

Challenges Affecting the Implementation of Teaching Practice: The Case of the University of Zambia

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Abstract

For many years, the process of training a teacher has been extensively studied and discussed in the scientific and academic community worldwide. However, very few studies have been conducted on teaching practice in the developing world, which include Zambia. Teaching practice affords student teachers an opportunity to translate theory into practice in a real classroom situation. This study investigated challenges that the University of Zambia faces in implementing teaching practice in schools. In addition, the study probed teacher educators, supervising teachers and student teachers' views on measures that can be taken to improve the implementation of teaching practice in schools. The theoretical framework for this qualitative study was the third generation activity theory. The sample was purposely selected and comprised eight teacher educators, 10 supervising teachers and 24 student teachers. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were used to collect data. The data were analysed thematically. The study established that the whole process of teaching practice faced many challenges such as lack of collaboration between teacher educators and supervising teachers and limited learning space resulting in inadequate learning and peer teaching time. Most of the study's findings are consistent with findings of earlier studies. This study is significant as it attempts to reduce the knowledge gap that appears to stem from a paucity of research on teaching practice in Zambia. One major recommendation is that School of Education should be separated from other schools.

Keywords: Activity theory, Challenges, Teacher education, Teaching practice, Theory-practice divide.

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1. Introduction

For many years, scientists and academicians have widely studied and debated the "process of becoming a teacher" (Martinez, 2008; Caires, Almeida & Vieira, 2012; Mason, 2013). One of the most important parts of this process is teaching practice (Goh & Mathews, 2011; Ramanaidu, Wellington, Chew & Hassan, 2014). This is partly why the processes of school teaching practice together with the contribution it makes towards the learning of pre-service teachers has attracted the interest of the researchers, teacher educators and teachers (Lawson, Cakmak, Gunduz & Busher, 2015). For this reason, understanding current issues in teacher education is paramount for grounding research, shaping practice, and establishing a policy that is up-to-date and informed (Dooley, Dangel & Farran, 2011).

Teaching practice is a key component of any teacher training programme (Leshem and Bar-Hama, 2008; Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education (MoESVTEE), 2012; Hamaidi, Al-Shara, Arouri & Awwad, 2014; Muyengwa & Bukaliya, 2015; Iqbal, Saeed & Mujahid, 2021). Teaching practice is a part of teacher education in which student teachers are attached to schools where they teach in a classroom (Bhatt, 2021). The value and multifariousness of teaching practice have generated a variety of interests and means aimed at investigating its different dimensions, actors and dynamics (Caires, Almeida & Vieira, 2012).

Over the years, it has been observed that blending theory with practice of the profession in the pre-service teacher education programme has been a challenge (Cheng, M., Cheng, A. & Tang, 2010; Korthagen, 2010; Allen, 2011). A gap has been noted between student teachers' theoretical and practical knowledge in a real classroom situation (Hascher, Cocard & Moser, 2004). As observed by Marais and Meier (2004), student teachers sometimes fail to relate what they had learnt to classroom practice. This concern has resulted in greater governmental scrutiny of initial teacher education (ITE) (Grudnoff, 2011; Jones, Hobbs, Kenny, Campbell, Chittleborough, Gilbert, Herbert & Redman, 2016). Further, this is why much of the available literature on teacher preparation, focuses on the theory-practice divide and ways in which the divide can be addressed (Adoniou, 2013; Jones et al., 2016).

According to Alhwiti (2007), an important strategy for evaluating a teacher education programme is to measure its effectiveness. The main goal of evaluating an educational programme is to come up with information for the purpose of making sound decisions (Alhwiti, 2007). Substantial research has been undertaken on teaching practice around the world (Rogayan & Reusia, 2021). Research on teaching practice in Zambia is scanty and

limited. In addition, none of them has investigated challenges of implementing teaching practice. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to investigate challenges the University of Zambia faces in implementing teaching practice in schools. Considering that in the context of this study, teaching practice is considered to be a process, the study aims at examining both pre-practice instruction as well as the actual teaching practice in schools. The objectives of the study are two-fold, namely to establish challenges faced by the University of Zambia faces in implementing the teaching practice programme, and seek suggestions from the teaching practice triad on how teaching practice can effectively be implemented in secondary schools. Therefore, through this study, the researcher makes an attempt to narrow the knowledge gap that appears to stem from a paucity of research on teaching practice in Zambia.

2. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework that best informed the study is the activity theory, specifically the third generation activity theory. The activity theory, a product of Vygotsky and Leont'ev's work (Lee, 2003), is usually referred to as the "cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT)" (Bakhurst, 2009; Nussbaumer, 2012; Bligh & Flood, 2017; Razak, Jalil, Krauss & Ahmad, 2018). Central to Vygotsky's thesis is the notion that the individual's interaction with objects in the world is mediated by cultural artefacts: signs, symbols and practical tools (Hardman, 2008).

In the third-generation activity theory, the unit of analysis is a collaborative activity (Bourke, Mentis & O'Neill, 2013). In this study, teaching practice is considered a collaborative activity in which two activity systems namely the University of Zambia and schools participate. This explains why participants for this study were essentially drawn from these two activity systems. Meyer and Lees (2013), Avis (2009) and Roth and Tobin (2002) state that the activity theory can be used to identify the challenges that affect the implementation of teaching practice in order to ameliorate the theory-practice divide. This theory fits well in this study which aims at establishing the challenges that the University of Zambia faces in implementing teaching practice. The activity theory is a reliable "socio-cultural lens" to scrutinise human activity (Mudavanhu, 2014) and that it is suitable for research in education (Bakhurst, 2009). In addition, some studies investigating university education and specifically teaching practice have used the activity theory (see Mtika, 2008).

Responding to challenges in the teaching practice programme is in line with Yamagata-Lynch and Haudenschild's (2009:509) view that using the third-generation activity theory in research is useful because of its "interventionist nature". The use of the activity theory in this study is also justifiable considering that the main elements being investigated, which include subjects, artefacts and outcome are the same as those in Engeström's (2001) third generation activity theory model. Therefore, a framework based on the activity theory provides a conceptual and theoretical tool to organise an inquiry into understanding the challenges that the University of Zambia faces in implementing teaching practice from the perspectives of the teaching practice triad, namely teacher educators, supervising teachers and student teachers.

3. Literature review

Teaching practice is entrenched in the desire to teach and produce knowledgeable and skilled teachers (Endeley, 2014). However, as observed by Cheng et al. (2010) and Korthagen (2010), theory-practice gap during the teaching practice has been acknowledged worldwide leading to extensive research and debate among scientists and academics. In this section, the meaning of teaching practice and reasons for implementing it are explained. In addition, challenges faced in implementing teaching practice are presented. Finally, some pertinent studies on teaching practice in Zambia are reviewed.

The major goals of teacher education, according to Perraton (2010), are to expand "student teachers' knowledge and understanding of the subjects" they intend to teach, as well as to develop functional skills and proficiencies. In other words, teacher education aims to provide student teachers with the information and abilities necessary to teach. In the context of this study, the University of Zambia provides teacher education to both pre- and in-service teachers, collectively referred to as student teachers, in order for them to qualify to teach at either junior or senior secondary school, or both. Teaching practice is a phase during which student teachers put what they've

learned in a teacher education programme into practice in the classroom (Ogonor & Badmus, 2006; Rosemary, Ngwarai & Ngara, 2013).

There are many reasons for conducting student teaching practice. First, student teachers practice their teaching skills. Second, according to Cohen, Hoz, and Kaplan (2013:346), student teachers use teaching practice as a "professional training ground" where they also establish "their personal identity". Third, it allows student teachers to put theory into practice. Cohen et al (2013) believe that teaching practice can assist to close the gap

between pedagogical theory and instructional practice. Additionally, teaching practice allows student teachers to become acquainted with a variety of learning situations (Cohen et al., 2013). Student teachers might use the experience they learn from such engagements to assist them deal with similar issues in the future. In short, teaching practice is an extremely vital aspect of the training of student teachers as it helps them practise what they have learnt in a real life situation.

The manner in which teaching practice is organised can vary within one country as well as from one country to the other. Mattsson, Eilertsen and Rorrison (2011) have identified several models for teaching practice, one which is the partnership model in which the training institution rehearses with a local school where its student teachers are sent to do teaching practice. The Partnership model shares similar features with the University of Zambia's teaching practice model.

