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Evaluating the Validity and Impact of Teaching Practice Assessment Tools in Higher Education

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Abstract. Evaluating teaching practice is an essential component of teacher education that provides valuable insights into the effectiveness and quality of teaching using evaluation tools. Previous research reveals that giving feedback is key in achieving effectiveness and contributing to growth and development. Consequently, evaluation results in imbalance distribution of marks which lead to inflated marks or bias because of lack of standardisation and divergent tools. This study investigated the effectiveness of tools for evaluating teaching practice as well as the elements that affect the reliability and correctness of preservice teachers' performance ratings during practice. The study draws from Danielson's (2022) theory as specific components that define high quality teaching. The study adopted a qualitative approach using Teaching Practice Evaluation Forms as documents to gather data. According to the literature and theory consulted for this study, these were subjected to thematic analysis. The resulting themes were coded, analysed in light of the study topics, and interpreted and analysed by comparison analysis. The findings were contextualised and issues identified, including subjectivity, standardisation, and time and resource constraints that would prevent an adequate assessment of teaching practices. Performing assessment without sufficient evidence of preservice teachers' practice is a poor practice.

Keywords: assessment; cooperating teacher; evaluation tools; preservice teachers; teaching practice

1. Introduction

Teaching practice evaluation is an essential component of teacher education that provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of quality teaching and learning and the competence of preservice teachers (PSTs) (Din et al., 2021; Oluwatayo & Adebule, 2012; Onyefulu et al., 2019; Tlali, 2018; Zondo & Adu, 2024). This evaluation or assessment is the process of observing evidence of PSTs' behaviour and drawing inferences thereafter about their ability to teach (Berk, 2018). This

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means that the observers make a judgment about how well the PSTs have taught and even provide feedback on how to improve if weaknesses were identified. Providing feedback is key to achieving effectiveness and contributes to the positive growth and development of these teachers, encouraging them to be competent and take ownership of their teaching (Bichi & Musa, 2017; Dunklin & Hasan, 2024). Prior research has shown that during this period, PSTs are provided the opportunity to gain practical professional experience while studying (Zondo & Adu, 2024).

This implies that they are allowed to go to real classrooms and teach as part of the program they are pursuing. This also means that there must be an individual who observes them teaching since they will be new at it to determine if they are performing well. When evaluating PSTs, marks are allocated as a yardstick that measures performance, relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency in teaching, which should be done in the light of specified criteria (Nkonki-Mandleni, 2023).

Consequently, literature has unveiled the concern about how these assessment tools can be used to develop and produce the envisaged teachers, who are an embodiment of what reflective practice in education is (Nyewe & Booi, 2018). This is due to an imbalance in the distribution of marks during evaluation resulting in the assessment tools which are not uniform across all higher education institutions, leading to bias in score distribution. This practice compromises validity of assessment for PST leading to incompetence in future. Nyewe and Booi (2018) further argue that universities use outdated and poorly structured assessment tools, leading to potential bias and inaccurate evaluations related to PSTs' skills. This is because these tools fail to align with current pedagogical approaches which focus on theoretical knowledge rather than practical teaching competencies resulting inconsistent rating.

When grades are inflated, PSTs will enter the teaching profession without a realistic understanding of their competencies, potentially affecting their preparedness and effectiveness in real classroom settings. This subjectivity is also reported by Masole and Howie (2015) that it causes PSTs' marks to be inflation or a severe decrease due to the nature of supervisors' judgment relating to PSTs' performance since they lack standardisation and inadequate quality control mechanisms used to assess and allocate marks without bias. This mismatch can also reflect an absence of expertise on the side of observers if no workshop is offered before the tasking of observation starts.

Conversely, studies further contend that these tools are not invalid, although it depends on how the score is interpreted and used for making decisions (Anderson, 2018). Consequently, literature further argues that supervisors evaluate PSTs based on their personal preferences and understanding regarding the evaluation tools. This has sparked heated conflicts among supervisors and PSTs due to unfair judgment made about the PSTs' teaching (Dlamini, 2018). This leads to the conclusion that even though evaluation tools can measure performance, relevance, and effectiveness in light of specified criteria, if they are not standardised for monitoring and evaluation marks are reduced across all

institutions of higher education. Hence, the study intended to determine challenges that may arise due to discrepancies in the evaluation tools and how they affect the evaluation outcomes. The study also suggests how evaluation can be improved to enhance their validity and effectiveness in assessing teaching practice.

