzi and Mandishona (2013), gaining insight through studying live experiences of student-teachers during teaching practicum may assist teacher education institutions in reviewing their approaches and foster the attainment of desired outcomes. Therefore, this study attempted to identify UL student-teachers' experiences and to capture their reflections on challenges and opportunities they encountered, as well as areas that need improvement.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The aim of this study is to explore student-teachers experiences and reflections during teaching practicum sessions, to discover their benefits from such sessions, as well as the challenges that need to be addressed. The purpose of this article is therefore to report on the findings of this investigation. In an attempt to achieve the above stated aims of the study, the following questions guided the investigation:

What are the student-teachers' experiences and reflections on school environment during their teaching practicum?

Did the subject mentor provide adequate mentoring support?

What are student-teachers' classroom practices and management styles during teaching practicum?

### **Responsiveness and Reflection as Part of Experiential Learning Theory**

Education programs should be responsive to student-teachers' needs and teaching practicum in particular. Experiential learning is a core in teaching practicum and teaching practicum is also a core in teacher education. Teacher learning processes should occur during teacher practice as suggested by Harrison et al. (2006). Expe-

riential learning theory is a philosophy based on what Dewey called a theory of experience (Kolb and Kolb 2005). Teaching practicum provides experiential learning which affords student-teachers opportunity for action, reflection and experience (Kolb and Kolb 2008). *“Education programmes should address new perspectives of the knowledge-based economy by focusing on rethinking the teaching-learning process which prepares the teaching personnel to meet the changing social and economic demands by adopting a complex, evolutionary and responsive approach”* (Serdenciuc 2013: 754).

Responsiveness focuses on providing the required education services when they are needed. This responsiveness is the opposite of anticipation. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are required to adopt new organisational approaches, preferably responsive business model in their education programs. This model calls for HEIs to wait for clients to make an order (procurement), before engaging in the provision of educational services. Unfortunately, in South Africa, HEIs become policy implementers, and their autonomy and flexibility on curriculum making decisions, is minimal. In the change of curriculum of the Bachelor of Education (BEd) program at UL, the program had to be overhauled to meet Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualification (MRTEQ) (2015) policy requirements, if its accreditation by Council of Higher Education (CHE) is to be maintained.

University of Limpopo had to change the curriculum of the BEd program, and teaching practicum notional hours were increased. In order to be responsive to the UL clientele during teaching practicum, UL uses school-based and university based-models. The adoption of both models was after thorough deliberations between the university lecturing staff and student body. Both models were found to have benefits and set-backs. Without much focus on cost and benefit analysis, it was agreed that both models are used, considering students' background and circumstances. In an attempt to design teacher education and teaching practicum that is responsive and flexible, the experiential learning theory served as a useful guideline to design and implement education programs in higher education, specifically at UL.

Reflective practice is a vehicle that allows teachers the ability to explore, contemplate and

analyse experiences in the classroom (Malatji and Wadesango 2014: 375). According to Kolb and Kolb (2008), the experience which is needed for reflection is preceded by action. Teaching practicum provides student-teachers with a platform to experience and reflect on the practice of teaching. Teachers' reflections have become a point of focus with regards to educational evaluation and introduction of new methods of measuring learner and school performance at local, regional and national levels (Peng et al. 2014). In teacher education, student-teachers can reflect on numerous activities ranging from school discipline, mentoring, and classroom practices and management. Teaching practicum facilitates the attainment of reflexive thinking skills. These include observation, communication, team working, judgement and decision making skills (Mirzaei et al. 2014). Mirzaei et al. (2014) further state that using reflective thinking tools is an important way to support teachers' reflective thinking skills. Student-teachers are exposed to teaching practicum to provide them space to make educational meanings.

## METHODOLOGY

A qualitative multiple case study methodology was adopted for this study because it provides valuable live experiences and knowledge base, as a means of tracking transformation and development (Bowen 2009) and attainment of policy income. This methodology provides tools for researchers to study complex phenomena within their complex contexts, and can be used to develop theory and interventions (Baxter and Jack 2008). In qualitative research, focus is on the meanings that participants give to their life experience, while case study helps researchers to obtain live experiences from participants.

Five Bachelor of Education final year students enrolled at the University of Limpopo were purposively sampled and interviewed. The major aim of this investigation was to identify and explore student teachers' experiences and reflections on the school environment, teacher mentoring, teaching, assessment and classroom practices and management during their teaching practice.