Ong'ondo and Jwan (2009) observe that some universities spend more time on theory training student teachers. As a result, most student teachers face difficulties during their teaching practice, such as a lack of connection between coursework and practice. In response to this difficulty, some teacher education institutions have a tendency to mix diverse models in a variety of ways in order to improve the weak relationship between coursework and practice (Mattsson et al., 2011). It must be stated that the choice of a teaching practice model depends on a number of factors such as availability of resources, the perceived objectives of teaching practice and time. However, regardless of the models adopted, they are all aimed at making sure student teachers attain a certain level of proficiency in teaching during training (Yan & He, 2010). This is because the ultimate aim of teacher preparation is to ensure that student teachers excel in teaching a class (Liu, 2012).

Since independence, Zambia has had three major policy documents on education that have been guiding the "theory and practice of teacher education" (MoESVTEE, 2012:3), namely the Education Reform of 1977, Focus on learning policy of 1992 and Educating Our Future of 1996. These policies have had a bearing on the development of teacher education. Education policy issues are valued because they aid in the construction of an adequate framework for the educational system that is consistent with the country's development goals (Ministry of Education, 1996: ix). For example, a policy can assist in determining the inputs and processes of teacher education and requirements of pre-service preparation programmes.

All the three educational policy documents have tended to focus more on the primary, secondary and colleges of education than on higher institutions of learning. In addition, none of the education policy documents has referred to teaching practice directly. Further review of literature has revealed that the only official document that has made explicit reference to teaching practice and its value in teacher training is the Zambia Education Curriculum Framework (ZECF) of 2012. One major highlight of the ZECF is that teaching practice should be conducted in not less than one full school term. The ZECF also appreciates the roles that the members of the teaching practice triad play in teaching practice (MoESVTEE, 2012). In this regard, the ZECF document is critical because it contains some parameters that could guide the study.

Teaching practice is beset with challenges. This is probably why some student teachers find it challenging and problematic (Mashava & Chingombe, 2013). According to Moore (2003), student teachers fail to practise teaching effectively because they are more concerned with 'procedures and routine tasks'. Consequently, they fail to "develop their pedagogical reasoning" (Ong'ondo & Borg, 2011) because they are only interested in pleasing their supervisors so that they can be evaluated positively.

Goh and Mathews (2011) identified challenges in the implementation of teaching practice in Malaysia. The challenges were related to classroom management and pupil discipline, institutional and personal adjustments, classroom teaching and pupil learning. Another study conducted in Namibia also established that maintenance of discipline and class management and knowledge transfer were challenges to the implementation of teaching practice (Scott, 2013). Chunmei and Chuanjun (2015) report that some challenges arose from student teachers' lack of opportunities to teach and learn how to manage a class.

Another challenge is lack of collaboration between schools and universities (Nguyen, 2015; Robinson, 2016; White, Bloomfield, & Cornu, 2010). Mtika's (2008) study also revealed little collaboration between the college and schools despite the anticipated benefits that can be derived from it. According to Sharon and Esther (2012), collaboration can support change and create conditions that can help the personal transformation of the participants. Smedley (2001) adds that collaboration can enrich the link "between theory and practice". Conversely, the lack of a collaborative partnership can result in no or less support from the activity systems of the school and college and/or university (Mtika, 2008).

Role confusion among teacher educators, supervising teachers and student teachers has also been identified as a serious challenge to the implementation of the teaching practice programme (Montecinos, Walker & Maldonado (2015). According to Southgate, Reynolds and Howley (2013) and Zeichner (2012), it is common for schools and universities not to be conversant with their roles while policies to support schools' involvement in the pre-service training of teachers are not available. It has been reported that the role confusion is maintained due to unclear "definitions and expectations related to support, supervision and exploration" (Hamman & Romano, 2009).