2. Problem Statement

In both Lesotho and South Africa, the teaching practicum is a core component of initial teacher education, designed to equip pre-service teachers (PSTs) with the practical skills, professional dispositions, and pedagogical knowledge required in diverse and often under-resourced classroom environments. However, the effectiveness of teaching practice assessments in these countries is increasingly called into question due to the continued use of outdated, inconsistent, and poorly structured evaluation tools (Nyewe & Booii, 2018; Masole & Howie, 2015). These tools frequently lack clarity, objectivity, and alignment with evolving educational demands, resulting in inflated marks, superficial evaluations, and limited developmental feedback for PSTs.

In South African universities, studies have pointed to the inconsistent application of teaching practice assessment rubrics across institutions, the overreliance on mentor teachers' subjective judgments, and the lack of moderation and standardization in assessment practices (Jita & Mokhele, 2014; Booii, 2020). In Lesotho, similar concerns have emerged, with teaching practice evaluations tools often being guided by general observations rather than competency-based criteria, and insufficient attention paid to feedback that supports PSTs' reflective growth and classroom readiness (Thobane, 2019).

These systemic shortcomings hinder the credibility of teaching practice outcomes and contribute to a mismatch between university-based training and school-based teaching realities. There is therefore an urgent need to explore similar robust evaluation tools that can be adapted to support fair, comprehensive, and development-oriented assessments of PSTs in Lesotho and South Africa. That will not only enhance the validity of teaching practice assessments but also contribute to the professionalisation of teaching in line with national education policies and global best practices. Therefore, this study aims at critically examining the effectiveness, relevance, and contextual suitability of current teaching practice evaluation tools used in initial teacher education programmes in Lesotho and South Africa. The study seeks to explore how these tools can be aligned with contemporary pedagogical standards and the professional competencies required by pre-service teachers.

3. Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed by the study:

- a) What challenges arise from discrepancies in evaluation tools?
- b) What is their impact on assessment outcomes?
- c) What improvements can be made to enhance the validity and effectiveness of evaluation tools for assessing teaching practice?

4. Literature Review

4.1 The rationale for Teaching Practice Evaluation Tools

In the initial teacher education, the teaching practicum is a cornerstone of professional preparation, offering pre-service teachers (PSTs) an opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge in real classroom contexts. Evaluation tools are essential to accurately measure the effectiveness of teaching and learning outcomes (Chu, 2019). These tools help lecturers and institutions understand where strengths and weaknesses lie, both for individual teachers and the education system as a whole. They provide a structured approach to assess teaching quality, student engagement, and the impact of instructional strategies as well as the personal growth of teachers (Nalla, 2018).

Therefore, a multi-dimensional approach must be adopted that addresses various aspects of teaching and learning. As indicated earlier, teaching practice evaluation involves the systematic collection and analysis of feedback from various sources, including lecturers, peers, and mentors. The purpose is to identify strong and weak areas for improvement in teaching (Power & Tanner, 2023; Wei & Liu, 2024), thereby contributing to the professional growth of PSTs and the enhancement of student-learning outcomes. In most countries, effective teaching practice evaluation involves a combination of self-assessment, peer feedback, mentor observations, and student feedback.

This shows that these elements can provide a comprehensive picture of PSTs' strengths and areas for improvement during the teaching practice. It is aimed at fostering continuous professional development and enhancing the teaching and learning process of these PSTs in the future. In addition, there has been debate about whether it is reasonable to assess teaching quality solely by looking at behaviour and other quantifiable elements based on specific standards (Leshem & Barhama, 2008). The purpose of this study was to assess the effectiveness of teaching practice evaluation methods, with a particular emphasis on the challenges that may arise from the improper allocation of marks for instructional performance.

4.2 Contextualizing Teaching Practice

As indicated earlier, teaching practice is one of the crucial components of teacher education programs in all universities that aim at providing PSTs the opportunity to practice teaching in real classrooms (Al-Mekhlafi & Naji, 2013). According to Nguyen and Walker (2014) and Ariza-Quiñones et al. (2022), PSTs are given the opportunity to experience a real teaching environment, which aids in the reinforcement, extension, and improvement of what they have learned in the classroom. This implies that PSTs have the chance to acquire the abilities necessary to attain a comprehensive development as both professionals and human beings during this process. Consequently, it provides PSTs with a chance to interact with the actual context of teaching and improve what was learned in the course. As a result, it offers them a chance to interact with an authentic environment and enhance it with social and cultural elements that they may use in their instruction (Pinzón Capador & Guerrero Nieto, 2018). According to Karsli and Yağiz (2022), teaching practice must be effective and respond to the needs of

the PST in terms of professional development and mentoring support regarding teaching skills. During this period, they need to receive regular feedback from both their mentor teachers and faculty instructors regarding their teaching performances. As Oluwatayo and Adebule (2012) indicate, supervisors need to do a series of performance assessments in order to report a valid assessment about a PST.

