

Practicability Of Virtual Practicum Assessment: Zimbabwean University Students And Lecturers' Perspective

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Abstract—This research examined the perceptions of university lecturers and students on the practicability of virtual practicum assessment in Zimbabwe. The research was informed by the continuous efforts to integrate information and communication technologies (ICTs) in higher education. A qualitative methodological approach and descriptive survey design were used to conduct this research. Online questionnaires and telephone interviews were used to collect data. Five lecturers from one university were purposively sampled to ensure that the participants had the necessary expertise and experience in practicum assessment. Ten students from two schools in Masvingo Rural Districts were convenience sampled, which was informed by accessibility and willingness to participate. The results showed that there is a huge gap between the institutional intentions to change the teaching and learning process using ICTs and the realities of the lecturers' and students' contexts. Even in scenarios that seemed to offer promising prospects for the implementation of virtual practicum assessment, there were broader societal factors that hindered the success of the assessment. Poverty levels, for instance, in terms of inaccessibility of electronic device also contributed to the failure of assessment. The study also advocates for the need to offer training to both lecturers and students in order to boost their confidence in using technology and working in groups using technology. The success of virtual practicum assessment also calls for the support of both the host university and the schools that the students are attached to in order to ensure that blended learning strategies are realistically attainable

Keywords—Access, lecturers' perspective, teaching practice assessment, technology in education, virtual practicum assessment

BACKGROUND

The Covid-19 pandemic ushered in a new reality that compelled many individuals to work from home, while students across academic institutions were required to attend classes online due to lockdown restrictions. Student teachers on practicum, who are typically attached to schools for a full year, faced unique challenges as universities were expected to

supervise and assess their ability to implement pedagogical knowledge acquired during earlier years of study. The sudden closure of schools and academic institutions disrupted traditional practicum assessment, creating a significant challenge for teacher educators in evaluating student teacher readiness. Given that teaching practice is widely regarded as an essential rite of passage in the teaching profession, with certification often contingent upon its successful completion (Graham, 2006; American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 2018), the pandemic necessitated alternative assessment modalities.

Moyo (2020) observes that university-based teacher educators have historically assumed the sole responsibility for adjudicating satisfactory performance during practicum. However, this arrangement was destabilized by Covid-19 and the subsequent closure of schools, creating a practicum assessment conundrum. With the pandemic establishing a "new normal," teacher educators were compelled to devise innovative solutions. Virtual practicum assessment emerged as one such alternative, designed to ensure continuity in evaluating student teachers. Yet, as Moyo (2020), citing Flores (2016) and Ngwaru (2017), notes, practicum is a practical, classroom-based undertaking that differs significantly from other academic modules that can be completed online. This distinction underscores the unique challenges of implementing virtual assessment in teacher education, thereby raising critical questions about its practicability in contexts such as Zimbabwe.

Faloye and Obateru (2021) highlight that a growing body of scholarship has acknowledged the increasing prominence of virtual technologies in higher education, particularly in the delivery of online instruction worldwide. The Covid-19 pandemic accelerated this shift, compelling educators in tertiary institutions, and especially colleges of education, to devise strategies for sustaining academic engagement through digital platforms. Tools such as Google Suite, Zoom, and other social networking applications have become central to maintaining continuity in teaching and learning. This global trend reflects a broader recognition that online modalities are not only viable alternatives during crises but are also reshaping the future of education. Within teacher education, the expectation is that the use of virtual tools for lectures will naturally extend to the

supervision of teaching practice, thereby ensuring that professional training remains uninterrupted. Scholars argue that while online instruction can replicate many aspects of traditional classroom learning, practicum supervision presents unique challenges because it is inherently practice-based and situated in real classroom contexts (Flores, 2016; Ngwaru, 2017). The integration of virtual practicum assessment thus represents both an opportunity and a challenge: it offers a pathway to sustain teacher preparation during disruptions, yet it requires careful consideration of contextual realities such as access to ICT infrastructure, digital literacy, and institutional support. This discourse situates virtual practicum assessment as part of a global movement toward blended and technology-enhanced teacher education, while also acknowledging the complexities of adapting field-based experiences to online environments.

