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Abstract
Teaching Practice 1(TP1), a core component of pre-service teacher education, is intended to bridge university-based theory and school-based practice. TP1 has recently been introduced as a mandatory requirement for pre-service teacher training in Kenya. Implementation by teacher educators, especially universities, has progressed more rapidly than systematic documentation regarding the preparedness of mentor teachers, who play a central role in mentoring student teachers. This study examined mentor teachers' perceptions of their preparedness to implement TP1 in junior secondary schools during the early phase of this reform. A concurrent mixed-method design was employed, targeting mentor teachers across designated teaching practice zones, drawing a sample of 217 from an accessible population of 325 using a stratified simple random sampling technique. Data was collected using a Mentor Teachers' Questionnaire (MTQ) and an interview guide (MTIG). Content validity was established through expert review, and the MTQ demonstrated high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.93). Quantitative data were analysed descriptively using SPSS (Version 24), while qualitative data were analysed thematically using Nvivo. Findings indicated that mentor teachers generally perceived themselves as well prepared to implement TP1. However, interview data revealed significant gaps in preparedness, including misalignment between university expectations and school-based mentoring practices. The findings highlight misalignment between university expectations and school-based mentoring practices as one of the challenges associated with early-stage policy implementation and mentor teachers' capacity development. Hence, establishment of a structured orientation and professional learning programme for mentor teachers to support coherent implementation of TP1 is recommended. The study offers insights into mentor teachers' capacity, role ambiguity, and inclusivity within competency-based education.

Introduction

Teacher education is critical to equipping student teachers with the requisite competencies and practical experience for successful, impactful learning (Musset, 2010). Practical experience is primarily gained through the student teacher's engagement in teaching practice (TP). The exercise serves as a link between theoretical knowledge acquired during training and the practical realities of the classroom (Akbar, 2002). According to James (2023), structured teaching practice experiences enhance meaningful teaching competencies, foster self-efficacy, and prepare student teachers to traverse the multifaceted dynamics of real-world classrooms.

In Kenya, TP is particularly significant as the country undergoes educational reforms, including the introduction of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), which emphasises inclusivity, practical skills, and the application of knowledge (Ministry of Education, 2017). This aligns with Sustainable Development Goal four and Kenya's Vision 2030 (UNESCO, 2016, 2017; Republic of Kenya [R.o.K.], 2007). This demands a re-orientation on how these aspects are implemented at the classroom level. Teaching Practice 1 (TP1) is undertaken in junior secondary schools (JSS), which are domiciled in former primary schools which have since been renamed comprehensive schools. The programme is undertaken during one school term of three months. TP 1 is the initial compulsory school-based field experience for student teachers at the end of their second year of the Bachelor of Education programme. The practice typically marks an early stage in a student teacher's professional development, providing initial exposure to the school environment and basic teaching responsibilities under the guidance of experienced mentor teachers (R.o.K, 2012). The effectiveness of this initial placement is crucial in shaping student teachers' confidence, pedagogical approaches, and overall preparedness for their future roles in the education sector.

Mentorship plays a pivotal role in shaping the effectiveness of teaching practice. Mentor teachers are critical in guiding and assessing student teachers. Hence, the need to be adequately equipped to support novice educators amid evolving curricula and pedagogical expectations, such as those introduced by the CBC (Izadinia, 2018). Research by Odundo et al. (2017) argues that supportive interactions among university assessors, school principals, and mentor teachers are essential for fostering professional competence among teacher trainees. The study underscored that the quality of mentorship directly affects student teachers' preparedness to handle classroom challenges effectively. Effective mentorship requires experienced teachers who can provide constructive feedback, model effective teaching strategies, and support the professional growth of student teachers. Most of the JSS teachers are experienced; however, they are trained to teach in the former 8.4.4 primary school curriculum. Further, some of the teachers are recent recruits by the Teachers Service Commission (TSC), most of whom have taught for less than five years. Therefore, it is not clear whether JSS teachers possess the relevant knowledge and skills or have received specific training in mentoring university-level student teachers. Hence, the study aims to determine mentor teachers' perceptions of their preparedness to mentor student teachers assigned to them.