In both institutions under study, namely the National University of Lesotho (NUL) and the University of the Free State (UFS), teaching practice is a key component of teacher education programs. However, the structure and implementation may differ slightly depending on the context of each of these institutions. At NUL, teaching practice is a mandatory part of teacher training programs in the Faculty of Education (Tlali, 2018). It is typically carried out in the fourth year for the last fourteen weeks of the program to allow PSTs to experience actual teaching in the classroom before they graduate as trained teachers (Karsli & Yağiz, 2022).

PSTs are assigned to schools for a specified period of 14 weeks, often a quarter, to gain hands-on experience. They work under the joint supervision of mentor teachers (referred to as cooperating teachers) and university lecturers (referred to as supervisors), who assess their progress. Assessment includes lesson planning, classroom management, content delivery, and learner engagement (Musingafi et al., 2015). There may also be a final evaluation where the university supervisors observe and assess a full lesson. This is when they allocate marks to the lesson presented depending on their perception of the lesson.

At UFS, teaching practice is still a mandatory part of the teacher training program, known as work-integrated learning (WIL) (Adebola, 2022; Zondo & Adu, 2024). Unlike at NUL, it is carried out in various phases (spread across) throughout the program (starting from the first year with observations and intensifying in later years) (Zondo & Adu, 2024). Students are placed in partner schools and must complete a certain number of teaching hours. The UFS School of Education collaborates with schools to ensure that students receive structured training. There are regular supervisions and assessments by lecturers, mentor teachers, and sometimes external assessors.

The practice includes lesson presentation, assessment of learners, classroom management, and professional conduct. At UFS, teaching practice assessment is a structured process that evaluates student teachers in terms of various aspects of their practical teaching skills, professionalism, and classroom effectiveness (Nyewe & Booi, 2018). The assessment is conducted by mentor teachers, university supervisors, and sometimes external assessors. According to Ebrahim et al. (2017) and Dlamini (2018), teaching practice is essential for equipping PSTs with the skills needed for practical teaching and addressing the diverse learning needs of their learners.

The cooperating teachers and the supervisors have to regularly observe PSTs in their classes and meet with them at least once a week to provide feedback on their lesson plans and all aspects related to the observed lesson (Nyewe & Booi, 2018;

Oyinlola & Tsotetsi, 2022). The supervisor should then provide the PSTs with adequate feedback to help them improve their teaching skills. This implies that they need to use evaluation tools to rate these PSTs on several elements of their teaching during this period. These evaluation tools must effectively provide valuable insights into teaching methods, classroom management, and student engagement. They often include classroom observations, peer reviews, and self-assessments, each contributing to a comprehensive understanding of teaching performance (Nyewe & Booi, 2018).

Through this process, educators can refine their skills, adopt best practices, and create a learning environment that fosters academic success. Similarly, at UFS, the effectiveness of teaching practice evaluations has been a subject of academic inquiry, with an emphasis on aligning evaluation tools with educational outcomes (Anderson, 2018). This implies that the evaluations are not just about measuring teacher performance superficially but are also designed to reflect how well the teaching practice contributes to the desired educational objectives, such as student learning, skills development, and overall quality of teacher training. Hence, Anderson (2018) argued that there is a need to improve or refine evaluation processes to make them more outcome-oriented and impactful.

In both contexts, teaching practice evaluation forms serve as essential tools for assessing the effectiveness of teaching practice, particularly during PST training programs (Majake 2016). These forms provide a structured way for PSTs, mentors, and university supervisors to evaluate various aspects of teaching, such as lesson planning, classroom management, teaching strategies, and the ability to engage students (Mokuku & Thathakane, 2013). According to Berk (2018), these tools should be left in the hands of anybody authorised or qualified to make judgments about the PST's progress. This is because they are made for the purpose of making judgment on the teaching and even suggesting how the PST can improve.

They should therefore be in the right hands. In both contexts, teaching practice is regarded as the integral component of teacher education designed to monitor the growth of PSTs while still training and identifying areas that would need improvement (Benton & Ryalls, 2016). In this way, universities ensure that PSTs are adequately prepared for their future careers in teaching. This means that they are bridging the gap between theory and practice since they are expected to align their theoretical knowledge with practical teaching skills in the real classroom environment. By identifying areas for improvement, the professional growth of PSTs will be enhanced as well as their competence in teaching.