Statement of the Problem

Teaching practice is a cornerstone of teacher education, forming the foundation of all teacher-training programmes. Effective assessment of student teachers during practicum requires rigorous validation and the involvement of multiple supervisors, including college lecturers and school-based mentors. In Zimbabwe, teacher preparation at every level of formal education is incomplete without structured exposure to teaching practice routines. However, the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted conventional modes of practicum supervision and assessment, prompting the adoption of online and virtual assessment methods as an emergency measure. With the pandemic now subsided, a critical question arises: can virtual practicum assessment, initially introduced out of necessity, be sustained as a practical and effective approach to evaluating student teachers? This study therefore explores lecturers' and student teachers' perceptions regarding the feasibility of virtual practicum assessment in the post-Covid-19 era.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study sought to:

- Discuss the effectiveness of virtual practicum assessment.
- Establish the focus of virtual practicum assessment.
- Identify strategies, which can be implemented to carry out virtual practicum assessment.
- Recommend mechanisms, which can be put in place to improve the effectiveness of virtual practicum assessment.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Conceptual Framework

Teaching Practicum Assessment

Teaching practice is widely acknowledged as a cornerstone of teacher education, providing student teachers with opportunities to bridge theory and

practice. It is designed to expose pre-service teachers to the realities of classroom teaching while enabling them to apply theoretical knowledge acquired during coursework (Department of Basic Education and Training, 2011; Oluwatayo & Adebule, 2012). High-quality field-based experiences are considered indispensable in teacher preparation, as they offer learning opportunities that cannot be replicated through lectures alone (International Literacy Association & National Council of Teachers of English, 2017).

Globally, teacher education programmes emphasize the integration of coursework with school-based placements. These practicum experiences allow student teachers to observe, practice, and refine pedagogical skills under the guidance of mentor teachers and university supervisors (AACTE, 2018). Impactful fieldwork not only enhances instructional competence but also fosters growth in areas such as literacy development, culturally responsive teaching, and relationship building with families, colleagues, and learners. Such experiences are critical in preparing reflective practitioners who can adapt to diverse educational contexts.

In the Zimbabwean context, teaching practice is equally central to teacher preparation. It is regarded as a rite of passage that validates the readiness of student teachers to enter the profession. Mtetwa and Dyanda (2003) emphasize that practicum enables student teachers to develop across multiple dimensions of professional knowledge, including pedagogical, subject matter, pastoral, ecological, inquiry, and personal knowledge. This holistic development underscores the importance of practicum in ensuring that teacher education programmes produce competent and versatile educators.

However, the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted conventional practicum supervision and assessment, compelling universities to adopt virtual modes of evaluation. While this innovation ensured continuity during the crisis, it raised questions about the sustainability and effectiveness of online practicum assessment in contexts where access to ICT infrastructure and digital devices is limited. Thus, the literature highlights both the indispensable role of teaching practice in teacher education and the emerging challenges of adapting practicum assessment to digital platforms in Zimbabwe and beyond

Virtual Practicum Assessment

In practice, computer-generated assessments share many similarities with traditional on-site practicum assessments, with conference calls, email, screen-sharing, file-sharing, and videoconferencing replacing face-to-face interactions as the primary modes of engagement. Shared Assessments (2018) describe virtual third-party assessment as a form of due diligence that substitutes certain onsite evaluations with equally effective processes

conducted remotely in real time. These virtual assessments are structured, supervised, and evaluated professional experiences that allow student teachers to apply their skills, knowledge, and values in authentic contexts.

