



## Enhancing Teacher Training: A SWOT Perspective on Practicum Experiences in Tanzanian Higher Education

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### Abstract

*The teaching practicum spans two semesters in the first and second years of teacher training, during which trainees apply academic knowledge in real-world settings. Prior research highlights the need to observe classroom activities to assess career development trajectories. This study addresses this gap using a descriptive phenomenological design, employing observations, document analysis, and interviews. Snowball sampling recruited 12 teacher trainees from Science and Arts fields during their practicum in Tanzanian secondary schools. Thematic analysis revealed SWOT elements: strengths (progress in the teaching profession), weaknesses (self-doubting tendencies), opportunities (soft skills development), and threats (perceiving teaching as routine business). Findings offer practical insights for improving teacher preparation programs, benefiting educators, students, researchers, and policymakers in enhancing practicum planning and execution.*

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### Introduction

Teaching is a complex profession that requires educators to address the diverse needs of students and society diverse needs (Cochran-Smith et al., 2020; Whitaker, 2020). Effective preparation involves planning, implementing, and facilitating activities; classroom management; and student support (La Paro et al., 2019). The teaching practicum, defined here as supervised classroom experiences (García-Noblejas et al., 2023; Jenssen & Haara, 2024) is essential for bridging theory and practice. Globally, it is synonymous with terms such as student teaching or internship (Lekule, 2017), typically lasting six

to eight weeks per semester and focusing on instructional planning, learning facilitation, and student interactions.

Educators consider teaching practicums an essential academic prerequisite for teacher trainees in the teaching profession (Kihwele & Mtandi, 2020; Petre et al., 2022). It is also a fundamental element of educational quality (Lekule, 2017). It addresses specific social demands such as role modelling and guidance, skills, and knowledge transfer, and assists teacher trainees in realizing their potential (Novella-García & Cloquell-Lozano, 2021). This practical training enables teacher trainees to understand the dynamics of primary and secondary education and cultivate reflective processes regarding their practice based on the theoretical knowledge gained in the classroom. Laizer et al. (2022) assert that the interplay between theoretical understanding and practical application enables teacher trainees to develop their professional teaching expertise by teaching, designing classes, and obtaining feedback to refine their teaching skills (Martín-Romera & Molina Ruiz, 2017).

Studies have shown that some teacher trainees experience anxiety regarding insufficient preparation for teaching, especially at the beginning of their teaching practicum (Novitasari & Murtafi'ah Murtafi'ah, 2022). Moreover, they face difficulties in employing instructional activities during the assessment day (Alan & Sinoğlu-Günden, 2022; Tunçeli & Bayindir, 2022). Others reacted to how they perceived the effort and possible ways of using technology in teaching (Ranellucci et al., 2020). Various situations influence motivation for learning and teaching (Jähne et al., 2022). Nevertheless, despite these challenges, they are still willing to accomplish teaching practicum requirements (Margiyanti, 2022) and perceive teaching practice as an essential tool for improving their teaching experience and preparing them for real-world work (Msangya et al., 2016; Laizer, 2022). However, the question remains: What causes teacher trainees to experience these setbacks during their practicum? Several studies have been conducted on teaching practices that generally focus on logistics and the practicum's objectives, perceptions, and impacts (Cilliers et al., 2020; Kihwele & Mtandi, 2020; Linh et al., 2020; Parveen et al., 2020).

Examining the impact of the practicum. This report shows that these studies investigated the impact of practice in isolation, often diverting attention to the overall career development of teacher trainees. For instance, some studies have examined the practicum's impact on student teachers' beliefs and identities (Österling & Christiansen, 2022), thus providing practical insights into teacher-training

programs. Others have focused on the effects of practica during pandemics (Alonso-Díaz et al., 2023), offering valuable lessons for future crisis management. Similarly, some studies have highlighted the impact of practicum on pre-service teachers' self-efficacy (Eginli & Solhi, 2021), the development of classroom management skills (Linh et al., 2020), and the influence of students' prior work experience on their perceptions of practicum (Mykkänen et al., 2022). The studies mentioned above indicate that there has been limited investigation into the analytical impact of practicums on teacher trainees' career development. This argument was supported by La Paro et al. (2020), who identified a specific gap in the literature and emphasized that future studies should be conducted holistically to investigate practicum experiences and career development outcomes by capturing what is going on in the class during the practicum. Addressing this research gap may not only enhance the teaching experience for future trainees but also contribute to the advancement of the field. This study was qualitatively designed to examine the analytical impact of a teaching practicum on the career development of teacher trainees, and holds the potential to bring about significant positive changes. The analysis focused on the practicum's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to identify areas that require significant attention and improvement. The overarching research question that guided this investigation was: How does a teaching practicum influence the career development of teacher trainees during their practicum experience? The specific research questions were as follows.