4.3 Teaching Practice Evaluation Tools and Their Purpose

As indicated earlier, teaching practice is that crucial component of teacher education programs that exposes PSTs to practical and professional experience in the real classroom, enabling them to put the theoretical knowledge they learned in class into practice (Oluwatayo & Adebule, 2012; Onyefulu et al., 2019; Tlali, 2018; Zondo & Adu, 2024). Although it can be offered at different periods of the teacher programs in different universities, it is a mandatory requirement for PSTs before the completion of their teaching qualification. There is no teacher education

program that is complete without an effective and supervised teaching practice program (Bichi & Musa, 2017). Hence, according to Zondo and Adu (2024), Quinones et al. (2022), and Oluwatayo and Adebule (2012), it is a pivotal journey that PSTs have to embark on while training because it is a skill that becomes inherent through training and practice.

According to Taole (2020), teaching practice simplifies the complexity of teaching because it commences with micro-teaching, where aspects of teaching are broken down into small pieces, allowing PSTs to teach one aspect at a time. This prepares them for real teaching at the schools where they will be placed for teaching practice experience. It is also argued by Hasan (2023) and Dlamini (2018) that teaching practice is used to determine whether PSTs are ready to teach or not because it allows them to apply the theories, methods, and strategies learned in actual teaching.

As a guide to teaching, evaluation tools determine the effectiveness of a teacher to teach and enhance students' learning (Berk, 2018). Additionally, evaluating teaching practice is required for increased student learning and hence has to be done to measure the effectiveness of teaching (Nalla, 2018). Therefore, Benton and Young (2018) and Berk (2018) asserted that to make fair judgment, these tools should be placed in the hands of authorised and qualified individuals.

4.4 Process of Evaluation

Quality supervision and duration of teaching practice are key to achieving effectiveness in teaching. Therefore, evaluation should not be a once-off activity but rather be done several times to help assessors determine trends that will help them identify improvement or decline in teaching effectiveness (Benton & Ryalls, 2016). As has been indicated, evaluation tools should be in the hands of those who are authorised to use them; they can be used by supervisors (from the university), cooperating teachers (at the school level), and peers. To make evaluation or assessment effective, it must be based on these criteria, among other criteria: the lesson plan, conduct of the lesson itself, knowledge of the subject matter, classroom management, and teacher personality (Berk, 2018).

A deep understanding and mastery of the subject matter of a teacher are essential for effective teaching. This also involves how well a PST can engage students in the lesson, encourage interaction, facilitate participation, and influence the overall teaching experience. PSTs must plan the content to be taught carefully, looking into the methods to deliver such content, referred to as subject matter. Fernández and Martínez (2022) and Oluwatayo and Adebule (2012) also pointed out that PSTs must plan their lessons appropriately because good planning shows that a teacher has concise and clear objectives for the lesson, which is influenced by many factors. Mastery of subject matter is very crucial, as Chu (2019) asserted that it determines quality teaching and, if monitored closely, strengths and weaknesses and points for improvement can be easily identified.

Performance on these aspects is or may be rated according to prescribed criteria and scores allocated depending on individual PSTs' competence to teach. As indicated earlier, this is one of the components that supervisors must make

judgment on when evaluating whether PSTs are able to deliver teaching in a clear voice and to a diverse learner group. The ability to maintain a productive and respectful classroom environment is critical for learning. Fernández and Martínez (2022) argued that classroom management matters because it has a substantial effect on student-teacher relationships, which must be conducive to contribute to effective teaching. It also implies that PSTs should manage class time effectively, ensuring that the lesson is neither rushed nor dragged on too long. Poor classroom management can lead to distractions, disorganisation, and a lack of discipline, which can impede student learning and reduce the perceived quality of teaching.

Mkhasibe and Mncube (2020) asserted that when a PST fails or struggles to manage their class, it implies that they are less confident or have not been exposed to the basic rules for reinforcement. This may lead to the PST scoring lower as a result of ineffective management. As alleged by Al-Mekhlafi and Naji (2013), those who are in authority should use all these aspects of the lesson plan to make judgment about the PST's teaching, which if fairly done, will help the PST to build self-confidence about teaching.