## FINDINGS

Three structured questions were given to the research participants during interviews. The

participants' responses were captured as field notes for subsequent analysis and interpretation of gathered data. The interview questions and participants' responses are interpreted in the following section.

### School Environment

The question on school environment wanted to establish if schools provide enabling and supportive climate for student-teachers' teaching practicum. Under school environment, themes such as supportiveness, warmth and caring, management and leadership, school resources and textbooks, teacher commitment, school discipline, as well as school infrastructure were identified. It was clear from practising teachers' responses that the school environment was important in the provision of adequate learning experiences during teaching practice. This finding confirms Thaba and Kanjere's (2014) perception on experiential learning in ITE that it requires mentoring schools to provide a learning environment to equip student-teachers with both subject content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge.

It was further established that well-managed schools led by effective school principals, coupled with committed teachers and proper resources generate the capacity for successful experiential learning. The vignettes below illustrate this point quite succinctly:

*"In three special cases learners were abandoned by teachers who labelled them as 'problematic'. This was caused by their low achievement levels as compared to other learners in other classes of the same grade."*

This labelling of learners, instead of helping them, was found to be a serious problem in under-performing schools than in well-performing schools. In schools that were functional, learners were not discriminated based on their academic performance. Seemingly, there is a well-established trend in secondary schools, where some classes are labelled and learners are left on their own, without proper intervention. The classes experience the highest failure rate, and ultimately, learners drop out of school.

*"Some of these classes are allocated to us (student teachers). Occasionally you find that learners are aware that they are not treated as others, and show dedication and commitment to attract student teachers to help them. It is*

*really a shocking situation, and it is being perpetuated, and nothing was done in the school to curb the situation. No departmental official nor parent, nor community member is coming to the learners' rescue. I felt sorry for the learners, and I taught them, even when I was scorned and discouraged by their teachers."*

It is unbelievable to allow student-teachers to teach such classes, without support by mentor teacher. The situation depicted indicates negligence by school principal, teachers and parents. The situation depicted above requires continuous Teacher Development (TD) that can offer confidence and guidance on how to work with learners in real school situations (Kagoda and Sentongo 2015: 148). Furthermore, TD should prepare school mentors in the new and extra role of mentoring student teachers. MRTEQ prescribes that teaching schools should become teaching laboratories that offer learning in practice and work integrated learning (Government Gazette No. 38487 2015: 10). In a country such as Finland, this challenge was addressed by using teaching schools that offer student-teachers best school and classroom practices, by setting higher professional requirements for teachers' placements, proven competencies in teaching skills, supervision, teacher professional development and assessment strategies.

An enabling school environment makes teaching practicum a fruitful experience. The learning context is central to teaching practicum and experiential learning, and as such it should be well-designed. Mukeredzi and Mandrona (2013) argue that if a school as learning context is characterized by unhappy or disinterested individuals this scenario can breed discontent, feeling of helplessness and create negative learning experiences.

*"In one case, the school was without proper school infrastructure and teaching and learning materials. This has impacted negatively on my teaching and assessment of learners. The learners' performance and classroom discipline became issues during my lessons, as 10 to 12 learners used one textbook, and no other books served as references. The class of 78 learners had to share 7 books. I found it difficult to move to the back, because my class was over-crowded. Even my mentor and university evaluators found it difficult to find a space to sit."*

Lack of classrooms and textbooks is a problem in most of Limpopo rural schools. In 2013, it

was found that the new South African curriculum textbooks were not delivered to schools, and the ministry of Education was put to task. Similar problems recurred in 2014, where Grade 12 teachers and learners' books were not delivered to some schools in Limpopo again. Teacher experiential learning is therefore compromised by overcrowded classrooms and lack of textbooks. Peng et al. (2014) assert that a positive school environment has impact on classroom climate and when such basics are not available, performance is compromised.

One participant reported that the principal was always absent.

*"During his absence, teachers and learners bunk lessons. As a result teaching and learning was difficult to take place, and this caused disciplinary challenges. I had the last period on Friday, and I failed to attend three times in my five weeks of teaching practicum. The culture created is that the school knocks off at 13h00, but (the school) timetable has periods up to 14h00. I had to talk to my class and we eventually agreed, after I learnt my lessons of being in a disruptive school like this. I intend not to come back, and I will indicate in my report the problems I encountered in this school. It was not a good experience at all, despite the warm, caring support that I enjoyed from my mentor."*

In this case, it was revealed that the school has a principal who does not execute his roles and responsibilities as required by professional statutes. The principal's absenteeism from school has negatively impacted on school discipline and leads to bunking of lessons by teachers. This erodes the culture of teaching and learning in schools and makes teaching practicum experiences difficult. Again, teacher-subject-learner contact time is negatively affected. Loss of teacher-subject-learner contact time on Fridays impacts negatively on student teachers'-subject-learner contact time and subject teachers-mentor contact time. The sum of all these problems has a negative impact on learner and school performance, ultimately.