1. What aspect do teacher trainees do well during the teaching practicum?
2. What do teacher trainees need to improve during the teaching practicum?
3. What opportunities are open to teacher trainees during the teaching practicum?
4. What threat do teacher trainees encounter throughout their teaching practicum?

### **Theoretical Underpinnings**

This study draws on experiential learning theory (Dewey, 1938; Stock & Kolb, 2021), which emphasizes knowledge construction through real-life experiences and reflection. It integrates Reflective Practice Theory (RPT) and Relational Cultural Theory (RCT), which highlight professional growth through relationships and reflection (Majani, 2022; Jordan, 2017). These theories complement SWOT analysis (Puyt et al., 2023), categorizing internal (strengths/weaknesses) and external (opportunities/threats)

factors to inform strategies, such as SO, ST, WO, and WT (David et al., 2020). This framework holistically evaluates the practicum's impact.

Relational cultural theory highlights the importance of competencies essential for establishing and sustaining relationships, including capability and maturity, to identify and respond to the needs of others (Edwards-Groves et al., 2020). The RTC identifies interdependence and interconnectedness with others as essential components of human development and psychological wellbeing (Jordan, 2017). The theory posits that interactions characterized by engagement, empathy, and empowerment maintain human relations and professional growth. Mutual engagement promotes positive relationships during classroom interactions. A healthy and conducive teaching and learning environment and support are essential for strengthening and sustaining teacher-student connections (Edwards-Groves et al., 2020). In addition to mutual engagement, this theory posits the necessity of mutual empathy. Edwards, Richards, and Harris asserted that mutual empathy involves readiness to be affected by another's experiences and the intention to influence the other through authenticity. Mutual empathy recognizes teachers' need to understand their students' needs and to be open to learning. Mutual empowerment is strengthened when teachers and students collaborate to establish deeper and more meaningful relationships. Consequently, the development of teaching skills, particularly during the practicum, occurs through these dimensions. Literature indicates that teaching is inherently relational (Freire & Carmona, 2022), encompassing various interactions between students and teachers, teacher trainees, host staff, and broader community engagement.

SWOT denotes the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. It was first developed in the 1960s by Albert Humphrey at the Stanford Research Institute, who used it to analyze Fortune 500 companies and create a new change management and control system (Puyt et al., 2023). Since then, researchers and scholars have widely adopted SWOT analyses, including those of education (Benzaghta et al., 2021). SWOT components are categorized as either internal or external. Strengths include the program's internal components that assist it in reaching its goals, whereas weaknesses are internal components that interfere with business success. Opportunities include external aspects that help an organization achieve its objectives, such as positive environmental aspects and opportunities to address gaps and initiate new activities. Threats include all elements of the external environment that act as barriers or potential barriers to reaching an objective (Benzaghta et al., 2021).

SWOT recognizes the critical internal and external aspects of attaining a program's goals. Internal elements are features of a program's control, whereas external elements are factors that are out of control (Puyt et al., 2023; David et al., 2020). SWOT analysis can effectively produce alternative options for a business based on a mix of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats analyses (Benzaghta et al., 2021). Such techniques can clarify how strengths and weaknesses match the opportunities and threats. Based on internal and external factors, managers can develop four strategies these are SO (strengths and opportunities (SO), strength threats (ST), weakness opportunities (WO), and weakness threats (WT) (David et al., 2020), providing a practical application of SWOT analysis in developing strategies, thereby empowering them to make informed decisions.

This study examined the potential impact of a teaching practicum on teacher trainees and environmental factors in order to document opportunities and threats to improve the program. SWOT analysis assists in identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, which when considered efficiently, can help improve teaching programs effectively. This study uniquely contributes to the understanding of how teaching practicum impacts teacher trainees through SWOT analysis, and provides a basis for future improvement and investigations. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to evaluate the analytical impact of a teaching practicum on teacher trainees through SWOT analysis, and to provide new perspectives on areas that require reformation, rectifications, corrections, and improvements. It fills the knowledge gap in planning and implementing a teaching practicum by interactively and practically integrating the findings collected from SWOT guiding questions. Moreover, this study critically discusses the analytical impact of the teaching practicum on teacher trainees through the SWOT framework, which later informs the reader of a specific area that requires special attention, which has not been reported in most previous studies.

### **The purpose of practicum on career development of teacher trainees**

According to Stones and Morris (1977), as referenced in Lekule (2017), three critical connotations of teaching practice (TP) are identified: the development of teaching skills and the assumption of the teacher's role; the comprehensive experiences students encounter in educational settings; and the practical components of the curriculum, as opposed to theoretical studies. To enhance students' understanding of their teaching practices, it is essential to understand their objectives. Akbar (2002) outlines the following goals of teaching practice: to permit student-teachers to establish a good

rapport with pupil relationships, to provide an opportunity to evaluate the student's potential and suitability for the teaching profession, to develop a personal relationship with others, administrators, teachers, parents and students, to provide future teachers with experience in school to overcome problems with discipline and enable them to develop a method of control, To ensure students and teachers have an opportunity to convert theories into practice and understand educational principles and their implications for learning, to enable the student-teacher to plan and prepare lessons effectively, to cultivate skills in the use of fundamental procedures, techniques and methods of teaching, To encourage desirable professional interest attitudes and ideas relative to teaching, to enable student-teacher to develop acceptable teacher traits and display appropriate behavior, to provide student-teacher with the opportunity to be evaluated and to gain constructive criticism, it provides an opportunity for self-evaluation and to discover one's strengths.