4.5 Validity of Evaluation Tools

Evaluation should be an ongoing process that is not confined to a single class period. Assessment tools used in some universities may be outdated and poorly structured to such an extent that some of the crucial components for assessment are missing (Nyewe & Booii, 2018). This leads to potential bias and inaccurate evaluation of PST skills. It can also release a huge debate on how marks should be allocated for teaching observed. Thus, before conducting an evaluation of the items that constitute evaluation, assessors must review the PST teaching practice file as evidence because it might be a poor practice to do an evaluation without sufficient evidence (Benton & Ryalls, 2016). Another factor that can make evaluation effective is feedback.

Teaching practice evaluation tools can be effective if PSTs are provided feedback, both constructive and immediate (Wilcoxon & Lemnke, 2021). This will make them take ownership of their teaching and become motivated. Encouraging PSTs to take responsibility for their own learning and motivating them to set personal goals can positively affect their engagement. Highly motivated students are more likely to contribute positively to class discussions and rate their teaching experience highly. Hence, teachers who are culturally sensitive and inclusive create a safe space for all students, improving their comfort levels and class participation.

High workload results in PSTs not receiving feedback from their cooperating teachers (Di et al., 2022). Sometimes, marks are allocated based on the supervisor's preferences and this causes conflicts between the supervisor and PST due to unfair judgment, thereby frustrating students (Dlamini, 2018). In cases where feedback is unfair, Bichi and Musa (2017) attested that evaluation supervision should be done by more than one supervisor to eliminate unfairness and bias in the allocation of marks. When evaluation tools are standardised, they can be an appropriate measure of effectiveness. In support, Nkonki-Mandleni (2023) argued

that evaluation tools are not standardised for monitoring and evaluation across universities, and they cannot be used as the yardstick to appropriately measure PSTs' performance, relevance, and effectiveness. This is because they are contextualised and are designed by individuals to serve the objectives of a specific university. For this reason, they have a multi-dimensional approach to address various aspects of teaching and learning (Nalla, 2018).

5. Theoretical Framework

The study is framed by Charlotte Danielson's framework (2022) for teaching is a comprehensive, research-based tool designed to assess and support effective teaching practices (Danielson, 2022). According to Danielson this framework serves as a foundational model for teacher evaluation and professional development. It organizes teaching responsibilities into four domains. The first one being Planning and Preparation which focuses on teachers' content knowledge and pedagogy, understanding of students, setting instructional outcomes, and designing coherent instruction and assessments. Secondly, the classroom environment which addresses the creation of conducive environment of respect and rapport, establishing a culture for learning, managing classroom procedures, student behaviour, and organizing physical space.

Thirdly, instruction which centres on communicating with students, using questioning and discussion techniques, engaging students in learning, using assessment in instruction, and demonstrating flexibility and responsiveness. Lastly, professional responsibilities which involve reflecting on teaching, maintaining accurate records, communicating with families, participating in a professional community, growing and developing professionally, and showing professionalism.

This framework is highly relevant to teaching practice evaluation and assessment performed during PST's teaching practice. It allows supervisors and mentors to systematically observe and evaluate PSTs across all critical areas of teaching. Instead of merely observing whether a lesson was well delivered, the framework encourages them to assess how well the PST planned components such as for diverse learners, managed the learning environment, and used assessments during instruction. It emphasizes reflective practice, helping PSTs understand their strengths and identify areas for improvement. This aligns well with the developmental nature of teacher training, where the goal is not just grading but guiding growth. Lastly, it supports evidence-based feedback which encourages supervisors to base assessments on observable evidence, reducing bias and making feedback more meaningful and actionable for PSTs.

6. Research Methodology

To explore and compare the evaluation tools used by the two higher education institutions under study, the study adopted a qualitative approach, with embedded case study design of two universities. This approach enabled the researcher to examine not only the structure and content of the tools but also how they are interpreted, applied, and experienced by users (Tracy & Hinrichs, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The design was chosen to allow for an in-depth

exploration of each university's teaching practice assessment tools, their structures, implementation processes, and the contextual factors influencing their development and use (Yin, 2018). A comparative case study approach is particularly useful when the aim is to identify both shared and divergent practices across bounded systems of each case (O'Leary, 2023; Yin, 2018; Goodrick, 2014).

Data was primarily collected for the study through document analysis. To obtain valuable information or insights that can support decisions, address research problems, or assess content, document analysis entails a methodical process of perusing and analysing a collection of documents (Palmar-Santos et al., 2023). Setting clear objectives for the analysis of the documents – in this case, evaluation forms used as instruments to gauge the efficacy of instructional strategies, was the first step in the process. To gain a general understanding of the information included in these forms, they were carefully read (skimmed), which allowed for the identification of themes, patterns, and noteworthy details (Yin, 2018).