The success of TP1 hinges significantly on mentor teachers' perceptions of their preparedness for this practical experience. These perceptions can highlight areas where school-based mentorship may need strengthening to ensure a more seamless and beneficial experience for mentors (Galamay-Cachola et al., 2018). A study by Njagi (2020) in Kiambu Sub-County revealed that teachers' preparedness in pedagogy

and digital literacy significantly influences the successful implementation of the CBC. Student teachers enter TP1 with varying levels of theoretical understanding and prior practical exposure, which can influence their confidence and ability to translate theory into effective classroom practice (Dreyer et al., 2015). This poses a challenge to mentor teachers as they balance their teaching workload and provide mentorship to their mentees.

Several factors can influence mentor teachers' perceptions of preparedness for TP1 in the Kenyan context. These may include the quality and relevance of pre-service training for student teachers and the clarity of expectations and guidelines for TP1 set by teacher training institutions. Further influences may result from the availability of resources, support within the placement schools, and the nature of the relationship and communication between student teachers and their mentors (Mkhasibe et al., 2018). Moreover, the recent implementation of the CBC in junior secondary schools adds another layer of complexity, requiring mentor teachers to be prepared to guide their student teachers in adopting and implementing new teaching methodologies, assessment strategies, and curriculum content (Njiru & Wairimu, 2020). Understanding these factors is essential for identifying potential gaps in preparedness and designing interventions to enhance TP1's effectiveness. In addition, it can provide valuable insights into the strengths and weaknesses of current teacher preparation programmes and mentorship practices in the context of educational reforms.

The literature reviewed underscores a scarcity of empirical evidence on perceptions of mentor teachers' preparedness to implement TP1 in Kenya's JSS. Such research is vital for identifying gaps in current training programmes and mentorship practices. The findings can inform policy decisions, curriculum reviews, and the development of targeted support mechanisms to ensure that both novice and experienced teachers are well-equipped to foster high-quality learning experiences for student teachers in the evolving Kenyan education system (Kennedy et al., 2018).

The study addresses the introduction of CBC in Kenya, which necessitated changes to the teacher education curriculum, leading to the introduction of TP1. During this period, student teachers are expected to be mentored by an experienced teacher, especially on the teaching methodologies and classroom management. This implies that mentor teachers need to be well-equipped and prepared to effectively guide their assigned mentees. However, there is a clear disconnect in expecting these JSS teachers—many of whom are new to the profession and were originally trained for the 8-4-4 system—to serve as CBC mentors for university trainees. There is a gap in empirical evidence regarding how these specific teachers perceive their own readiness in a newly restructured school environment. Therefore, the study aimed to examine mentor teachers' perceptions of their preparedness to guide their student teachers in observing and identifying various aspects of lesson presentation during TP1 in JSS.

The study's objective was to determine mentor teachers' perceptions of their preparedness to effectively guide the student teacher during classroom observation in TP 1.

Theoretical Framework

CBC is a recent education reform in Kenya that prioritises learners' active role in the learning process. It is underpinned by several theoretical frameworks, key among them being the social learning theory and the constructivist learning theory. These two theories guided the study.

Social Learning Theory

The Social Learning Theory was developed by Albert Bandura (1977). The theory posits that people learn by observing and imitating others. It emphasises the importance of observing, modelling, and imitating others' behaviours, and of seeing the consequences of their actions. For student teachers in Kenya, the mentor teacher serves as the primary "social model" to the teacher trainees within the school community. Bandura's core concepts of 'vicarious reinforcement' and 'observational learning' are central to Teaching Practice 1. This is because student teachers are expected to observe how their mentors use inquiry-based pedagogical strategies, manage their classes, and interact with the school administration. Through these observations, student teachers are expected to acquire classroom management skills, pedagogical skills and professional moral principles which are often difficult to conceptualise through lectures and textbooks alone. According to social learning theory, when mentor teachers perceive themselves as competent role models, they are more likely to intentionally demonstrate high-quality instructional behaviours that student teachers can effectively observe and replicate. This positive self-perception enhances the mentor's self-efficacy, ensuring they provide the consistent reinforcement and motivated modelling necessary for the student teacher to successfully internalise professional norms.