Globally, scholars have examined the integration of technology into practicum experiences. Wells (2020) notes that while traditional field-based placements rely on physical presence in classrooms, emerging research has explored practicum elements completed in virtual spaces. Hixon and So (2009) categorize technology-enhanced field experiences into three types: Type I, which occurs in traditional classrooms but uses technology for supervision, reflection, or communication; Type II, which involves remote observation of teachers and students through videoconferencing or recorded lessons; and Type III, which is fully virtual, employing tools such as virtual reality and computer-enhanced simulations. These categories highlight the diverse ways technology can augment or replace conventional practicum experiences.

Internationally, countries such as the United States, Australia, and parts of Europe have experimented with virtual practicum models, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic. These innovations were driven by necessity but have since sparked debates about sustainability and effectiveness in teacher education. While virtual practicum offers flexibility, scalability, and continuity during disruptions, challenges remain regarding authenticity, equity of access to ICT infrastructure, and the ability to replicate the complexities of real classroom environments. Thus, the global discourse positions virtual practicum assessment as both an opportunity for innovation and a challenge requiring contextual adaptation, especially in resource-constrained settings such as Zimbabwe.

Effectiveness of virtual practicum assessment

Teaching practice, or practicum, plays a pivotal role in teacher development as it provides pre-service student teachers with the essential opportunity to merge theoretical knowledge with practical classroom experience, while simultaneously immersing themselves in the professional culture of teaching. Assessment is widely recognized as a vital element of the teaching and learning process, often serving as a key measure of student achievement and academic performance. However, the restrictions brought about by lockdowns created significant challenges for conducting assessments effectively (OECD, 2020). In virtual classrooms, assessment practices differ from traditional face-to-face methods, requiring teachers to adopt more creative approaches and utilize diverse online tools. This mode of learning encourages students to engage in repeated practice before producing skill demonstration videos for practicum examinations. Research highlights several advantages of virtual assessment compared to traditional methods. For instance, students often

experience reduced anxiety when not physically observed by examiners, leading to a more relaxed psychological state (Lisa, Andriani & Ahzaliza, 2020). Online assessments can also be seamlessly integrated into the teaching process, with trained supervisors monitoring candidates remotely through video, audio, and screen sharing, ensuring security and accountability since all activities are recorded for review (Stoeva, 2018). Clarke (2020) affirms that virtual assessment is here to stay, while Faloye and Obateru (2021) emphasize the need for lecturers to be digitally competent in line with the global shift toward virtual learning. Similarly, Yusof and Halim (2014) stress the importance of equipping both supervisors and student-teachers with digital and communication skills during training. Singh and Thurman (2019) further note that virtual instruction and assessment foster innovative learning experiences across synchronous and asynchronous contexts, supported by internet-enabled devices such as laptops, tablets, and mobile phones. However, they caution that interpersonal aspects of virtual practicum assessments require greater attention than in on-site settings, with success depending on mutual trust between supervisors and student-teachers. Yahya, Mansor and Abdullah (2017) state that e-portfolio may serve the purpose of assessment for the pre-service teachers during teaching practice provided that a clear set of assessment criteria be needed to assess their growth in teaching competencies. The use of e-portfolios clearly has more advantages than conventional paper-based portfolio because it will reduce the paper consumption to prepare the paper-based portfolio and also different type resources that can be supported such as images, video and much more. The e-portfolio can be connected with networking to provide more value toward student supervision and assessment during teaching practice and institutional supervisor can monitor their supervisee across the country without the need to be at the school often.