Themes were subsequently identified by analysing and interpreting recurrent categories that surfaced from the assessment forms (tools) in light of the study questions. A checklist was used to compare data from the tools from both universities (Bowen, 2023). According to the assessment forms, these categories were the essential components, and the coded information was assigned to areas of the forms that corresponded with the themes identified. Subsequently, themes were grouped to provide analysis in a more structured format. Second, a selection of pertinent documents was examined to obtain data to answer the research topic.

Themes and patterns pertinent to the research subject were identified through comparative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2024). Contextualising the findings in light of the social environment in which they were produced ensured that the information contained inside was accurately understood and interpreted. The results from these documents were compiled to synthesise, interpret, and make connections (Bowen, 2023). Based on the documents examined, the interpretation of this data presented difficulties that hinder the evaluation of effective teaching practices. These difficulties were discussed thereafter.

7. Findings and Discussions

This study examined the effectiveness of teaching practice evaluation tools, focusing on the elements that would make them impartial, valid, and standardised in two universities. As previously shown, assessing teaching has been identified as a crucial component of teacher education and is intended to introduce teachers, especially those involved in teaching practice, to the practical side of the teaching profession. Consequently, it is imperative to continuously monitor each phase of their teacher education for quality reasons. The themes that emerged from the evaluation tools analysed are presented and discussed below.

In general, all teacher training institutions place a high priority on producing qualified instructors because producing high-quality PSTs is essential to producing and retaining effective teachers in the teaching profession. Such efforts are necessary to develop teachers who embody reflective practice in education.

7.1 Subjectivity of assessment

The study found that evaluation tools used for assessing PSTs are subjective. Assessment form as a document, is a crucial element in evaluating teaching practice because it provides concrete evidence of the PST's methods and progress as well as students' learning. Documentation can include lesson plans, student work, assessments, reflection journals, and feedback from students or colleagues.

All these documents are meant to provide feedback for PSTs. However, allocating marks to PSTs is a subjective decision influenced by the mood, beliefs, personal experiences and context of the individual evaluating. The university supervisors and cooperating teachers may have their own preferences or biases towards the teaching styles that PSTs use, the subject matter, or even personality traits when evaluating. This aligns with what Danielson (2022) advocated that learning environment has a great impact on the evaluation score, as what is rated by one person can be differently rated by the other. Thus, contributing to subjectivity that assessment scores might contain. Some may prefer a more structured teaching approach and that is likely to influence the rating if a PST becomes less flexible and might make such lesson or approach less effective.

It is also evident by Nyewe and Booi (2018), who showed that poorly structured university evaluation tools do not accurately measure teachers' abilities when the evaluations tools do not spell out the criteria for evaluating. This limit professional growth when evaluation is influenced by personal feelings. When marks are allocated without clearly stipulated criteria, they might be biased because the criteria for assessing are not spelled out by the tools used. This also comprises quality, objectivity and consistency of assessment provided. Subjectivity may also be caused by expectations against reality.

When university supervisors and cooperating teachers have preconceived notions of what good teaching is or should look like, they often base rating on their own experiences, and as Danielson (2022) indicated, such judgement lacks planning if there is no checklist used as criteria for assessment. This can skew the way they interpret the PST's performance, especially if the PST's approach did not align well with their own ideas of what constitutes effective teaching. Hence, a biased score is allocated that does not match the PST's teaching. As Nyewe and Booi (2018) articulated, PSTs' marks are likely to be inflated or reduced as a result of subjectivity.

PSTs' behaviour may also influence how their teaching is rated. When the observer is more drawn to one style over another, this can affect how they make judgments on the teaching and hence produce a difference in rating. Teaching effectiveness can also vary widely in accordance with context. From one university to another, it is guided by policy, and in South Africa, teaching practice is spread across the program of four years, while in Lesotho, it is done in the fourth or final year and for a maximum of fourteen weeks (Karsli & Yağiz, 2022; Tlali, 2018). Therefore, the time factor also matters in judging the effectiveness of teaching because it is an important aspect of teacher education that influences the

quality of education. The PST's cultural background may also differ from that of the observer and may in one way or another influence their rating. This happens when one element of the system is considered for evaluation rather than the entire system. When such an important aspect of teacher education is completed in a very short time, subjectivity is likely to result in assessing quality and effective teaching. This subjectivity may affect the final product of a teacher as subjectivity challenges the validity of the assessment outcomes and raises concerns about equity, especially when these evaluations contribute to final certification.