Another study indicated that the primary aim of the practicum was to provide trainee teachers with genuine practical teaching experiences. This is essential for enhancing pedagogical skills and accumulating experience to augment professional expertise (phronesis). Reading about teaching or observing others must be improved and students have been engaged in practice for years. They must engage in self-practice as personal experiences and insights are not readily transferable across individuals. Student teachers require techné (practical knowledge) and, by linking teaching skills to epistemes (theoretical knowledge) through reflection, they progressively cultivate phronesis (practical wisdom). Nonetheless, it is advantageous to be mentored by an individual with excellent expertise to transcend one's current personal capabilities. The value of student teachers' internal reflections in comprehending personal reasoning is limited (Ulvik et al., 2023).

Dewey (1904), as referenced by Rojas and Niñoles (2024) and Jones (2024), delineated two models of practical experience: the apprentice model and the laboratory model, which may be regarded as complementary. In the initial approach, the mentor acted as a model for imitation, making teaching similar to training. The second strategy entails directing teacher trainees through observation, mentorship, and classroom analysis to foster their development and improve their capacity to nurture personal and professional experience. Practicum is essential for facilitating smooth transition into the profession. The primary determinant of retention is the calibration of initial educational experience (Rots et al., 2007). Consequently, student teachers must have high-quality practice

placement. To derive insights from field experience, one must reflect on and rebuild it through interactions among individuals, things, and others (Dewey, 1938). This experience can equip individuals for future endeavors. Systematic reflection during discussions with peers, mentors, and supervisors equips teachers with intricate and precise classroom environments. It equips prospective educators with the resources to cultivate the confidence necessary for professional conduct in distinctive circumstances.

### **Evidence-based teaching practicum on teacher trainees**

Researchers have discovered effective practices outside of the training component (Kuusisto et al., 2024). Emphasis was placed on the climate, mentors, and coherence of teacher education, particularly in practice. For example, student teachers aspire to "survive" in the classroom and attain favorable teaching evaluations (Jiang et al., 2023). Furthermore, teacher trainees require adequate support in all spheres of emotional, physical, social, and professional practicum settings to feel relaxed and able to take risks (Nawab, 2024). Nonetheless, a balance must be maintained between support and difficulty in facilitating the discovery of new insights. Tokoz and Demiroğları (2024) assert that "cooperating teachers are essential contributors to the quality of learning for student teachers'." This finding indicated that mentors are paramount contributors to learning and development. He asserted the necessity of converting practical experiences into professional comprehension to cultivate a professional identity (Tokoz & Demiroğları, 2024). A crucial mentoring skill is the ability to identify and foster development of essential talent. Therefore, mentors require specialized training to facilitate reflection.

Additionally, student instructors desire to integrate their practicum into campus programs (Liu & Siteo, 2020). Integrating theory and practice may require clarification to reconcile the contradictory expectations of school and university mentors, which may be perceived as a dichotomy between practical and theoretical knowledge (Ravhuhali et al., 2020). This conflict is a prevalent critique in teacher education. During the practicum, student teachers cultivate their professional identity and perceive themselves as constituents of the teaching profession (Seyri & Nazari, 2023). Wilkin (2020) underscored the significance of engaging in social and cultural acts to form this identity. This perspective endorses the concept of engaging in teachers' multifaceted roles. Ruffinelli et al. (2020) found that tutorials were crucial to students' practical experiences. Practicum learning outcomes

improve when student teachers collaborate in pairs or groups (Strutchens, 2020). Michos and Petko (2024) asserted that student instructors collaborating with peers are equipped to incorporate peer-supported learning into their future professions. The literature indicates the specific attributes that contribute to a practical practicum, such as its objectives and the type of knowledge it should foster (Ulvik & Smith, 2011). Previous research has focused on what constitutes good teaching practices and the atmosphere for effective teaching, although the analytical impact on teacher trainees' career advancement needs to be clarified. This study was qualitatively designed to zero on the analytical impact of the teaching practicum on teacher trainees, focusing on its strengths, shortcomings, opportunities, and threats, to identify areas of significant improvement.

## **Methods**

This study employed qualitative methods, particularly a phenomenological approach, drawing extensively from experiential learning theories augmented by the SWOT Analysis framework. This study examined the analytical impact of a teaching practicum on trainees' career development. The overarching question was how did the teaching practicum affect the career development of the teacher trainees?