Tikhonova (2021) posits that nowadays, digital technologies are widely used at all levels of education and are effectively integrated into diverse teaching and learning activities (transmission of information, educational projects, presentations, games, training, modeling, evaluation and competence assessment, and many others.). Information and communication technologies are considered as a key element of assessment of teacher student professional skills and competencies during school teaching practice. TestReach (2018) suggests that virtual practicum assessments lead to a reduced administrative burden. Organizations greatly reduce the administrative burden of organising and running teaching practice supervision when it moves online. Printing and circulating assessment crits on paper and organising transportation for supervisors to host schools is a time-consuming and costly process. Hence, online assessments and offering students the chance to complete a teaching practice online are more timely and efficient. Virtual assessments take up

less storage space in respect to keeping records than paper. All data pertaining to students and their practicum activities can be kept on a single server. Virtual assessments can deliver major travel and expense (T&E) reductions and labour cost-savings as well. Our experience shows that a virtual assessment can reduce the time it takes to complete an on-site assessment by 54 percent while reducing the cost of an on-site assessment by 72 percent. These savings stem from eliminating the T&E costs and labour time, which includes travel – and layovers – between different student teacher host schools) associated with visiting a student teacher's location. For larger universities and colleges with hundreds of student teachers on practicum, these cost reductions can add up to substantial savings (Dogan & Hout, 2019). It also reduces the risk of stress affecting the participant's performance during exercises and assessment, due to travel, and logistical discomfort. Virtual practicum assessment is more environmentally friendly. The option to assess online is much more environmentally friendly – with less paper, printing, and transport used overall (TestReach, 2018). Choosing an online assessment is advantageous in that all the activity is happening in the virtual world, which eradicates the piles of paperwork that supervisors usually maintain during physical assessment and then collate for the final result. It facilitates standardisation of assessments, easy benchmarking, and easy culling of results. Their ability to produce instant and automated results with minimum or no manual efforts is often a great advantage. Clarke (2020) Access and accessibility considerations—some candidates might not have access to the right devices or not have the bandwidth due to affordability or location and some candidates with disabilities may need special accommodations made in order to receive a truly equitable experience. The physical distance between teacher and student, the use of technology in order to communicate with students, and the workload and time management can be considered as challenges to the online assessment process. Nevertheless, there are different techniques available to the teacher that can be used to correctly assess the progress of their students (Stoeva, 2018).

The focus of virtual practicum assessment

Assessment processes in teacher education are undergoing transformation, shaped by new literacies that extend beyond traditional reading and writing. ICT-mediated assessment requires additional skills and knowledge, challenging conventional educational paradigms (Torres-Madronero, Torres-Madronero & Botero, 2020). Teaching practice remains a critical component of teacher education, designed to prepare student teachers for the profession by equipping them with practical competencies such as lesson planning, classroom management, communication, evaluation, and professional conduct (Yahya, Mansor & Abdulah, 2017). During practicum, pre-service teachers are typically assessed through both formative and summative approaches to measure their readiness

and quality as future educators. Reliable and valid assessment instruments are therefore essential to ensure credibility in evaluating student achievement.

Virtual practicum assessment mirrors many of the processes of traditional on-site supervision, with adaptations made through digital platforms such as videoconferencing, screen-sharing, and online communication tools. As with conventional reviews, assessment teams must remain flexible to address unexpected challenges. Embracing technology in this context supports broader institutional goals, including professional development, leadership training, and succession planning. Globally, countries have begun to institutionalize virtual practicum models. For instance, Dawley, Rice, and Hinck (2010) report that in Singapore, all preservice teachers are trained to teach online, including blended learning models, and 100% of secondary schools employ online learning. This demonstrates the feasibility of extending virtual practicum assessment into mainstream teacher education.

However, challenges remain. Mokoena (2017) notes that some distance education institutions abandoned practicum supervision due to organizational difficulties, while others adopted alternative strategies to mitigate supervision gaps. Similar challenges are evident in Zimbabwe, where economic constraints and limited ICT infrastructure complicate practicum assessment. In such contexts, virtual practicum assessment emerges as a pragmatic strategy, offering continuity and innovation while raising important questions about sustainability, equity, and effectiveness in teacher education perspectives:

Strategies for the Implementation of Virtual Practicum Assessment

The literature emphasizes the need for academics to shift from exclusive reliance on face-to-face instruction toward blended or fully virtual modes of teaching and assessment (Faloye & Obateru, 2021). The growing interest in online assessment (e-assessment) has led to the development of diverse models for designing tasks that evaluate student learning (Crisp, 2012). One widely adopted strategy is the use of e-portfolios, which have evolved from paper-based to electronic formats (Hung, 2012). E-portfolios provide authentic evidence of teaching practice, enhance professional growth, and allow continuous monitoring of student progress (Tikhonova, 2021; Makokotlela, 2020; Cheng & Tseng, 2019). They also help student teachers develop documentation and reporting skills, though their effective use requires digital literacy among both lecturers and students (Romero, Gutierrez & Caliusco, 2017).