The study established that a good working environment, in a good school with good teachers and learners, makes student teachers enjoy their stay in the school, and enables their experiential learning. The study further established that an enabling school environment coupled with good mentoring systems expose student

teachers to good classroom practices and management that they are expected to emulate. Moreover, the positive school environment is likely to teach socialisation skills and instil high levels of professionalism.

### **Mentoring**

On the question of mentoring, students focus was on mentoring competencies, mentoring approaches and a practice teaching mentoring model adopted by the University of Limpopo.

*"Mentor teachers were very kind, helpful, caring and they were able to provide positive comments about my teaching. They provided the support I needed in lesson planning and presentations. My mentors helped me improve my teaching practice, as they were able to identify my weaknesses and areas that needed improvement. She was regularly visiting my classes. Mentoring was done by mentor teachers and the principal. The principal was regularly making rounds of class visits to evaluate students' lesson presentations. I decided to do my practice teaching at my home and former secondary school, in Malalane village, Mpumalanga Province. I was heartily welcomed and supported by my entire former staff including my former principal. My principal indicated that I was the source of their inspiration and my choice of school was perceived as a reflection of their commitment to education. He said in the morning assembly during my first day's introduction that the school was proud of me, and students were motivated."*

In the case above, mentor teachers provided adequate support that student teachers required, with regard to lesson planning and presentation; and provided feedback by identifying weaknesses and areas that needed improvement. This confirms Abongdia et al. (2015: 50) findings that school mentors should support work integrated learning. Since mentors are expected to display positive attitude, motivate student teachers and be available when help is needed, (Mukeredzi and Mandrona 2013), this case indicated a mentor who knows his roles and responsibilities, and at least he was able to meet the student teacher's expectations.

In 2014, the University of Limpopo adopted two models of teaching practicum - home and university models. The students were at liberty to choose the model based on their educational

needs. Practice teaching was done in schools situated in all five Limpopo educational districts and Mpumalanga. Based on the findings from student-teachers who chose home-based teaching practicum model, they received all the support they needed and they established good professional relationships with their mentors. Unlike those who chose university-based model, they were denied access to other classes and they were not supported. They were not seen as part of the staff, and were put in special staff rooms that were to set them apart from the conventional staff.

*“During my teaching practicum, I found myself a mentee, mentoring both of my mentors; business studies and accounting teachers. They were expected to mentor me, with teaching and assessing my learners. Instead I was helping them, because I found that they have problems with certain content areas, and the accounting teacher requested me to teach them, and he observed. With business studies, we were able to sit down and discuss the difficult content with the teacher. I was further requested by the business studies teacher to give a project and mark it. I felt like I wanted a mentor who should help me with pedagogical content knowledge, and I was on my own, in this area. With other school related issues, they helped a lot, but with classroom practice not.”*

Mentoring is perceived and executed by schools differently. There were three approaches of mentoring adopted by mentoring schools. In the first approach, all teachers in the school become mentors. This is usually applicable with students who chose home-based model. The second approach is when subject teachers become mentors. Lastly, some schools appoint only one person to be the mentor for all student-teachers deployed to the school during practice teaching. Student-teachers were found to favour home-based model, because they feel well supported and adequately mentored.

### **Classroom Practices and Management**

A major concern in teacher education is applying theories and principles in ways to show their relevance to classroom practice (Ching 2014: 280). According to student-teachers experiences, teachers' classroom competencies refers to their knowledge of learners' deviant behaviour, conduct, pedagogical content knowledge, and

their ability to use a variety of assessment methods and strategies. A classroom practice offers experiential learning that is required by MRTEQ. The focus of experiential learning in ITE is when student-teachers develop their practice whilst in the classroom: experiment, reflect and adapt new theories, practices and content they have been introduced to in their own professional context (Girvan et al. 2016: 129).