## **Context of the study**

Conducted in mainland Tanzania, where practicums involve eight weeks per year in the first and second years (Kihwele & Mtandi, 2020), this study focused on mid-September 2024, during the final practicum stage. The participants were from Albam University (pseudonym), the largest Tanzanian institution for teacher education in three rural Morogoro secondary schools. Snowball sampling via school heads and peers recruited 12 trainees (see Table 1 for details), ensuring diversity in specializations (e.g., BAED, BED-SC-ICT). For more detailed information, please refer to Table 1. According to the practicum arrangement, two supervisors supervised each teacher trainee. The school head is the primary supervisor and assesses the teacher trainees' conduct throughout the teaching practicum. The head of the school evaluates the overall behaviors of teacher trainees regarding punctuality, interpersonal relations, and the execution of assigned school activities. After the teaching practicum, grades were confidentially awarded based on individual performance. A different individual served as a supervising teacher (assessor). They were usually university



lecturers. The Assessors guided, supported, and evaluated the performance of teacher trainees during their practice by focusing on two primary areas: portfolio assessment and classroom observations. Following the teaching practicum, evaluations from the school heads and assessors were amalgamated to determine overall performance. However, despite the categorical assessment of teacher trainees' performance during their teaching practicum, little is known about the analytical impact of the practicum on their career development of teacher trainees during their practicum experiences (Petre et al., 2022). This study primarily examined the analytical implications of a teaching practicum on teacher trainees' career development to identify areas that require prompt intervention.

**Table 1.**

*Participants details*

S/N	Schools' (Pseudonyms)	Names	Identifier (Pseudonyms)	Year of Study	Specialised Degree Program
1	PSS	John		2 <sup>nd</sup>	Bachelor of Arts with Education (BAED)
2	PSS	Julius		1 <sup>st</sup>	Bachelor of Arts with Education (BAED)
3	PSS	Justine		1 <sup>st</sup>	Bachelor of Science in Education with ICT (BED-SC-ICT)
4	PSS	Alex		1 <sup>st</sup>	Bachelor of Arts with Education (BAED)
5	ASS	Allen		2 <sup>nd</sup>	Bachelor of Science with Education (Chemistry and biology)
6	ASS	Alexander		1 <sup>st</sup>	Bachelor of Science with Education (physics and mathematics)
7	ASS	Anton		2 <sup>st</sup>	Bachelor of Science in Education with ICT (BED-SC-ICT)
8	ASS	Ally		1 <sup>st</sup>	Bachelor of Science with Education (Chemistry and biology)
9	DSS	Grace		2 <sup>nd</sup>	Bachelor of Science with Education (physics and mathematics)
10	DSS	Gift		2 <sup>nd</sup>	Bachelor of Education in Arts (English and Geography)
11	DSS	Thomas		1 <sup>st</sup>	Bachelor of Education in Arts (History and Kiswahili)
12	DSS	Hellen		2 <sup>nd</sup>	Bachelor of Science with Education (Geography and biology)

**Sample and Sampling Procedure**

Snowball sampling was used to obtain 12 teacher trainees from the Alabama University (pseudonyms). The selection of these participants was deliberate, focusing on their specialization in educational programmes. The school heads and fellow university students were instrumental in identifying participants specializing in the Bachelor of Science in Education with ICT, Bachelor of Science with Education (Chemistry and Biology), Bachelor of Science with Education (Physics and

Mathematics), and Bachelor of Arts with Education (BAED) who were actively involved in their teaching practicum when this study was conducted.

### **Data collection**

This study employs three data sources to gather comprehensive insights into the analytical impact of teaching practices on trainees' career development: (1). In-depth interviews (2). detailed classroom observations, and (3). thorough document analysis. During the interview session, the interviewer conducted semi-structured interviews with the teacher trainees during the final week of their teaching practicum. The interviews were conducted using an interview protocol guided by a research question, using the SWOT element. The interviews had an average duration of one hour, during which they were audio-recorded and transcribed. Data were gathered from the first week of September to the second week of September, 2024. The interviews comprised a diverse group of five teacher trainees with bachelor's degrees in science education and seven teacher trainees with bachelor's degrees in arts, ensuring a range of perspectives and experiences were captured. The observation method was used to examine the actual environment of the teacher trainees' classroom delivery. Emphasis was placed on material delivery, pedagogical methods, classroom management and control, student engagement, and use of teaching aids. The objective was to examine the analytical impact of teaching practices on the career development of teacher trainees both internally and externally. Documents were reviewed, including portfolios created by teacher trainees, which contained a scheme of work, lesson plans, course syllabi, class notes, and other pertinent materials. This study aims to examine how practicum affects teacher trainees' career development, such as their planning of professional activities and decisions regarding lesson progression, as outlined in the curriculum.