Beyond e-portfolios, integrated assessment tasks that replicate authentic learning environments are increasingly valued. Technologies such as augmented reality (AR) and mixed reality (MR) offer innovative possibilities for virtual practicum assessment. AR

enables collaboration in simulated environments where participants interact as though they were in the same physical space, while MR combines AR and virtual reality to create immersive, interactive digital content for practicum evaluation (Zen & Hidayat, 2022; Google Developers, 2022). These tools can strengthen the link between theory and practice, providing student teachers with realistic opportunities to demonstrate pedagogical skills.

Nevertheless, technology is not always reliable. Software limitations, infrastructure challenges, and technical breakdowns can hinder practical learning (Zen & Hidayat, 2022). To mitigate these risks, clear communication protocols are essential. Dogan and Hout (2019) recommend that lead assessors provide student teachers with detailed instructions prior to virtual assessments, including timelines, agendas, and expectations. Such structured communication reduces uncertainty and nervousness, ensuring smoother implementation.

Globally, countries such as Singapore have institutionalized online teaching and assessment, training all preservice teachers to teach in blended and virtual environments, with 100% of secondary schools adopting online learning (Dawley, Rice & Hinck, 2010). This demonstrates the feasibility of virtual practicum assessment when supported by strong infrastructure and policy frameworks. In contrast, contexts such as Zimbabwe face economic and technological constraints that complicate implementation (Mokoena, 2017). In such settings, virtual practicum assessment emerges as a pragmatic strategy to sustain teacher training, though its success depends on institutional support, digital literacy, and reliable ICT infrastructure.

METHODOLOGY

Research methodology refers to the specific procedures or techniques used to identify, select, process, and analyse information about a topic. This study employed a descriptive research design, which focuses on answering the “what” of the research problem by providing a detailed account of the phenomenon under investigation. The descriptive design was considered appropriate as it allowed the researchers to explore perceptions of lecturers and students regarding the practicability of virtual practicum assessment. A qualitative approach was adopted, as qualitative research emphasizes the collection and analysis of non-numerical data to extract meaning and provide deeper insights into social phenomena (Clont, 2009). This approach was particularly suitable for understanding the lived experiences and contextual challenges faced by lecturers and student teachers during practicum assessment.

The target population comprised lecturers from one university and student teachers on teaching practice from four schools in two Masvingo Rural Districts. Sampling was conducted using two distinct techniques. Purposive sampling was applied to select

five lecturers, as they were directly involved in supervising and assessing student teachers and thus possessed the relevant expertise and experience required for the study. This ensured that the sample included participants who could provide rich, informed perspectives. In contrast, convenience sampling was used to select ten student teachers. This method was chosen because the students were readily accessible during their practicum placements and willing to participate, making them suitable respondents for capturing the student perspective.