To aid our understanding of issues and how the current study fits into the broad area of teaching practice, four relevant studies on teaching practice in Zambia are reviewed. The earliest study on teaching practice in Zambia was conducted by Moyo (1980). It was aimed at identifying the specific characteristics of the selected dimensions of the teaching practice in primary teacher education in Zambia as well as how students were evaluated. Another study was conducted Masaiti and Manchishi (2011) who investigated the responsiveness of the University of Zambia pre-service teacher education programmes to schools and communities. The study used face to face interviews and focus group discussions to collect data from teacher educators and student teachers. The study established that student teachers' didactic competences were low to handle high school pupils effectively due to little time allocated to didactic courses and related activities. Another study conducted by Manchishi and Mwanza (2013) whose main objectives of the study included investigating student teachers' expectations of school experience, the adequacy of training students received for school teaching practice, and the challenges they faced in the design and delivery of the teaching practice was also reviewed. The final study on the University of Zambia's teaching practice was conducted by Simuyaba, Banda, Mweemba and Muleya (2015). The study's major objectives were to establish the head teacher/mentor teachers' views of teaching practice, and ascertain the head teachers' views on pedagogical issues of student teachers on teaching practice. The administrators and supervising teachers were the only study participants while teacher educators and student teachers were excluded.

To sum up, all the four reviewed studies on Zambia focused on teaching practice in particular. However, none of them investigated the challenges that the University of Zambia faces in implementing teaching practice. This study endeavours to fill up this gap. In addition, unlike the current study, none of the earlier studies included all the three key informants on teaching practice, namely teacher educators, supervising teachers and student teachers. Furthermore, in an effort to establish the challenges faced by the University of Zambia in implementing teaching practice, the current study investigates the various components of the teaching practice process whose results could subsequently inform practice.

4. Methodology

This study is situated in the qualitative approach in the form of a case study and has adopted an interpretive paradigm. The sample was purposively selected and consisted of 8 teacher educators and 24 students from the University of Zambia, and 10 secondary school teachers (supervising teachers). Semi-structured interviews were used with teacher educators and supervising teachers while focus group discussions were used with student teachers to collect data. An audio recorder was used to record the interviews. The audio recorder preserved the integrity of data while the recorded verbatim responses were used in data analysis (Lodico, Spaulding & Voegtler, 2006). Individual interviews were held with teacher educators and supervising teachers in their respective offices while focus group discussions comprising six participants each were conducted in any available but convenient room. On average, an interview or focus group discussion lasted between 40 and 60 minutes.

The data were analysed using thematic analysis method. Braun and Clarke (2012) define thematic analysis as a method for 'identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data'. It is a way of making out patterns in a data set when developing 'themes become categories for analysis' (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane,

2006). The data were analysed simultaneously with data collection on the basis of 'commonalities, relationships and differences across a data set' (Gibson & Brown, 2009).

To uphold the trustworthiness of the findings, the researcher addressed issues of dependability, credibility, transferability and confirmability (Gray, 2009). For example, credibility was upheld by representing and interpreting the participants' original views in a clear, complete and honest manner while extensive use of quotations was employed. Ethical principles such as protection of the participant's dignity and reporting findings accurately and assigning them symbols to uphold confidentiality were adhered to.

5. Presentation and interpretation of findings

The presentation and interpretation of findings are anchored on the identified themes and sub-themes. Where possible, both the new evidence and the earlier research findings are presented simultaneously. The across-case approach which requires the researcher to gather answers from different participants on common questions together (Patton, 1990; Kalimaposo, 2010) is applied.

To interpret the findings, the findings of the study are linked to what others have already done in this area or topic (Lodico et al., 2006). Quotations and detailed descriptions of the findings are employed. This is in line with Bechhofer and Paterson's (2000:160), argument that reporting an interview in a qualitative study requires citing the actual words used by the interviewee in order to bring out a 'remarkable and invaluable interpretation'. Thus, the use of direct quotations helped the researcher to understand the underlying meaning of the teaching practice programme from the perspectives of the participants. Symbols in brackets are used to represent participants as follows: teacher educator (TE); supervising teacher (SupT); student teacher (StuT) and focus group (FG). To differentiate participants, the symbol for the first teacher educator is TEA while the second is TEB. The same approach was used for supervising teachers and student teachers. For example, the symbol for the first supervising teacher is SupTA while for the first student teacher is StuTA. Focus groups are differentiated from each other by a given number. For example, student teacher StuTA in the first focus group is FG1-StuTA. What follows is a presentation of challenges faced by the University of Zambia in implementing teaching practice.