### **Data analysis**

A thematic analysis was conducted using the procedures outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The procedures involved familiarizing the data collected from the responses, generating codes inductively or deductively, developing and defining themes by giving specific names, and reporting the data. This method enhances the analytical perspective of categorizing relevant passages based on general codes. The initial coding, which can be seen as the preliminary phase of Braun and Clarke's thematic

analysis, involved becoming acquainted with data. All the interviews were categorized based on these overarching codes. Subsequently, the researcher converted the general codes into specific content codes pertinent to selection and admission aligned with the second thematic analysis phase, as emphasized by Braun and Clarke (2006). The interviews were analyzed using a designated coding scheme. Themes were identified, organized, and presented in a table, discussed extensively, rearranged, and reviewed for relevance and alignment with the data. After in-depth analysis, the findings were well written and shared with a third party, the pseudonym (ROU), for validation. Feedback, which resulted in no modifications, ensured the accuracy of this study. The researcher maintained a diary documenting all the steps and decisions made during the study. Saturation was attained after the completion of all interviews, as the researcher was assured of having gained adequate depth of understanding of the existing themes, with no new themes emerging (Saunders et al., 2018). Subsequently, themes and subthemes were categorized as SWOT elements, reflecting the research purpose and objectives. For further details, please refer to Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Analytical Impact of teaching practicum on teacher trainees*

RQ	Central Themes	SWOT- Element	Sub-themes	Extract from the responses
What best practices do teacher trainees do during the teaching practicum?	Strength of teaching practicum on teacher trainees	<b>Strength</b> Making headway in acquainting with the teaching profession.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Improvisation</li> <li>✓ Leverage prior knowledge</li> <li>✓ Establish a conducive teaching atmosphere.</li> <li>✓ Performing instructional tasks</li> <li>✓ Applying guidance obtained from mentors.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Apply the surrounding material for teaching.</li> <li>✓ Challenge misconceptions and ground new concepts on existing knowledge.</li> <li>✓ Support students' holistic growth</li> <li>✓ Connecting the theories learned with practice</li> <li>✓ Improving the teaching process</li> </ul>
What do teacher trainees need to improve during the teaching practicum?	Weakness of teaching practicum on teacher trainees	<b>Weakness</b> Self-effacing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Self-assessment</li> <li>➤ Difficulty in handling the crowd of people</li> <li>➤ Insecurity and self-doubt</li> <li>➤ Fear of unknown</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Failure to Identify individual abilities.</li> <li>➤ Avoid stand before students and speak audibly</li> <li>➤ Avoid engaging in staff and parent meetings.</li> <li>➤ Disciplining the students</li> </ul>

What opportunities are open to teacher trainees during the teaching practicum?	Opportunities that are open to teacher trainees during the teaching practicum.	<b>Opportunities</b> Development of soft skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Instructional skills</li> <li>○ Positive relationships</li> <li>○ Blue-sky thinking</li> <li>○ Self-reliant</li> <li>○ Effective communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Developing skills in teaching techniques, procedures, and methods.</li> <li>○ Build supportive relationships with other mentors and administrators in the practicum setting</li> <li>○ Reflect on their classroom practices and learn to be innovative</li> <li>○ Improved self-direction in all aspects of lesson planning and execution.</li> <li>○ Improve their teaching accomplishments and professional achievements.</li> </ul>
What hurdles do teacher trainees encounter throughout their teaching practicum?	The threat of teaching practicum on teacher trainees.	<b>Threat</b> Considering teaching as a usual business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Lack of resources</li> <li>✚ Students' misbehaviors</li> <li>✚ Isolation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Insufficiency of teaching and learning materials stagnates the teaching of morality</li> <li>✚ Maintaining discipline, handling misbehaving students, and establishing rapport can be difficult; as a result, teacher trainees decide not to be considerate.</li> <li>✚ Isolation from in-service teachers results in a diminished focus on teaching efforts.</li> </ul>

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## Ethical considerations

The data were triangulated using multiple sources and an expert was consulted to assess clarity. This procedure was intentionally executed to guarantee trustworthiness and enhance the thoroughness of the study's description and findings (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). Moreover, participants were introduced to the study's objectives and critical information on ethical considerations was provided. Participants were allowed to select their participation and were allocated pseudonyms to safeguard their identity during the presentation of results. Participants voluntarily completed an informed consent document regarding their involvement in the study. This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Dodoma.

## Results

This section presents the findings derived from thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of data collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis (portfolios and supervision reports). Themes were organized according to the four research questions and the SWOT framework. Twelve teacher trainees participated in the pseudonyms that were used to ensure anonymity. Verbatim extracts were provided to illustrate key patterns, supported by observational and documentary evidence where relevant. Table 2 summarizes the central themes, SWOT classifications, subthemes, and representative data extracts.