Social Constructivism *Theory*

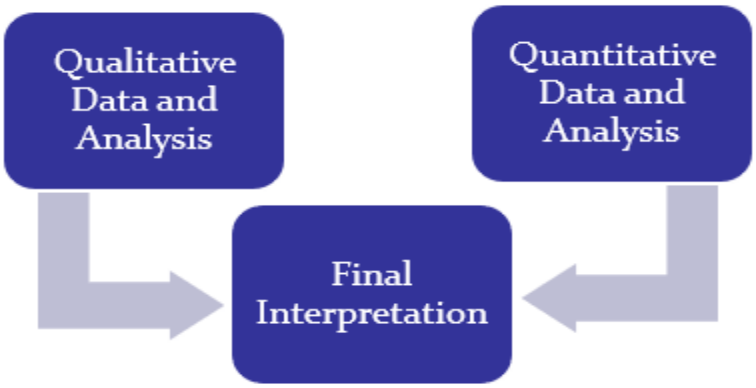
The theory was developed by Lev Vygotsky (1978), who posits that knowledge is actively co-constructed through social interaction and cultural mediation. Key to this framework is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which shows the distance between a learner's independent capability and their potential achievement under expert guidance. In the context of teacher mentorship, mentor teachers often assess their preparedness by their ability to identify and bridge this specific gap for their student teachers. By scaffolding complex pedagogical tasks, mentors facilitate a transition from external assistance to internalised professional competence. Consequently, a mentor's sense of readiness is closely tied to their mastery of these collaborative dynamics, ensuring they can provide the targeted support a student teacher needs to navigate their evolving professional identity. At the onset of TP1, student teachers begin the exercise with preconceived notions of pedagogy from their methodological coursework at the university. Therefore, mentor teachers act as facilitators, providing support to student teachers so they can learn and acquire new skills. This helps them bridge the gap between theoretical university coursework and the practical realities of a Kenyan classroom.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The study employed a concurrent mixed-method research design. This involved collecting both quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously in a single phase of the research study (Cresswell & Clark, 2017). The specific quantitative research method was a survey, while for qualitative, it was interviews with mentor teachers and focus group discussions with student teachers.

Figure 1: Concurrent Mixed-Method Research Design



Location of the Study

The study was carried out in the five teaching practice regions where Egerton University Students are posted to. The regions are Nakuru East, Nakuru-west, Kisii- Nyamira, Siaya –Kisumu- Kakamega and Uasin Gishu

Population of the Study

The target population for the study comprised all junior secondary school teachers assigned to mentor the student teachers on TP 1 in the five teaching practice zones. The zones had a total of 975 student teachers. The population of mentor teachers was estimated based on the 1:3 student-to-teacher ratio typically practised in JSS, yielding a total of 325.

Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

Krejcie and Morgan (1970) recommend a sample size of 175 mentor teachers for a population of 325. Goodrich and St. Pierre (1979) point out that the sample size should be increased by 20% or more of the calculated sample size to account for attrition and nonresponse. Therefore, 42 mentor teachers were added, bringing the total sample size to 217 mentor teachers who were to respond to the mentor teacher questionnaire. Further, the 217 mentor teachers were stratified by region, and using proportionate simple random sampling, 30 were selected for interviews. Bekele and Ago (2022) recommend a sample size of between 20 and 60 for qualitative interviews. The summary of the distribution of sample size is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of Accessible Population and Sample Size for Mentor Teachers

	Mentor Teachers	
Regions	**Accessible Population**	**Sample Size**
Nakuru East	93	62
Nakuru West	73	49
Kisumu, Siaya, Kakamega	55	37
Kisii, Nyamira	80	53
Uasin Gishu	24	16
Total	325	217

Instrumentation
Two instruments, namely the Mentor teacher questionnaire (MTQ) and the Mentor teacher interview guide (MTIG).

Mentor Teacher Questionnaire (MTQ)
The MTQ was used to collect data from mentor teachers. The questionnaire had two sections, namely, the mentor teacher's background information and classroom observation. Each section had 5 and 22 items, respectively. The classroom observation included five Likert-scale items: Not prepared at all, somewhat prepared, Prepared, well prepared, and very well prepared.