Data were collected through telephone interviews and online questionnaires. These tools were selected to accommodate the constraints posed by distance and limited face-to-face interaction, while still enabling the researchers to gather detailed qualitative data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Focusing on effectiveness of virtual practicum assessment in improving Zimbabwe’s teacher education system the respondents highlighted that the introduction of virtual practicum assessment was a move in the right direction for the teacher education sector in Zimbabwe. This came as a result of a growing need to provide solutions to mounting problems that have emanated from the lockdowns brought by the novel corona virus as well as the need to save resources in the pertaining economic difficulties that universities and other teacher education institutes were going through. Virtual practicum assessment is perceived as a solution to economies diminishing prosperity. Lecturers and student teachers on teaching practicum liked the convenience of holding online assessments and may look to replicate it in future. The main finding revealed that a significant number of lecturers accepted the workability of virtual teaching practice assessment while others appeared less proficient in digital appreciation. Furthermore, a majority of College lecturers strongly agreed to the utilization of virtual assessment in a Covid-19 resurgent era. But even after the pandemic eventually subsides, we can be certain virtual assessments are here to stay in some shape or form. Virtual practicum was viewed as being able to offer positive and constructive feedback as stated by respondent A:

The virtual classroom allows for immediate feedback from both the supervisor and the other participants (student and his/ her class) in both an individual and a general way. The supervisor’s critical role here is to generate an atmosphere of positive feedback by guiding the group’s interaction. The need for feedback, which recognises the positive aspects of the students’ performance and offers valuable observations and recommendations for improvement, benefits their education and progress.

These findings align with the observations of the Best Educational Committee (2014), as cited in Medeiros, Icen, Morciano, and Cortesao (2015), who emphasize that constant communication and feedback among students, universities, and partner

institutions are critical to the success of virtual practicum. Students highlighted that feedback should be treated as a service, with visible implementation of their input during the practicum experience. This underscores the importance of responsive and collaborative communication in ensuring that virtual practicum assessment is both effective and meaningful.

Respondent C:

Taking virtual student internships can be a joy as I enjoy getting to know supervisors in an informal way online. Lecturers can be less intimidating in an online environment than in a structured classroom setting.

This perspective suggests that students may feel more relaxed and confident during virtual practicum assessments. The reduced formality of online interactions can lower anxiety levels, enabling student teachers to perform at their maximum potential. Research on virtual learning environments supports this view, indicating that informal communication channels foster stronger rapport between students and supervisors, enhance motivation, and encourage openness in feedback exchanges. Moreover, the flexibility of virtual platforms allows students to engage in assessments from familiar environments, which can further reduce stress and promote authentic demonstration of skills.

Additionally, virtual practicum assessments can create opportunities for more personalized supervision. Online tools such as video conferencing, chat platforms, and collaborative digital spaces enable supervisors to provide timely feedback and continuous support. This immediacy of communication contrasts with the sometimes rigid scheduling of face-to-face visits, thereby enhancing the overall quality of the practicum experience. In essence, the informality and accessibility of virtual practicum assessment can transform the supervisory relationship into one that is more supportive, less hierarchical, and ultimately more conducive to student growth.

Respondent B emphasized that e-assessment enables participation from any location, allowing candidates to engage at times convenient to them and thereby minimizing disruption to work schedules. Unlike traditional practicum assessments, which often require supervisors to travel to central locations—leading to inflated costs and loss of productive hours—virtual assessments streamline the process. These observations are consistent with Dogan and Hout (2019), who reported that virtual assessments can reduce the time required to complete on-site evaluations by 54 percent and lower associated costs by 72 percent. Such savings are largely attributed to the elimination of travel, accommodation, and related expenses, as well as reduced labor time.

In the context of teaching practicum, university lecturers are expected to design assessment criteria, visit schools during teaching practice, and remain available to students for consultation. However, during

telephone interviews conducted for this study, it emerged that some students particularly those enrolled in pre-service degree programmes were visited only once or twice over the course of a year-long practicum. This limited frequency of supervision underscores the potential value of virtual assessment, which can facilitate more regular and accessible engagement between lecturers and student teachers. By reducing logistical barriers and costs, virtual practicum assessment offers a practical alternative that can enhance communication, increase feedback opportunities, and ensure more consistent monitoring of student progress.

Respondent D expressed frustration, noting: *“Last term when I was doing my first part of teaching practice no one from the university visited me. And how do they expect us to be effective teachers on completion of our degree if they do not support us?”* This response highlights a critical concern regarding the effectiveness of supervision during teaching practicum. Limited or absent supervision undermines the credibility of practicum assessment and raises questions about the preparedness of student teachers upon graduation.