### **Strengths: Progress in Acquainting with the Teaching Profession**

The first research question examined the aspects of effective teacher trainee performance during the practicum. Thematic analysis revealed a predominant theme of progressive acclimation to the teaching profession, characterized by increased confidence in practical application, integration of theoretical knowledge, innovative engagement of learners, and effective utilization of mentor feedback.

Participants frequently described the gains in pedagogical competence and professional identity. For instance, one trainee noted,

"I am excited about the progress I have made in the teaching process. I now see myself as a more capable teacher trainee and can even guide my colleagues in preparing lesson plans and teaching aids." (Blender, Interview, September 2024).

Another emphasized the linkage between theory and practice:

"Reflecting on my university learning, I recognized the relevance of Albert Bandura's social learning theory in facilitating student interactions and enhancing classroom learning." (Alexander, Interview, September 2024).

Trainees also highlighted contributions to students' holistic development through creative methods:

"I used the practicum innovatively to engage students in activities that build mental and physical capacities, such as games whose rules help shape appropriate behavior." (Jenifer, Interview, September 2024).

Effective incorporation of feedback has emerged as a key subtheme, with trainees actively seeking and applying guidance from their mentors and peers.

“As a novice, I regularly consult seniors, peers, and mentors about challenges, such as selecting appropriate instructional aids and using their feedback to refine my practice.” (Interview September 2024).

Document analysis corroborated these self-reports, most of which demonstrated strong organization, including schemes of work, detailed lesson plans, class registers, daily reports, and student assessments. A typical supervision comment stated the following.

“The portfolio is well organized and contains relevant subject-specific materials; however, it is recommended to include feedback notes for each observed lesson.” (Student Portfolio Performance Form, September 2024)

These patterns indicate that the practicum facilitated meaningful professional socialization and skill consolidation for the majority of the participants.

### **Weaknesses: Emergence of Self-Doubting Tendencies**

The second research question addressed areas that require improvement. The analysis identified a core theme of self-doubting tendencies, encompassing difficulties with self-assessment, public speaking, crowd management, insecurity, and apprehension about classroom discipline.

Participants commonly reported challenges in reflective self-evaluation:

“Self-assessment during the practicum was difficult for me. What I record as evaluation often does not reflect reality, and I tend to avoid centering myself in the process, even when required.” (Ally, Interview, September 2024)

Managing larger groups posed difficulties:

“This is my second practicum, yet I remain uncomfortable leading meetings or school activities involving many people; I often find excuses when asked.” (Anthon, Interview, September 2024)

Shyness and associated insecurity hindered verbal participation:

"I experience considerable shyness when speaking loudly in front of groups, leading to uncertainty and recurring insecurity in social teaching situations." (Alex Interview, September 2024)

Anxiety about disciplinary consequences was also prevalent:

"Despite completing two practicums, I hesitate to discipline students due to uncertainty about the outcomes of physical or psychological measures." (Grace, Interview, September 2024).

These internal barriers appeared widespread, potentially limiting trainees' engagement in the challenging aspects of their roles and impeding fuller professional growth.

### **Opportunities: Cultivation of Soft Skills Relevant to the Contemporary Labor Market**

The third research question explored the practice-provided career development opportunities. A prominent theme concerned the development of transferable soft skills, including instructional competencies (e.g., planning, questioning, explaining, demonstrating, engaging, and managing), relational skills, innovative thinking, self-reliance, and effective communication.

Trainees reported enhanced instructional abilities through active involvement:

"The practicum required me to plan lessons, deliver content, explain concepts, and question for understanding—activities that significantly strengthened my instructional skills." ( Interview September 2024).

Positive interpersonal connections were frequently noted:

"I feel more connected to school administrators, senior teachers, peers, and colleagues. These interactions provided valuable insights into the profession, which I hope to maintain." (Gift, Interview, September 2024).

Innovation in resource design fostered creative problem-solving:

"I was often required to create engaging teaching aids using available materials, which improved my innovative skills daily." (Julius Interview, September 2024).

Resilience under pressure was evident:

"During assessment weeks, sleepless nights preparing materials occurred, but effective time management helped me recover and stay organized." (Justine, Interview, September 2024).

These competencies align with the demands of contemporary employment markets, positioning the practicum as a valuable platform for professional preparation.

### **Threats: Perception of Teaching as Routine Business**

The fourth research question examined the detrimental factors. The central theme was the tendency to view teaching as routine or "business-as-usual," driven by external constraints such as resource shortages, student misbehavior, and professional isolation.

Resource deficiencies were pervasive, as observed in classrooms:

Most trainees reported inadequate instructional materials, furniture, libraries, or laboratories. Observations confirmed that the students were seated on floors without supporting aids (see Figure 1: Classroom environment lacking facilities; Hellen Observation, September 2024).

Student misconduct intimidated participants and eroded confidence in building relationships:

"One student attempted an inappropriate approach, leading me to remain detached to avoid complications." (Alexander, Interview, September 2024).