7.2 Standardisation

Findings revealed that evaluation tools used are not standardised. Universities do not use standardised (uniform) tools for evaluating teaching. Standardisation refers to the use of uniform criteria or rubrics to assess teaching performance across different PST programmes (Nkonki-Mandleni, 2023; Dlamini, 2018). Furthermore, it aims at bringing consistency and fairness to the evaluation process and can be introduced to reduce the limitations of rubrics because they can oversimplify the complexity of teaching practice even though they are designed to provide clear guidelines for assessing teaching. This implies that they are not using standardised tools, or their tools are poorly structured as per Nyewe and Boo's (2018) assertion. Even though using a rigid and standardised tool may fail to measure consistency, coupling it with checklist would hide its limitations.

A standardised tool needs to include all elements or criteria on which assessment can be based. Standardised tools align with Danielson (2022) dimensions 1 (Planning and Preparation) that when PSTs prepare their lessons, they show content knowledge and their pedagogical knowledge in relation to learners' needs. Consequently, this is not the case with NUL because most of the elements are missing from the tool, and when not all the elements of the system are spelled out in the tool, this can cause bias. It might be that they are using a rigid tool that cannot even be benchmarked against that of other universities, and if the rubric is too rigid, it is unlikely to capture the nuances. This also concurs with Benton and Young (2018) that sometimes, it is not about the validity of the evaluation tool but rather about the individual who interprets and allocates a score in relation to the teaching performance. This implies evaluating PSTs on a principled teaching as Danielson (2022) indicated.

In some cases, university supervisors and cooperating teachers may be lenient and offer higher ratings based on the PST's potential and effort, while others may be more critical, focusing only on observable skills. This variation in standards of success (criteria) leads to differences in ratings, even if the PSTs' overall teaching abilities are relatively good. This is in line with Kwatubana and Bosch (2019), who explained that the presence of all elements helps the observer to make a fair judgment on the performance of PSTs. This means that the scores obtained are fairly awarded on the teacher's quality practices, as indicated by Darling-Hammond (2017). This means an evaluation tool without all the elements (standardised) influences inaccurate and inconsistent scoring. Hence, the absence of one element in making judgment affects the whole system. Standardised evaluations reduce flexibility and often limit the ability of mentors and university

supervisors to consider the specific context in which teaching is happening. If PSTs are evaluated based on uniform expectations without room for interpretations of the teaching environment and the subject matter of what they are teaching, it could lead to unfair or incomplete assessment. If standardised criteria do not align closely with the actual goals of the teacher education program or the needs of the students in the class, it could lead to ratings that do not accurately reflect the true potential or overall effectiveness of the PST. If standardised indicators are overlooked, tension can be created between accountability and assessment practices authenticity.

7.3 Time and Resource Constraints

The findings show that in one university, teaching practice is conducted within three months only, which seem to be a short period of time to get everything right. Teaching practice assessments are often conducted within limited time resources, especially in the case of Lesotho, and this can affect the depth and accuracy of the evaluation process. Frequently, the university supervisors or even cooperating teachers may have limited time to observe the PSTs on teaching practice due to the short period allocated for teaching practice.

This concurs with Ebrahim et al. (2017) and Bichi and Musa (2017) that the teaching practice period is very short, it does not meet the minimal requirements for evaluation and valid allocation of score. Within this short period of time, PSTs have not yet developed attitudes towards teaching and professional competencies, and weaknesses and strengths may have not been identified at this juncture. This means that the rating is likely to not be reliable because it is based on limited PST work and does not truly represent the full scope of their teaching profession.

This can also favour some PSTs who may have an exceptional lesson on one day but struggle during the rest of their teaching practice. Therefore, such evaluation based on one lesson does not provide an accurate picture of the overall competency of the teacher. Similarly, when feedback is compressed or rushed due to limited time, it implies providing surface-level comments only instead of detailed feedback. This is likely to reduce opportunities for PSTs to truly reflect on their practice to make improvements and grow from such experiences. Due to time limits, supervisors may try to assess multiple teachers within a short time of period. This causes them to take shortcuts and to prioritise their effectiveness over thorough assessment.