Such sentiments suggest that virtual practicum assessment could provide a viable solution to avoid these gaps in future. By leveraging digital platforms, universities can ensure consistent monitoring and support, even when physical visits are constrained by distance, resources, or unforeseen disruptions. The findings emphasize that assessment of student teachers must be conducted efficiently and validated properly to maintain standards of teacher education.

In the post-Covid-19 era, adopting digital approaches to training and assessment is not only a safeguard against potential resurgences of pandemics but also a reflection of the “new normal” in education. However, challenges remain. One student reported connectivity problems during supervision, noting that lecturers sometimes misinterpret such issues as deliberate avoidance of assessment. This miscommunication can foster negative attitudes from supervisors and unfairly affect student performance scores.

These experiences underscore the importance of reliable ICT infrastructure, clear communication protocols, and mutual trust between lecturers and student teachers. Without these, virtual practicum assessment risks replicating the same inefficiencies it seeks to resolve. Properly implemented, however, it offers a pathway to more equitable, consistent, and supportive practicum supervision.

Respondent E explained: *“On the day the online assessment was conducted, there was no internet connectivity. From the background I heard, the lecturer was not convinced. The assumption was that maybe I was trying to evade assessment. So I feel online is to our disadvantage because some lecturers might develop a negative attitude that may affect our scoring the moment we are connected successfully.”*

This statement underscores a critical challenge in the implementation of virtual practicum assessment: the reliability of internet connectivity. Poor connectivity can create misunderstandings between student teachers and supervisors, with technical disruptions sometimes misinterpreted as deliberate avoidance of assessment. Such misperceptions may foster negative attitudes among lecturers, which in turn can unfairly influence student evaluations.

The findings reveal that while virtual practicum assessment offers flexibility and continuity, its effectiveness is highly dependent on stable ICT infrastructure and mutual trust between participants. Without reliable connectivity, students risk being disadvantaged, not because of their performance, but due to circumstances beyond their control. This highlights the need for institutions to establish clear communication protocols, provide training for lecturers to manage virtual supervision empathetically, and invest in ICT support systems.

In essence, the data suggests that virtual practicum assessment can only achieve its intended goals if both technical and relational challenges are addressed. Ensuring fairness, transparency, and reliability in the assessment process is crucial to maintaining student confidence and safeguarding the integrity of teacher education programmes.

Lecturer A responded:

Virtual practicum assessment encourages students to problem-solve and apply creativity throughout. By finding their own ways to create and present their teaching, students are demonstrating the ability to adapt and build a new teaching - learning environment that suits their current situation.

Students and lecturers, post-COVID-19 era have been pushed to take up skills initially taken for granted – interpersonal communication, stakeholder management, problem-solving, decision-making, leadership, agility, and many more. This has led them to enter uncharted territories and strive for future-readiness, as they continue to upskill and reskill themselves naturally. Universities and teacher training organizations need to match this skilling speed and need with future-ready strategies such as going virtual in practicum assessment. These findings correspond to those of Dawley, Rice and Hinck (2010) who state that Colleges of Education should train every new teacher to teach online now that online education holds out the promise of quality instruction on a range of diverse subjects to even the most remote locales, the absence of required preservice training in online teaching skills must change. Preservice teachers should also take at least one required online course on pedagogy and practice in online courses. Lecturer B:

Physical on-site-assessments are predisposed to bias and intricacies of individual assessors. Virtual spaces, on the other hand, are often perceived as more liberating. A virtual practicum assessment

assures a standardised online assessment, with little or no involvement of an assessor, leading to minimum bias, better supervisee performance, and results. A virtual practicum assessment ensures a comforting, consistent, and objective environment where participants are safe from difficult or extraneous factors and can carry on with their assessment in a stress-free manner.