Isolation from in-service teachers diminished motivation:

"The social distance from regular teachers reduces my focus and makes teaching feel like an ordinary job." (Hellen, Interview, September 2024).

These environmental and relational threats have risked undermining trainees' motivation, sense of professional value, and long-term commitments.

For example, regarding lack of resources, most teacher trainees complained about a shortage of instructional resources, classroom furniture, libraries, and laboratories. This threat was observed during classroom observations, in which all the students sat on the floor with no instructional materials to support their learning. Figure 1 provides a summary of the findings.



**Figure 1**

*Classroom environment with insufficient facilities to support teaching*



Classroom Observation, Hellen, September 2024.

Additionally, classroom observations revealed that teacher trainees demonstrated limited skills in executing instructional tasks, including using interactive teaching aids, chalkboard management, and methods to enhance teaching and learning processes. The way the content was delivered, with a disorganized flow of material to the students, could confuse learners. Figure 2 provides a summary of this information.

**Figure 2**

*A picture shows teaching in progress.*



Source: (Observation, Thomas, September, 2024)

Student misconduct has emerged as a salient external threat, encompassing behaviors such as bullying, peer dishonesty, and, in isolated cases, inappropriate attempts at personal engagement with trainees. These incidents appeared to generate discomfort and hesitation among participants, particularly because of trainees' limited authority and experience with assertive interventions. Many trainees reported feeling ill-equipped to effectively manage or report such behaviors, which contributed to their relational withdrawal.

One trainee described a specific instance:

"One of the most threatening aspects was student misconduct. For instance, there was an occasion when a student attempted to establish an inappropriate relationship by attempting to seduce himself. Consequently, I decided to remain indifferent whenever such behaviors manifested to avoid potential complications." (Alexander, Interview, September 2024).

This pattern aligns with the broader literature on practicum challenges in Tanzanian secondary schools, where disruptive and boundary-violating student behaviors have been documented as common stressors for pre-service teachers (e.g., studies on managing disruptive behaviors during practicum placements).

In addition, professional isolation from in-service teachers constitutes a recurring relational threat. Most participants described social distancing or limited interaction with the host school staff, which fostered feelings of exclusion and reduced professional support. This lack of integration appeared to diminish trainees' motivation, focus, and sense of belonging in the school environment, reinforcing their perception of teaching as a routine or isolated occupation.

A representative account stated:

"The isolation I observed from in-service teachers reduces my concentration on teaching efforts, leading me to view the teaching field as merely a traditional business." (Hellen, Interview, September 2024).

Environmental and interpersonal factors, resource constraints, student misconduct, and professional isolation collectively pose significant barriers. They appear to constrain trainees' ability to fully engage in the practicum role, potentially shaping negative or diminished views of the teaching profession during this formative phase.

## Discussion

This study provides a holistic examination of the analytical impact of a teaching practicum on teacher trainees' career development in Tanzanian higher education, framed from experiential learning perspectives. Reflective Practice Theory (RPT), Relational Cultural Theory (RCT), and SWOT analysis. By capturing trainees' experiences in real time during the final practicum phase and triangulating interviews, observations, and documents, this study addresses a gap in prior studies that often examined practicum impacts in isolation or retrospectively (e.g., Kihwele & Mtandi, 2020; Msuya, 2022). SWOT offers a structured lens for categorizing internal (strengths/weaknesses) and external (opportunities/threats) factors, enabling more actionable insights into program reform than general descriptive accounts.

The identified **strengths**—progress in professional acclimation through improvisation, theory-practice integration, learner engagement, and mentor feedback utilization—align closely with the core tenets of experiential learning and RPT/RCT. Trainees' ability to connect theoretical frameworks (e.g., Bandura's social learning theory) to classroom interactions and reflect on practice fostered professional identity development and relational competence (Majani, 2022; Jordan, 2017). These patterns echo established practicum objectives such as effective lesson planning, skill refinement in procedures/techniques, and constructive feedback incorporation (Akbar, 2002; Stones & Morris, 1977, as cited in Lekule, 2017; Pak et al., 2020). Unlike many studies focusing on isolated outcomes (e.g., self-efficacy or identity alone), the current SWOT integration highlights how these strengths serve as leverage points (SO strategies) for enhancing career trajectories when paired with supportive environments.

Conversely, the prominent **weakness** of self-doubting tendencies, manifested in challenges with self-assessment, public speaking, crowd management, insecurity, and disciplinary apprehension, represents a significant internal barrier to growth. This finding resonates with the literature on novice anxiety and low self-efficacy during the early practicum phases (Novitasari & Murtafi'ah, 2022; Eginli & Solhi, 2021) and Tanzanian-specific accounts of diverse and often overwhelming challenges. The persistence of these tendencies, despite two semesters of practicum, suggests deficiencies in pre-practicum preparation, particularly in psychosocial skill-building and reflective training. RCT underscores that relational maturity and mutual empathy are foundational to professional confidence (Edwards-Groves et al., 2020) and inadequate university-level scaffolding in these areas likely

exacerbates trainees' avoidance of challenging interactions, thereby limiting experiential learning cycles. This internal weakness (a potential WO strategy) highlights the need for targeted interventions to convert self-doubt to reflective growth.