5.1. Challenges in implementing teaching practice

The overriding theme that emerged was that the University of Zambia faces many challenges in implementing teaching practice. Limited time for lectures and peer teaching, inadequate funds for teaching and learning materials, lack of coordination and collaboration among staff and short period for teaching practice were identified as sub-themes.

5.1.1 Limited time for lectures and peer teaching

The first sub-theme was limited time for lectures and peer teaching. Three out of eight teacher educators (TEA, TEC & TEH) confirmed the reduction in lecture hours for the teaching methods courses. One teacher educator (TEA) attributed this to inadequate infrastructure. One teacher educator commented:

I talked of the time factor, timetabling, and reduced contact hours from 4 to 2 because of limited infrastructure (TEA, interviewed on 28 February 2018).

Little time for peer teaching was identified as a challenge by the majority of teacher educators (TEA, TEB, TED, TEG & TEH). This finding is consistent with Chunmei and Chuanjun's (2015:235) study which showed that student teachers were not given enough time for peer teaching. One participant expressed this view as follows:

The other challenge is that we were being asked to teach for ten minutes during the training... (FG4-StuTE, interviewed on 4 May 2018).

5.1.2 Inadequate funds for teaching and learning materials

The second sub-theme was that there were inadequate funds for teaching and learning materials at the University of Zambia and schools. This was highlighted by two teacher educators (TEC & TEH) and student teachers in focus groups 1, 3 and 4. Here is what one student teacher said:

... other challenge I faced was lack of teaching aids. I was told to provide for myself as the school did not have enough (FG3-StuTB, interviewed on 26 April 2018).

5.1.3 Lack of coordination and collaboration among staff

Another sub-theme was lack of coordination and collaboration among staff training student teachers. Teacher educators handling teaching methods said that they hardly interacted with teacher educators handling subject content despite working for the same university. One teacher educator expressed this view as follows:

..., we hardly ever meet our colleagues (from other schools) to talk about how we are going to train teachers (TEC, interviewed on 1 March 2018).

The value of collaboration among staff involved in teacher training cannot be over emphasised. Their collaboration can help teachers to blend content with teaching methods and subsequently contribute to the effective implementation of teaching practice. Lack of collaboration was also evident between the University of

Zambia and schools. All the teacher educators, supervising teachers and almost half of the student teachers (10 of 24) confirmed the lack of coordination and collaboration. The following extracts support this view:

To the best of my knowledge, we do not collaborate (TED, interviewed on 7 March 2018).

There is no collaboration between the school and the University (SupTD, interviewed on 12 January 2018).

The findings confirmed the lack of collaboration on teaching practice between the University of Zambia and schools. This was exemplified in the failure by the University of Zambia to make advance arrangements with schools for student teachers' placements. These findings are consistent with studies by Nguyen (2015:169), Robinson (2016:19), Celen and Akcan (2017:251) and Mtika (2008:218) which confirmed the lack of collaboration between schools and universities. Zulu (2015:53), and Sharon and Esther (2012:41) argue that collaboration is important because it can expedite change and generate conditions to engender personal transformation.

5.1.4 Period for teaching practice is short

Another important sub-theme was that the period for teaching practice is rather short. The findings suggest that the short period for teaching practice as was the case with the University of Zambia prevented teacher educators from interacting adequately with student teachers. Additionally, student teachers were observed only once. This view was expressed by all the teacher educators (except TEC), the majority of the supervising teachers (except SupTC & SupTE) and all of the participants of the focus groups (except 2 participants in FG4). One participant expressed this view as follows:

The number one challenge is the period for us to do teaching practice. It was too short ... (FG1-StuTB, interviewed on 18 April 2018).

6. Measures to improve the implementation of teaching practice

On the question of how to improve the implementation of teaching practice by the University of Zambia, the overriding theme that emerged was measures to improve the implementation of teaching practice. Three sub-themes were identified, namely: allocate more time to teaching methods and peer teaching, extend period for teaching practice, increase funding for teaching and learning materials, and separate the School of Education from the other schools. Details of these sub-themes are presented below.

6.1 Allocate more time to teaching methods and peer teaching

All the teacher educators and supervising teachers (SupTB, SupTD, SupTH & SupTG) recommended the allocation of more time to teaching methods while some participants in FG1 (StuTA, StuTC & StuTE) and FG2 (StuTF) proposed an increase in time for peer teaching. These views were articulated as follows:

... they should spend more time on teaching methods (SupTB, interviewed on 9 January 2018).