Virtual practicum assessment help universities and other teacher training organisations get improved results in a shorter period while warranting it is a win-win for everyone involved in the execution, participation, and evaluation stages of the process. With technology acting as an enabler, an online practicum assessment allows organisations to outspread opportunities of growth to all their stakeholders (staff and students) in a streamlined manner.

One respondent highlighted the importance of institutional support, noting: “My institution supports me with regular retraining and training workshops on digital literacy.” While such initiatives are commendable, it was also observed that institutions need to provide adequate computer systems (laptops/desktops) for instructional purposes. Coupled with strong institutional backing in the use of virtual instructional tools, these measures would make virtual practicum assessment more feasible. This finding substantiates Bidabadi, Nasrifahani, Rouhollahi, and Khalili (2016), who argue that educators must align with 21st-century educational practices by capacitating both human and material resources to benefit the next generation of teachers.

A critical strategy for future readiness involves identifying skill gaps among educators and creating engaging learning and development opportunities. Although such initiatives are often sidelined due to competing institutional priorities, they are essential for enhancing commitment, satisfaction, and productivity among staff, while reducing attrition rates. Furthermore, universities as teacher training institutions must collaborate with external stakeholders—including NGOs and private organizations—to secure technology and resources that support e-practicum assessment. Medeiros et al. (2015) emphasize that such partnerships can play a pivotal role in advancing educational innovation, as seen in European Engineering Education, where collaboration facilitated the establishment of strategies aligned with globalization, including virtual internships.

To improve the effectiveness of virtual practicum assessment, students must also be adequately prepared. Familiarity with virtual assessment tools, exercises, and requirements is crucial. Preparation includes ensuring proper technical setup—such as webcams, microphones, and stable internet connectivity—while minimizing disruptions like competing Wi-Fi usage. Students should also ensure devices are fully charged, test equipment beforehand, and adopt professional presentation practices,

including formal attire and appropriate camera positioning. These measures not only enhance confidence but also ensure that student teachers present themselves effectively in virtual environments.

The findings showed that virtual practicum assessment has great potential to supplement and, in some cases, substitute conventional practicum supervision. It is flexible, cost-effective, and ensures continuity of teacher education, especially when actual visits are limited by logistical, economic, or health-related factors. Virtual assessment also enables supervisors to dedicate more time to their core business while allowing institutions to address high student enrollment more efficiently. These benefits make virtual practicum assessment an attractive alternative for teacher education institutions that are keen to update their approaches and keep pace with the global trend towards online learning.

However, the effectiveness of virtual practicum assessment is contingent on a number of critical considerations. These include the provision of adequate institutional support in the form of online tools, ICT infrastructure, and training for both lecturers and student teachers. Otherwise, the implementation of virtual practicum assessment may be patchy and unfair. The findings pointed to challenges such as lack of good internet connectivity, device availability, and misunderstandings between supervisors and student teachers. These can call into question the validity of the assessment and impact negatively on the performance of student teachers.

Teaching practice is still an essential component of teacher education, which readies student teachers for the future by equipping them with teaching skills. It is, therefore, important that the practicum exercise be undertaken with dedication and seriousness. All stakeholders, such as universities, colleges of education, governments, NGOs, and the private sector, must come together to ensure that the necessary resources are provided. This can help share the costs of setting up electronic assessment systems, which are often expensive in terms of hardware and connectivity.

Recommendations:

The following recommendations were suggested:

- Teacher education institutions need to induct student teachers on the use and significance of virtual platforms.
- Both supervisors and student teachers need to undergo digital literacy training.
- Periodic workshops on virtual assessment procedures need to be conducted.
- Virtual microteaching needs to be conducted for student teachers.
- Students failing to show their proficiency in virtual microteaching need not proceed for their practicum.

- Universities need to collaborate with government organizations, NGOs, and private institutions to support student teachers in the use of virtual platforms.

- The cost of establishing electronic assessment systems can be avoided.

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