Mentor Teacher Interview Guide (MTIG)
The MTIG was used to collect data from mentor teachers. The guide contained six items used to collect data on how it guides student teachers to observe their lesson presentations. For each item, there were different types of responses provided. One teacher could provide more than one response. The responses were categorised into themes, and the number of teachers in each theme was counted. Each theme was presented as a percentage of the total responses provided.

Validity of the Research Instruments
The instruments were validated by five experts in curriculum and instruction from the faculty of Education and Community Studies, Egerton University. Their comments and suggestions were used to refine the instruments.

Reliability of the Research Instruments
Piloting was conducted in a subzone that did not participate in the final study after the instruments were validated. 10% of the 217 sampled mentor teachers served as respondents during piloting, totalling 22 mentor teachers. The reliability of the MTQ was estimated using Cronbach's alpha, yielding 0.93, above the acceptable threshold of 0.7.

Data Collection
Prior to data collection, approval to collect data was sought from Egerton University's Ethics Committee (Appendix B); thereafter, further approval was sought from the National Commission of Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) (Appendix A). Once the authority had been granted, Egerton University teaching practice coordinators, through their chairperson and dean, FEDCOS, were informed of the study's objectives and the intention to collect data from their respective zones. The zone coordinators, with assistance from allocated supervisors, distributed and collected questionnaires from mentor teachers.

Interviews were conducted with 30 mentor teachers in junior secondary schools who were randomly selected through regional stratification after the questionnaire was completed. The interview sessions for each teacher lasted approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour, at a time convenient to them within the school compound.

Data Analysis

The collected questionnaire data were coded and analysed descriptively (means and standard deviations) using SPSS version 24. The qualitative data from the interview guide were analysed thematically using Nvivo.

Ethical Considerations

Official consent to collect data was sought from the Egerton University Ethics Committee (EUEC). Consent was also sought from the participants before data collection. All the respondents were treated with dignity, respect and equity. To ensure confidentiality and privacy, the participants were not required to write their names on the questionnaires.

Results

The objective of the study was to determine mentor teachers' perceptions of their preparedness to effectively guide the student teacher during classroom observation in TP 1. Mentor teachers' perceptions were measured using a five-point Likert-scale ranging from Not prepared at all (NPA), Somewhat prepared (SP), Prepared (P), Well prepared (WP) and Very well prepared (VWP). The scores ranged from one for Not prepared at all to five for Very well prepared. The overall mean was 4.27 with a standard deviation of 0.54. This shows that mentor teachers were very well prepared to guide student teachers to observe all aspects of a lesson presentation, as the overall mean is above four out of a maximum of 5.

Further, data were collected from mentor teachers using an MTIG to determine how they guided their student teachers to observe and recognise various aspects of lesson presentation. Each mentor teacher could provide multiple responses for each item. Each response is represented as a percentage of the total responses. They were first asked to explain how they guided the student teachers to identify a good lesson introduction. The mentors reported using various strategies, as summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Strategies used by Mentor Teachers to Guide Student Teachers to Identify a Good Lesson Introduction (n = 23)

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Discussing with the student teacher elements/features of a lesson introduction	17	73.9
Developing different lesson introduction models (concept to be taught, use of visual aids, real-life examples) and sharing them with the students	2	8.7
Allowing the student teachers to observe a lesson introduction as the instructor teaches then prepare a new one with the student teacher	2	8.7
Others (preparing an engaging introduction that captures learners' attention with the student teacher, explaining to the mentee the purpose of a lesson introduction)	2	8.7

Some of the mentor teachers described how they explained to the teacher students what should be done when introducing a lesson, rather than what they did to ensure that student teachers were able to identify a good introduction as shown in the below extract from interviewee 6,

"I encourage mentor teachers to capture learners' attention through engaging short stories and real-life situations. I also help student teachers link the introduction to prior knowledge and clearly state lesson objectives."

Others indicated what a student should do when preparing a lesson introduction, as expressed by the sentiments of interviewee 3,

"I advise student teachers to consider age, ability level and knowledge of learners when designing a lesson introduction."