I think the whole of third year should be for peer teaching (FG1-StuTC, interviewed on 18 April 2018).

Findings suggest that more time school be allocated to teaching methods as evidenced in the contributions made by all the teacher educators and supervising teachers (SupTB, SupTD, SupTH & SupTG). Similarly, findings suggest that student teachers need more time for peer teaching.

6.2 Extend period for teaching practice

The majority of teacher educators (TEA, TEB, TEC, TED, TEF & TEH), supervising teachers (SupTC, SupTD, SupTE, SupTG, SupTH, SupTI & SupTJ) and some student teachers (FG1-StuTB, FG2-StuTF & StuTB) recommended that the teaching practice period should be extended. Some participants (TEA, TEE, TEG & TEH) (SupTA & SupTC) (FG1-StuTA, StuTC & StuTD; FG2-StuTA, StuTB & StuTE; FG4-StuTB, StuTE & StuTF) also suggested that teaching practice should be conducted either in the first or second term because part of the third term was being used for examinations. These views were expressed as follows:

As long as they can do it the whole school term, I am comfortable with that (TEC, interviewed on 1 March 2018).

These findings suggest that the period for teaching practice is not long enough and as such it should be increased. Should the teaching practice take place either in the first or second term and the period increased, it will be in line with the recommendation of the Zambia Education Curriculum Framework (ZECF) of 2012, which recommends that teaching practice should be conducted over a period of at least one full school term (MoESVTEE, 2012:49).

6.3 Increase funding for teaching and learning materials

The teacher educators (TEB & TED), supervising teachers (SupTF & SupTJ) and student teachers (StuTC, StuTE & StuTF) suggested an increase in funding for the acquisition of teaching and learning materials. This view was expressed as follows:

We should be given materials like text books (FG1-StuTF, interviewed on 18 April 2018).

6.4 The School of Education should be separated from other faculties

The final sub-theme was that the School of Education should be separated from other faculties of the University of Zambia. The participants (TEA, TEB, TEF, TEH & FG1-StuTD) believed that this would remarkably improve the implementation of teaching practice. This is because the School of Education will become autonomous and have its own academic calendar and teaching staff for both subject content and teaching methods. A separate academic calendar will inevitably result in increased time for teaching methods, peer teaching and teaching practice. These views were captured from the interviews as follows:

We are linked to the university timetable ... So, the suggestion is that we become a college and have our own timetable (TEB, interviewed on 16 March 2018).

The University of Zambia should release students for a longer period... (SupTG, interviewed on 8 January 2018).

The participants demonstrated clearly that they understood how the challenges affecting the implementation of teaching practice could be ameliorated. The main recommendation hinged on the separation of the School of Education from other schools so that decisions concerning the organisation and implementation of teaching practice could be made independent of other schools. For example, this will lead to an increase in time allocated to activities such as teaching methods and teaching practice.

7. Conclusion

Using a qualitative approach, this study investigated the challenges facing the implementation of teaching practice by the University of Zambia in schools while the subsidiary question was aimed at eliciting participants' views on how these challenges could be overcome. The study was anchored in the third-generation activity theory.

The study established that the University of Zambia faced numerous challenges in the implementation of teaching practice, which included inadequate time for teaching methods and peer teaching, and short duration for teaching practice. These challenges were confirmed by the different groups of participants. Most of the findings are in line with the existing literature. In view of these challenges, participants made suggestions on how best teaching practice could be implemented. One radical suggestion to transform teaching practice would require the School of Education to be separated from the other schools. The participants believed that this change would provide autonomy to the School of Education thereby allowing it to allocate more time to both students' training at the University of Zambia and teaching practice in schools. This move would also be in line with what is stipulated in the Zambia Education Curriculum Framework of 2012 (MoESVTEE, 2012:49). It must be stated that teaching practice has been under-researched in the developing countries, such as Zambia. This has been confirmed by scholars such as Mtika (2008:16) and Ong'ondo and Jwan (2009:522). This study, therefore, makes a contribution to reducing the knowledge gap on teaching practice at the University of Zambia. It is hoped that this study will influence the way teaching practice is organised and implemented by the University of Zambia.

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