*“The success of my lesson preparation and presentation was a result of the availability of learner teacher support material (LTSM). The teaching and learning activities involved usage of extensive materials, and sometimes there was a lack in the school. This posed a challenge to using a variety of teaching and learning methods and strategies. Learners portrayed good behaviour, and they were very cooperative, respectful and they were willing to learn. When the principal is not present, some teachers would bunk their lessons and learners will be left on their own in the classrooms. This causes uncontrollable noise in the school, and most often than not, I fail to teach my Grade 11 class when the principal is away, especially on Fridays.”*

Effective schools serve as good experiential sites that offer student-teachers ample opportunities to experiment with their pedagogical and subject knowledge. During teaching practicum, student-teachers are expected to improve their classroom practice competencies through observations and reflection. Disciplined school environment where learners portray acceptable behaviour, enhance teaching and learning. However, ill-disciplined schools hindered student-teachers' opportunity to experiential learning.

*“I was given a problematic class where most of the learners were repeaters. I gave myself time to understand their learning background and how school environment impacted on their low academic achievement. Teachers' commitment, bunking of classes, teacher absenteeism and laissez faire leadership style were cited as a cause of their failure the previous year. I felt like they put a thorn in my flesh, and I wanted to bring transformation in this class. I then adopted a class, and I decided to make it my office and the school management agreed. I felt more fulfilled when I started to realise change. I developed a very strong bond with many learners from this class. Surprisingly, the principal called me to his office, and thanked me for the*

*good job I was doing to reform Grade 10c. He then made a proposal. I was offered a post to teach Life orientation and English next year, because there is a vacant post at school. I completed an appointment contract. I'm waiting for my final examinations and submitting my statement of results and SACE certificate."*

This student-teacher used his time and effort without mentors and teachers' support to help transform classrooms and derive job satisfaction. This is supported by the Mukeredzi and Mandrona's (2013) study that established student-teachers often did not receive the expected support, but drew on personal resources and resourcefulness to transform their classrooms into places of engaged learning.

### DISCUSSION

Schools are required to provide experiential learning as one component of five knowledge areas as prescribed by Minimum Requirements for Teachers Educational Qualification (MRTEQ) policy. The policy prescribes that teaching schools should serve as experimental and experiential sites for learners during teaching practicum. It is the responsibility of ITE to place student-teachers in quality schools during teaching practicum. Such schools should have proven to be good practical sites in the provision of the required experiential learning that provides for learning from practice and work integrated learning. Peng et al. (2014) assert that mentoring schools should possess a good culture of teaching and learning and be supportive, positive and caring towards learners. However, student-teachers' experiences and reflections, indicate that the ideal and prescribed situation has not been attained during teaching practice.

Instead of teaching schools promoting the culture of teaching and learning in schools and good discipline, the situation is different. The school environment is characterised by labelling of learners who underachieves, lack of learner teacher support materials and other resources, for example, lack of infrastructure, poor school discipline, and congested classrooms. In a similar study conducted in South Africa, it was revealed that student-teachers were concerned over perceived disorganisation and unpreparedness in schools, received inadequate teaching materials, classroom discipline, and low levels of learner motivation and as such they

felt uncomfortable whereas others tried to develop coping strategies (Mukeredzi and Mandrona 2013).

In Moshwana and Thaba-Nkadimene's (2016) study, high school discipline, sound classroom practice, sufficient and suitable teaching and learning materials and pro-active school leadership were found to be the factors that promote the culture of teaching and learning. They further contend that highly disciplined schools nurture learner success, boost their self-efficacies, and the changes of learners' uncontrollable aggression, bullying, violence and victimisation are minimal. South African schools are under resourced (Bush and Glover 2016) and make the curriculum leadership and management, as well as the teaching and learning difficult jobs.

A teaching school espoused by MRTEQ is expected to provide the required mentoring during teaching practice. Student mentoring is one of the most significant activities performed during practice teaching (Bates et al. 2011; Ibrahim 2013). However, the school environment and teaching personnel were not up to scratch. Whereas, mentoring benefits mentor teachers and student-teachers on raising their level of commitment to teaching, level of satisfaction and self-efficacy (Onafowora 2005; Ibrahim 2013), instead student-teachers don't find adequate support and guidance from their mentor teachers. Furthermore, teachers are not certain of their roles and responsibilities in executing mentoring function (Mukeredzi and Mandrona 2013). There are those who execute mentoring function to their best level of their abilities, however others neglect this area, either on the basis of lack of knowledge or thinking they are over-burdened. This resulted with student-teachers reflecting mixed feelings on mentoring.