The mentor teachers were also asked to indicate how they assisted student teachers in identifying features of an effective lesson introduction. The results indicated that most mentors could identify features of a good lesson introduction, such as "arousing learners' interest" (39.1%), "relevant to learners' experience" (13%), and "stimulating/thought-provoking" (8.1%). However, a majority (47.8%) instead of providing features of a good lesson introduction provided ways of carrying out a lesson introduction, thereby confusing their mentees.

Mentor teachers were further asked to explain how they guided student teachers in identifying good lesson development. The results showed that they used a variety of techniques as presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Ways through which Mentor Teachers Guided Student teachers on how to Identify a Good Lesson Development (n = 23)

Ways	Frequency	Percentage
Discussing features/elements of a lesson development	10	43.8
Taking the student teacher through steps of content delivery	9	39.1
Advising the mentee on what to observe (presence of learning activities, use of various teaching methods, monitoring understanding through observation and formative checks) during a lesson delivery	4	17.4
Discussing the purpose of a lesson development	2	8.7
Preparing a content delivery section of a lesson plan with the mentee	2	8.7
Others (develop a well-prepared content delivery section, share and discuss it with student teachers, demonstrating how to sequence content logically using various teaching methods and instructional materials)	2	8.7

The results in Table 3 show that mentor teachers guided their student teachers in identifying features of lesson development. However, a few mentor teachers explained the competencies that teacher students should possess and do to effectively deliver content, instead of indicating what they did to ensure that student teachers were able to identify a good introduction, as exemplified by the sentiments of interviewee 12:

"The student teacher should be conversant with content, use of lesson plans and teacher guides, and also ensure learners acquire key competencies."

In an inquiry into the features of good lesson development, only 30.4% of mentor teachers identified the features, which included: learner-centred activities, adequate time allocation, appropriate instructional methods, and regular checks to ensure that learners understood what they were being taught. The other

features identified were a clear explanation of concepts, differentiation to accommodate learners' needs, and step-by-step progression during lesson delivery.

When mentor teachers were asked how they guided their student teachers to determine whether the activities teachers engaged learners in class led to the achievement of lesson learning outcomes, their responses showed that the majority of the teachers did not emphasise the importance of aligning teaching and learning activities with the intended lesson learning outcomes. This is demonstrated by an excerpt from interviewee 10:

"*Most of the time, I put learners into groups to discuss a sub-strand before discussing with the whole class using questions and answers.*"

This clearly demonstrates that mentor teachers were not guided by lesson learning outcomes or outlined competencies when selecting appropriate teaching and learning activities. Hence, they relied heavily on group work and question-and-answer.

Regarding assessment during lesson presentation, the mentor teachers indicated how they guided their student teachers to identify different types of assessments used during a lesson presentation. A mentor teacher could provide more than one response. 73.9% of the responses indicated that mentor teachers discussed with the student teacher the types and features of assessments, such as questions and answers, group work, experiments, peer evaluation, and monitoring. 17.4% of the responses indicated that mentor teachers discussed the purpose of assessment with the student teacher, for example, to check what the students knew before the lesson, whether they were following what was being taught, and whether they had learnt what was intended. 8.7% of the responses indicated that mentor teachers exposed the student teachers to both formative and summative assessment models. However, none were mentioned in the diagnostic assessment. Going by these responses, it is evident that some of their responses as ways of assessment are not really assessment methods, for example, experiment and monitoring.

This inquiry also sought to determine whether mentor teachers guided student teachers in identifying strategies teachers use to ensure inclusivity during a lesson. Three aspects of inclusivity, namely learners' gender, ability levels, and impairments (visual, physical, and hearing), were examined. The mentor teachers indicated that they first had a general discussion with the student teachers about indicators and techniques to help them identify ways to ensure inclusivity. The results indicated that nearly half of the mentor teachers (47.8%) strongly prioritise lesson design to foster inclusivity, focusing on lesson plans, differentiated instruction, and assessment. In contrast, physical classroom arrangement and organisation received the least mention at only 8.7%. Both learner analysis and the explanation of inclusive teaching practices held a balanced, moderate focus at 13.0% each, reflecting a foundational but less emphasised effort to prepare student teachers for diverse learner needs.