On the other hand, PST assessment may be rushed into, which might mean that the assessor is not trained for the role or pressed by time. As Al-Makhlafi and Naji (2013) argued, in this case, not all aspects of the lesson are observed, and this does not help the PST in building self-confidence and increasing motivation. This is evidenced by Gujjar et al. (2011), who explained that the majority of student-teachers are not given the opportunity to demonstrate lessons in all subjects. Such practical evaluation is not appropriate. This connects to what Ariza-Quñones et al. (2022) attested, that a short period of 12 weeks or less than a year might influence inaccurate ratings because the component that links theory to practice does not evaluate the expected skills that accurately measure competence,

learning theories, and methods, which could lead to inaccurate evaluations. Similarly, feedback can be rushed when time is too restricted, in which case supervisors just offer surface-level comments instead of detailed feedback focusing on all areas of quality teaching. This reduces the opportunity for PSTs to truly reflect on their practice in order to make improvements and grow from such experiences.

In that way, the assessment will retain facts that report reliable assessment practices. In some cases, supervisors or cooperating teachers may be responsible for assessing multiple PSTs at once. Supervisors with heavy loads may often conduct brief or infrequent visits making it difficult to comprehensively observe teaching PSTs' teaching performance. This may result in them not having enough time to pay adequate attention to each of the PSTs. This overloading can result in rushing evaluation or not giving an appropriate rating, which is likely to favour some PSTs over others in accordance with the supervisor's perception and mood.

This coincides with Zondo and Adu (2024), Kasapoglu et al. (2023), and Dlengezele (2020), who indicated that it becomes a challenge for mentors who are heavily loaded with work to assess all PSTs which in turn affects the thoroughness of the evaluation. It might also deny PSTs time and space to reflect on their teaching and even to review their feedback for making adjustments in the future. This can also affect them negatively because it becomes difficult for them to develop a deeper understanding of their strengths and areas of growth. Without proper resources, feedback sessions may be less frequent to truly be helpful in assessing teaching, especially for PSTs.

7.4 Lack of Continuous Support

Continuous support emerged as crucial theme for teachers' personal growth and if not offered, may reduce the opportunity for ongoing mentorship and guidance during teaching practice. When supervisors do not have time to offer regular, in-depth support, the assessment may be meaningless and lead to missed opportunities for improvement and professional growth of these PSTs. This is in agreement with Carless (2018), that providing continuous feedback helps in determining trends that will help to identify areas that need improvement, and if it is not offered, it results in a decline in effective teaching.

This gap deeply affects Danielson's Domain 4, Professional Responsibilities, which emphasizes ongoing reflection, collaboration, and commitment to professional growth as necessary for PSTs during their teaching practice. When structured systems are missing, they limit the developmental purpose of assessment, leading to uncertain expression about PSTs' progress because they receive little guidance on how to improve their teaching. Additionally, this discontinuity weakens the formative potential of teaching practice and contributes to feelings of isolation and anxiety. Hence, a need for integrated support structures in order to enhance the validity and impact of assessment tools fostering sustained professional development.

This is also in harmony with Ariza-Quñones et al. (2022) that brief instruction leads to biased mark distribution, particularly when observers do not complete

assessments frequently with support. The level of support and guidance from cooperating teachers and supervisors, plays a significant role in shaping the PSTs' growth and performance. In many cases limited support to once off observations do not allow meaningful relationships between mentors and mentees (PSTs).

Without sustained discussions, PSTs may miss opportunities to reflect on their planning and adjust their instructional strategies to suit the existing classroom environment, aligned with Danielson's (2022) Domain 3 and 2. Frequent and constructive feedback throughout teaching practice enables PSTs to improve their performance in real time, which can affect their ratings positively.

8. Conclusion

The effectiveness of teaching practice is determined by factors such as teacher personality, lesson presentation, assessment, and pre-teaching preparation, contributing to how PSTs are rated. Teachers who excel in these areas tend to foster an environment where students feel engaged, supported, and able to learn effectively. These kinds of teachers are likely to be rated higher by supervisors because they demonstrate competence and are proven to put theory into practice.

These factors are interconnected, and a well-rounded teaching practice that integrates all of them is likely to receive positive evaluations. If these aspects are not used together to determine the score, they result in invalid scoring because of the preferences and subjectivity of the assessors. Thus, to avoid bias and uphold the validity of these factors, a standardised scaling should be used across universities when aiming at producing quality teachers who will sustain their teaching profession. The study found that rating PSTs using teaching practice evaluation tools that are not standardised results in subjectivity, which sometimes causes conflicts between PST and supervisor because the PST did not perform in accordance with their supervisor's preferences. Hence, these tools must be in the hands of authorised individuals so that PSTs' marks are not inflated or reduced, thereby becoming a motivation to them to do their teaching effectively.

9. References

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