The **opportunities** identified—cultivation of transferable soft skills (instructional competencies, positive relationships, innovative thinking, resilience, and communication)—position the practicum as a critical platform for market-relevant professional preparation. Trainees' active development of these skills through real-world engagement aligns with calls to integrate non-cognitive attributes in Tanzanian teacher education (e.g., motivation, empathy, problem-solving, and stress management) (Tang, 2020). Akbar (2002) and Ngang et al. (2015) similarly emphasize relational and instructional soft skills as practicum goals, yet this study uniquely frames them as exploitable opportunities (SO/WO strategies) amid global employer demand. In contrast to prior Tanzanian research that focused on pedagogical outcomes (Kihwele & Mtandi, 2020; Msuya, 2022), these findings suggest that an intentional emphasis on soft skills could enhance employability and retention in professions facing shortages.

The most concerning **threats**—perceiving teaching as "business as usual" due to resource shortages, student misconduct (e.g., bullying, inappropriate advances), and professional isolation—reveal external barriers that undermine motivation and relational engagement. Resource constraints (overcrowded classrooms and absent materials) mirror systemic Tanzanian challenges (Komba & Mwandangi, 2015; Du Plessis, 2020) and limit experiential depth, forcing reliance on improvisation while risking narrow pedagogical perspectives. Student misconduct and isolation from in-service teachers align with African contexts, where limited mentorship and social support foster exclusion, stress, and diminished self-efficacy (Nawab, 2024). An RCT posits that unsupportive interactions erode mutual empathy and empowerment (Jordan, 2017; Edwards-Groves et al., 2020); here, in which isolation and boundary violations appear to prompt withdrawal, reinforcing a diminished view of teaching as routine rather than transformative. Unlike prior fragmented studies, this research consolidates these factors as interconnected threats (ST/WT strategies), underscoring the urgency of environmental reforms to sustain teacher-student connections and professional commitment.

Overall, the mixed impacts reflect the practicum's dual potential: a powerful experiential bridge when relational and material supports align but a source of disillusionment when barriers dominate. The

in-field timing and multi-method design strengthened the ecological validity and depth compared with retrospective accounts. However, persistent weaknesses and threats signal that current Tanzanian practicum models—often logistically focused—underemphasize psychosocial preparation and school-university partnerships. These findings extend experiential learning theory by illustrating how external threats disrupt reflection-action cycles and relational growth in underresourced contexts.

The implications include (1) redesigning pre-practicum curricula to build self-efficacy and relational skills, (2) rigorous site-vetting and mentor training, and (3) policy advocacy for resource equity in rural schools. Future research should adopt longitudinal or mixed-method approaches to track long-term career outcomes and test targeted interventions.

### **Conclusion**

This study demonstrates that a teaching practicum in Tanzanian higher education has a mixed influence on teacher trainees' career development. It facilitates meaningful professional acclimation and soft skills cultivation through experiential engagement and relational opportunities, yet simultaneously generates internal self-doubting tendencies and external threats, such as resource scarcity, student misconduct, and professional isolation, which can diminish motivation and frame teaching as a routine business. While strengths and opportunities align with experiential learning principles and relational cultural theory by promoting reflective practice and mutual growth, persistent weaknesses and threats underscore systemic gaps in pre-practicum psychosocial preparation and school-based support, which is consistent with recent Tanzanian findings on limited mentorship, inadequate modelling, and supervisory inconsistencies during practicum. These results highlight the practicum's transformative potential when conditions are conducive but also the risk of reinforcing disillusionment in under-resourced contexts.

Limitations include the study's qualitative phenomenological design with a small, non-probabilistic sample (n=12) from one university and three rural Morogoro schools, restricting generalizability to urban, private, or other regional settings; reliance on self-reports during the practicum's final phase introduces potential recall and social desirability bias; and the exclusion of mentors, supervisors, and pupils limits ecosystem-level understanding.

Future directions should prioritize longitudinal mixed-methods research tracking trainees into early career stages to assess practicum effects on retention, self-efficacy, and teaching effectiveness; comparative studies across public/private and urban/rural sites; and intervention trials testing enhanced pre-practicum psychosocial training, structured mentorship programs, and resource-vetted placement models.

To optimize practicum outcomes, universities should implement rigorous pre-placement school assessments (focusing on resources, culture, and mentor capacity); integrate mandatory modules on self-reflection, emotional resilience, and classroom management; and foster stronger school-university partnerships for consistent feedback and support, which are essential for transforming the practicum into a robust catalyst for competent, motivated Tanzanian teachers.

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The author reported no potential conflict of interest

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