With regard to gender inclusivity, the mentor teachers reported discussing observable evidence of gender inclusivity with the student teachers in a classroom setting. 39.1% of the responses indicated that they give equal chances to boys and girls across all spheres, such as grouping, leadership, and participation in activities during a lesson. 21.7% indicated the use of gender-neutral language, examples, and activities, while 8.7% mentioned the presence of guidelines or a code of regulation for interaction in a mixed-sex class.

Further, the mentor teachers reported that they guided the student teachers in identifying different ways to ensure inclusivity in classes with learners of varied ability levels. This involved discussing with the student teachers related indicators during a lesson presentation, as summarised in Table 4.

Table 4: Indicators for identifying different ways of ensuring inclusivity in classes of learners with varied ability levels during a lesson presentation (n = 23)

Indicators/evidence	Frequency	Percentage
Factoring in learners' ability level when preparing lesson activities (evidence that activities can be adjusted to accommodate different learner abilities)	2	8.7
Using a variety of grouping strategies (mixing learners of different abilities)	6	26.1
Allowing learners to explain/show what they know in different ways	2	8.7
Blending teaching methods to cater for multiple learning styles	13	56.5
Provided different levels of support to learners (more time and work for slow learners)	3	13.0

From Table 4, the response most endorsed by mentor teachers was a blending of teaching methods to cater for multiple learning styles, as a technique to ensure that learners of different ability levels are taken care of during lesson presentations.

The mentor teachers also assisted the student teachers in identifying different ways instructors use to ensure inclusivity in classes with Special Needs Learners (SNLs), including those with learning disabilities, speech (stammering and articulation problems), visual, physical, and hearing impairments. The mentors discussed with the student teachers the observable indicators that can be used to ascertain that inclusivity was promoted in such a class. 43.3% reported that support is provided to special needs learners by grouping them with friends who can help them and giving them priority in the provision of resources and facilities. 13% of the responses pointed out that classroom organisation is sensitive to the needs of SNLs in terms of accessibility, layout, sitting arrangement and allows the use of assistive devices, while only 8.7% of the responses indicated the adoption of differentiated teaching and assessment methods, such as individualised teaching, and allocating more time during tests.

The majority of the mentor teachers (43.3%) identified the provision of extra support to SNLs. This is demonstrated in the excerpt by interviewees 2 and 19:

"I have a time taker in my class, so to assist him, I pair him with one of his friends to assist him in my mathematics lesson."

"I have a stammerer in my class, and so I allow her enough time to respond to questions asked as I encourage her."

This is evident that there are SNLs in class and that the mentor teachers are able to identify them and provide the required support. However, not all mentor teachers put effort into providing the extra support as depicted in the following statement by interviewee 21:

"Most of the time, it is not possible for me to teach at a slower pace to accommodate time takers due to pressure from the school management to cover the scheduled content as per the learning designs."

Mentor teachers were finally asked how they guided their student teachers to identify a good lesson conclusion. Only 56.5% of responses from mentor teachers indicated that they provided features of a lesson conclusion to their mentees. 17.4% indicated that they prepared a good conclusion with the student (summarize key points, relevance of content to real-life/future lessons) while 4.3% indicated that they demonstrated a good lesson conclusion to their mentees According to the mentors, the features of the conclusion stage of a lesson presentation are: brief and focused, what was learnt was linked to real-life application, indicate the next topic, and provide learners with opportunities to reflect on key points. The other features included giving learners opportunities to seek clarification, a review of the objectives, a summary and recapitulation of what had been covered, and closure activities such as question-and-answer sessions and formative assessment.

Finally, mentor teachers were asked to provide suggestions on how Egerton University, as a teacher-training institution, can assist them in effectively guiding the student teachers allocated to them during TP1. Their suggestions are summarised in Table 5.

Table 5: What Egerton University can do to assist mentor teachers to effectively guide student teachers during TP1

Suggestion	Frequency	Percentage
Provide clear mentorship guidelines for both mentors and mentees	7	30.4
Create a communication platform for direct communication and reporting (requests, challenges)	3	13.0
Organise periodic mentorship training, workshop, seminar, briefing and feedback sessions	14	60.9
Assist in acquisition of CBE resources/materials (journals, observation tools, assessment rubrics)	4	17.4
Enhance student teachers' skills (ICT, teaching, preparation of TP materials, classroom management)	4	17.4
Ensure student teachers are familiar with competencies and learning areas in junior schools	3	13.0
Others (incorporate special need learners when organising TP1, encourage students to report on time)	2	8.7

The results reveal that the majority of the teachers (60.9%) suggested that Egerton University should organise periodic mentorship training, workshops, seminars, briefings, and feedback sessions after the completion of TP 1. This would enable them to identify their strengths and areas for improvement, as identified by both the mentor teacher and teacher trainers.