The use of home-based model and university-based model adopted by the University of Limpopo in 2014 has resulted in student-educators experiencing three different approaches to mentoring, namely; all teachers becoming mentors, subject teachers are mentors and one mentor per school. Most of the student teachers who indicated the good experience to mentoring during teaching practice were those who used home-based mentoring. The reason might be that most often than not, student-teachers use the schools they attended, or schools where their family members work in. They are familiar with the environment and teacher mentors, and

they know who to consult for support and guidance. In home-based schools student-teachers reap benefits such as individualised mentoring with adequate support and guidance, welcoming teaching personnel and teacher mentors, and established good relationships. A good mentoring relationship leads to student-teachers' high levels of satisfaction and nurturing positive attitudes towards teaching profession (Ibrahim 2013). Furthermore, mentors have a direct impact on the identity, self-perception, and quality of future teachers (Freidus 2002; Bates et al. 2011).

On the other hand, student-teachers were trusted to serve as assistant teachers and offering subjects; and they were consulted on difficult content areas and new pedagogies. Student-teachers assistance was observed in changing behaviour of learners and restoring confidence and hope in learners.

In university model, the major challenge is that many student-teachers would choose schools in the vicinity, and cause congestion in the staffrooms. As a result, in some schools, student-teachers were alienated from school activities and were put in their staffrooms without the presence of mentor teachers. In such situations one would expect mentoring to be done during scheduled consultation periods and contractual basis. This is the result of unhappy and disinterested teaching personnel (Mukeredzi and Mandishona 2014).

The expectation is that students should be given opportunity to observe the life at school such as staffroom socialisation skills, staff meetings and classroom practices. Contrary to the above, they are put aloof, and this defies the aims of teaching practicum.

The common challenge identified by home-based and university based student-teachers is inadequacy in classroom practice. The inadequacy in classroom practice was levelled on diverse factors, ranging from inadequate mentoring; lack of support in addressing problematic classes; poor school discipline; lack of learner teacher support materials and other classroom resources; and teachers inadequacy in content and pedagogical knowledge.

In an attempt to deal with a missing link identified between universities and mentoring schools, the role and responsibilities of members playing role in practise teaching, mentors in particular, should be reviewed and communi-

cated to relevant stakeholders. Mentoring schools ought to provide student-teachers with adequate support they need to enhance their experiential learning. The universities ought to provide platform to capacitate these mentoring schools. They need to develop formal training to raise mentor awareness of what is required and to make them aware of their role in dealing with student-teachers during practice teaching. Training should afford mentoring schools capacity to provide a required experiential learning which meets the requirements of the South African policy on teacher education, namely, Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualification (MRTEQ) policy.

## CONCLUSION

The study explored student-teachers' experiences and their reflections on teaching practicum. This study attempted to provide the experiences, challenges and opportunities that they encounter during teaching practice. The benefits and challenges student teachers encountered in relation to school environment, mentoring and classroom practice were outlined and explained. Furthermore, the benefits that were brought during the presence of student-teachers during teaching practice were also indicated.

A developing country such as South Africa requires the development of a high quality teaching personnel as a means towards human development. It has become clear that quality education requires quality teachers. A quality teacher blends theory and practice. This is possible if only ITE can promote learning from experience and work integrated learning during teaching practicum that promote experiential learning.

In conclusion this study argues that enabling school environment with knowledgeable, skilful and committed teaching personnel has capacity to provide required experimental and experiential learning during teaching practice.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The study therefore makes the following recommendations:

- ♦ Universities should send student-teachers to effective schools that display enabling school environment, effective and committed school managers and staff;

- ♦ Universities should adopt school-based model coupled with subject teacher mentorship approach strategies for teaching practicum;
- ♦ Universities should initiate partnership with mentoring schools to establish appropriate mentoring sites;
- ♦ Universities should provide thorough school mentoring training, to raise the level of their commitment to their roles during teaching practicum; and
- ♦ In the long run universities should plan to have schools which are prepared to provide adequate experiential learning during teaching practice

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDY

This study explored experiences and reflections of student-teachers during teaching practicum and possibilities for achieving teaching school in South African teacher education, an appropriate proposal mentoring to mentoring, and how higher education can help upgrade teacher mentors to serve in future teaching schools.

#### LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The case qualitative case study design with small sample of five Bachelor of Education final year students enrolled at the University of Limpopo is not representative of the University and other universities in South Africa. As a result, the conclusions made cannot be generalised. However, the results of this empirical study are very significant in understanding the experiences and reflections of student teachers during teaching practice, and can be used to inform a preferred model of teaching practice by the University of Limpopo, School of Education.

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**Paper received for publication on January 2015**  
**Paper accepted for publication on December 2016**