Discussion

The objective of the study was to determine mentor teachers' perceptions of their preparedness to effectively guide the student teacher during classroom observation in TP 1. The results from the MTQ indicate a high level of positive perception of their preparedness to guide student teachers during classroom observations. However, the results of the MTIG reveal otherwise. The findings indicate that although the mentor teachers know the steps and process of lesson presentation, they did not mentor the student teachers as expected by the teacher training institution. This could be attributed to the fact that

most mentor teachers (69.2%) have less than 10 years of teaching experience. According to Feiman-Nemser (2012), teachers' teaching experience significantly and positively influences their ability to mentor student teachers. Mentors with greater experience tend to possess a deeper well of practical knowledge, classroom management skills, and pedagogical expertise to draw upon Goldshaft, 2024).

A study by Ossai and Ramsaroop (2025) on Mentoring experiences of student teachers during teaching practice in Nigeria revealed that student teachers lacked adequate mentoring and support. This may be attributed to mentor teachers teaching heavy workloads, lack of training, personality clashes with mentees, and insufficient institutional support. Studies have shown that the majority of teachers have heavy teaching loads and, in addition, other administrative duties, which negatively affect teachers' performance (Maldrine & Kiplangat, 2020; Mang'uu et al., 2021; Gituriandu & Mukolwe, 2022). According to Mkhomi et al. (2025), one of the major challenges mentor teachers face is the lack of structured guidance and communication from universities regarding their roles. They recommend that universities implement structured orientation programmes that have clearly outlined expectations for students and mentor teachers. They further reiterate that universities should establish consistent communication channels with mentor teachers to ensure achievement of intended mentoring objectives.

The findings show that, although mentor teachers perceived themselves to be well prepared to mentor student teachers, they lacked clarity regarding the specific expectations of the teacher training institutions. Vygotsky's Social Constructivism (1978) theory suggests that while mentors may possess the foundational knowledge, they lack the scaffolding provided by clear institutional frameworks necessary to effectively guide mentees within their Zone of Proximal Development. Furthermore, Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) highlights that without a defined understanding of their roles, mentors cannot serve as effective models, as observational learning is compromised when the expected standards of practice are ambiguous. Eventually, this misalignment shows that professional competence is not merely an individual attribute but a socially mediated process that requires a shared cognitive map of expectations to translate theoretical readiness into impactful mentorship. The key limitation of the study was the reliance on self-reported perceptions of preparedness, which introduces social desirability bias and subjective overestimation. This may skew findings away from objective competence; however, this was mitigated by conducting semi-structured interviews to triangulate data and probe for concrete behavioural evidence.

Conclusion

This study has brought to the fore the critical role of mentor teachers in guiding and supporting student teachers in teaching practice. It is evident that though mentor teachers perceive themselves to be well prepared to execute their roles during TP 1. However, interview data revealed significant gaps in preparedness, including limited role clarity and misalignment between university expectations and school-based mentoring practices. Further, the interview data showed insufficient enactment of inclusive pedagogies, despite inclusivity being a core principle of competency-based education. Most mentor teachers did not proactively guide their student teachers as the institution expected. This was largely attributed to the lack of structured orientation by the teacher educators at the university for the mentors regarding their expectations and support. Though the university prepared a teaching practice handbook outlining the roles of mentor teachers during TP1, it was evident from the interview that not all mentor teachers received it before the exercise began, or that those who did did not familiarise themselves with

their roles. In addition, the pressure from their allocated workload by the school administration left them with minimal time for mentorship. The literature confirms that the majority of teachers have heavy workloads per week. This is in addition to other allocated administrative duties. This leaves mentor teachers with limited time to provide effective mentorship to their mentees.

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